

**Camping Magazine submission for Sept/Oct issue**  
**“Meeting the special dietary needs of all camp guests”**  
By Viki Kappel Spain

The buses pull into camp, and 100 hungry campers converge on the dining hall for an orientation and a delicious hamburger lunch. Everything is ready, smiles and clean aprons are on, and all seems well for the first-time group. Just as the food is being served, 15 campers and counselors come running to the serving window with panic-stricken faces. “We don’t eat beef! Do you have anything else for us to eat?” they say, throwing an embarrassing wrench in the unprepared camp kitchen operation.

The above hiccup probably happens every day in every camp kitchen around the country, with more and more groups and individuals making personal or doctor-advised dietary changes. Even when group leaders and the food service director communicate at an optimum level, addressing meal times, themes, needs and personal requests, the subject of special diets often slip through the cracks of communication and make themselves known at the last minute, often catching the cooks off guard.

How can the cooks save the moment? They can say “no problem” and ask how many would like a Gardenburger, a chicken patty, or a vegan Gardenburger. Magically pull those items from the freezer and microwave, grill or bake, and then deliver them with speedy aplomb and a big smile. Not only will the kitchen receive rave reviews on the great lunch, but also warm thanks from the worried campers who thought they were going to starve.

The special diet issue needs to be a problem no more in our camp food service operations, with advance planning and a multitude of tasty and affordable food options available for nearly all special diets. Meeting the food and dietary needs for vegetarians, vegans, lactose intolerants, additive sensitivities, allergies and a wide variety of other dietary concerns can be handled easily if everyone embraces a true customer service focus.

## **Customer Service = A great food service operation**

There are many aspects to the concept of customer service, and the camp food service operation is a major factor in the camp’s ability to achieve a positive customer service goal. Essential for providing a positive experience at camp for guests is taking care of their dietary needs. More and more individuals and groups are changing their diets and many opt for vegetarian or meatless meals. To be successful, camps need to address these issues and create a “no problem” environment for special requests.

- **Vegetarian/meatless and other dietary restrictions**

This topic is a hotly-debated subject that has or should have the attention of every

**Definitions:**

Vegetarian: Choosing not to eat meat, fish or fowl or other meatless combinations

Vegan: Choosing not to consume any animal products whatsoever

Lacto-ovo: Milk and egg-eating vegetarians

camp director and food service director. This hopefully will cover the wide spectrum of vegetarian and meatless needs that camp cooking is exposed to, with menu alternatives, ways to plan for vegetarian groups and staff without breaking the budget, and how to keep everyone happy.

Most people in the United States who claim to be vegetarians fall into the category of lacto-ovo vegetarian, which excludes meat, poultry and fish but includes eggs and dairy. Many other variations, including vegan, exist, and each camp cook needs to work into his or her menu and budget a vegetarian or meatless alternative if there are those who request it

Many cooks find that the simplest way to provide for vegetarians is to serve the main meal items separately. For instance, when serving spaghetti and meatballs, serve noodles with marinara (red meatless) sauce in one dish, and serve the meatballs in another dish. Those who do not want meatballs can have spaghetti with parmesan cheese, and anyone else desiring meatballs can add them to his or her own plate. If there are enough requests or an entire group requests a vegetarian alternative, prepare some textured vegetable protein (TVP) meatballs or a TVP sauce.

### **Reasons for being a vegetarian**

There are many reasons people choose a vegetarian diet or are told to eat a meatless diet, and everyone in the food service and customer service industry needs to be not only aware of these needs but be happy and willing to provide alternative food items. Some of these reasons include:

- Health (heart disease, cancer, diabetes, etc.)
- Ethical
- Animal rights
- Factory farming
- Religion
- Ecology
- World hunger
- Dislike the taste of meat
- Family or friend influence
- Allergic to meat
- Economics or budget

### **Common foods that are vegetarian:**

Many people eat vegetarian or meatless foods without even realizing they are eliminating meat for a particular meal. Nutritionists have determined that avoiding meat or animal products one day a week can significantly improve the health of normal individuals. With the help of the following foods, people can enjoy a meatless meal once in a while: Pizza, French fries, salad, carrot sticks, raisins, peanut butter, cottage cheese, macaroni and cheese, cereal, pasta, bean burritos, pancakes and waffles, grilled cheese, oatmeal, eggs, ice cream, and milk.

## **Uncommon foods that are vegetarian:**

Most non-vegetarians are not interested in trying uncommon foods like tofu, soybean milk, tempeh, bean sprouts and some beans, but they could benefit from the dietary advantages.

## **Nutrition concerns in the Vegetarian diet**

The number one worry nutritionists have with vegetarians is their intake of protein, a necessary nutrient for daily living. However, the National Center for Nutrition and Dietetics of The American Dietetic Association (216 West Jackson Blvd., Chicago, IL 60606-6995) has recently issued a nutrition fact sheet on vegetarian diets that states “Vegetarians do not need to worry about combining foods as the old “complementary protein theory” advised. The body will make its own complete protein if a variety of foods and enough calories are eaten during the day.”

This concept of combining two incomplete proteins, such as beans and rice, together to form a complete protein is still advisable in general consideration, especially if the proper variety of foods is not being eaten.

Food sources for calcium, iron, vitamins B-12 and D are readily available for vegetarians in plant foods, with studies showing that vegetarians absorb and retain more calcium from foods than non-vegetarians do. Calcium can be found in dark, leafy greens such as kale, mustard and collard greens, Bok choy, broccoli, beans and tofu, and lacto-vegetarians can get plenty of calcium from skim milk, nonfat yogurt and low-fat cheeses.

Iron can be found in dried beans, dark-green vegetables like spinach and beet greens, dried fruits, prune juice, and fortified breads and cereals. Nutritionists recommend eating iron-rich foods with vitamin C sources (citrus fruits or juices, broccoli, tomatoes, green or red pepper) to help the body absorb the iron from plant sources.

Vitamin B-12 is found in all foods of animal origin including eggs and dairy products, and an adequate intake of vitamin B-12 is generally not a concern for vegetarians who eat some dairy products or eggs. Strict vegetarians or vegans, however, may need to supplement the diet by choosing a fortified breakfast cereal or by taking a vitamin B-12 (cobalamin) supplement at no more than 100 percent of the RDA for B-12.

The importance of vitamin B-12 intake is crucial to understand, as its role in the production of red blood cells and anemia consequences can affect the body’s ability to create and maintain the oxygen-carrying elements in the blood.

Nutritionists and doctors agree that anyone interested in embarking on a new diet of any proportion should consult and work with a licensed nutrition, dietician or physician to achieve the maximum health and success.

For the camp food service director and cooks, concerns for a healthy diet and variety of foods offered for all campers, regardless of special dietary needs or wants, should be exercised with love and willingness to serve all who come into the dining room.

## **Meatless dishes for camp or large-quantity settings:**

When one or more vegetarians or people with dietary restrictions are in camp, I usually tell them what I have to offer and let them choose what they would be

interested in eating. It is important to make people with special dietary needs feel that they are not an imposition or a problem for the kitchen. Once you say “no problem” or “let me know what I can do for you,” you’ll be surprised at how un-demanding some guests can be.. The following are a few items to consider serving for vegetarians:

1. Pizza (use fresh vegetables, low-moisture, part-skim mozzarella cheese)
2. Three or four-cheese lasagna (Parmesan, ricotta, cottage, mozzarella)
3. Stuffed bell peppers or tomatoes (stuffed with rice, cheese, nuts)
4. Quiche
5. Stir-fry vegetables or egg rolls with tofu
6. Soups, stews, chili
7. Salads (green, potato, pasta, bean)
8. Pasta and sauces
9. Stuffed potatoes or baked potato bar
10. Stuffed pasta shells or manicotti
11. Cheese enchiladas
12. Casseroles
13. Cheese ravioli
14. Fritatas (open-faced vegetable omelet)
15. Omelets
16. Mexican assembly (burritos, tacos, tostadas, quesadillas, salads)
17. Calzones (pizza pockets)
18. Pita pocket sandwiches
19. Submarine sandwiches
20. Bean or TVP burgers
21. Garden, Harvest, Nature’s Burger and other substitute burgers

### **Vegetarian idea and information sources:**

The hardest part of any cooking on a large scale or full time basis is coming up with new ideas, and meatless cooking is no exception. Almost every “complete” cookbook has a vegetarian section, but it is also good to have several other sources on hand specifically geared for vegetarian cooking. Several vegetarian periodicals are available, and the following books can be acquired through most booksellers. The following list provides a few vegetarian resources for the camp kitchen library:

- The Vegetarian Feast, by Martha Shulman
- The Classic Vegetarian, by Rose Elliot
- The Vegetarian Lunchbasket, by Linda Haynes
- The Occasional Vegetarian, by Karen Lee
- The All American Vegetarian, by Gunes and Van Vynckt
- Healthy and Delicious, by Kapoor
- Lighter, Quicker, Better, by Sax and Simmons
- Fast, Fresh and Spicy Vegetarian, by John Ettinger
- Moosewood collection by Mollie Katzen
- *Sunset Magazine* vegetarian publications
- *Vegetarian Times Magazine*, Box 570, Oak Park, IL 60303
- *Meatless Options*, 900 Proprietors Road, Worthington, OH 43085

One of the latest, greatest sources for large-quantity cooking in the meatless world is the Vegetarian Resource Group, P.O. Box 1463, Baltimore, MD 21203. The VRG offers a Foodservice Update, the Vegetarian Journal, meatless recipes, vegan recipes, a vegan handbook, a guide to natural foods in restaurants, and a host of information and educational resources such as introducing vegetarian food into institutions, discussing vegetarian nutrition with teens, cooking with tofu, vegetarian videos, and more.

The VRG's publication called "Tips for Introducing Vegetarian Food Into Institutions" can be a great source of guidance in the process of adopting vegetarian options at your facility. The publication includes information on simple modifications to an existing menu, simple modifications to existing recipes, recipe modification, sources for recipes and adapting family-size recipes for quantity use, modifying recipes to reduce fat, time and labor saving tips, equipment recommendations, introducing new foods to students, breakfast substitutions, salad bar ideas, lunch and dinner suggestions, and other valuable resources for substitute food products. The publication also lists sources for non-dairy milk products, as well.

### **Vegan and other restricted diets:**

Vegan: This is a dietary group that has made a choice to not eat any animal products.

- No meat or meat derivatives
- No eggs or chicken products including chicken broth
- No dairy
- No marshmallows (the gelatin is an animal-based product)
- No Jello (contains gelatin)
- No honey

Vegans planning to attend a retreat usually are in the habit of bringing food items they know they can eat. The food service director needs to make direct contact with the registered vegans, or it is the responsibility of the vegan to make his or her dietary choices known to the food service director prior to arriving at camp. If no communication has been made, the vegan needs to be comfortable with a limited diet at camp.

For more information on the entire aspect of a vegan lifestyle, contact the VRG at [www.vrg.org](http://www.vrg.org) or obtain books like Simply Vegan, by Debra Wasserman and Reed Mangels, available through VRG and other book sellers.

### Dairy sensitive or dairy allergies

This dietary group either chooses to avoid dairy or is required to for health reasons. To enhance the camp experience for those with dairy issues, the following ideas can help in basic situations:

- Many breads have dairy, but many bread doughs are made without dairy.
- Most cookies have dairy (for enhanced nutritional levels), except peanut butter cookies
- Make pizza with no cheese for dairy sensitive guests (make sure dough is dairy-free first or use a dairy-free dough for that particular crust)

- Always offer margarine
- Always serve scrambled eggs without milk added to the liquid
- Brush the tops of bread items with margarine instead of butter
- Cook with margarine instead of butter (rice, scratch recipes)

### Wheat or corn allergies

More and more people, especially children, are showing signs of sensitivities to or allergic reactions to wheat and wheat products and corn and corn products. Since this is a difficult situation to handle at camp (unless the entire group has a particular allergy), it is recommended that the food service director contact the parent or parents of the camper who has special needs.

Wheat and by-products of wheat can be included in almost any food, so cooks need to keep an eye open for key ingredient words such as bran, bulgar, germ, gluten, malt, starch, durum, farina, graham, semolina and even modified food starch.

The ideal situation is for the parents to send non-wheat or non-corn items for each meal, based on the menu for that group. An accompanying parent or adult leader of the group can be responsible for preparing the selected items for the camper.

### **Other food allergies**

More and more children and adults are being diagnosed with nut, chemical, additive or dye allergies associated with foods. In this regard, camp cooks and kitchens need to be ready to box up and put away peanuts and peanut butter, if need be, to protect the safety and health of guests.

<i>Read labels!</i>
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As many people with food allergies can attest, it is often difficult to determine if the allergic compound or products is in a particular food, especially if it is processed. Those who are allergic to shellfish have to avoid words even like bouillabaisse, fish stock, seafood flavoring, clam extract. Some allergies are so severe that eating fries deep-fried in the same oil as shellfish can cause a reaction.

Those who are allergic to dairy have to look out for words like whey, lactose, caseinates, nougat, hydrolysates, and even some margarines contain milk protein. Foods that are kosher are marked with a circled “U,” and if dairy is present in that kosher product, a “D” will be next to the “U.”

Eggs, peanuts, wheat, tree-nuts, soy, food colorings and other allergies have been researched and studied by the Food Allergy Network, an information source for camp and conference center cooks.

The Food Allergy Network can be contacted at 10400 Eaton Place, Suite 107, Fairfax, VA 22030-2208, or on the web at [www.foodallergy.org](http://www.foodallergy.org)

### **Diabetic and other medically-ordered diets**

Many camp and conference center options are open and available to children and adults with diabetes, with several that focus entirely on specific medical populations. One such camp that services diabetics, hemophiliacs, as well as general populations, is Camp Conrad/Chinook in Angelus Oaks, California, a camp operation owned by DYS, a

diabetic youth services organization, with the food service operation directed by Susan Lissy, a renowned cook in the diabetic field. See their web site at [www.dys.org](http://www.dys.org). This camp and others like it adapt their entire operation to a specific medical population, but occasionally mainstream groups will come to camp with one or more diabetic individuals that cooks need to consider in their menu planning.

Many theories and drastic adaptations to cooking have been implemented in past years, such as eliminating sugar from a diabetic's menu. However, recent studies and scientific results show that counting carbohydrates and calculating insulin needs based on those carb counts are far more effective than putting a diabetic "on a diet" of limited portions and exact amounts. The American Diabetes Association's website ([www.diabetes.org](http://www.diabetes.org)) specifies that fat is the number one concern for diabetics and "can be very harmful to people with diabetes," followed by salt intake, then sugar, and finally alcohol. The web site reports "People with diabetes have the same nutritional needs as anyone else. Regular, well-balanced meals may help to improve their overall health. Eating healthy foods in the right amounts and keeping weight under control may help diabetes management."

The Juvenile Diabetes Foundation is another source for diabetic information.

For basic tips on providing foods safe for diabetics, cooks can consult their food service vendors for sugar-free, low-fat and moderate carbohydrate level foods. The Bernard Food Industries, Inc., company, based in Illinois, has a huge selection of sugar-free drinks, jellos, puddings, and other diabetic-friendly items. The national contact number is 1-800-323-3663. Ask for the name of a representative in your state or region.

### **What kind of vegetarian are you?**

Not only are there many new classes of vegetarians, but sub-cultures within those classes. Some vegetarians choose not to eat any animal products, including dairy and eggs. In a camp or large-quantity cooking setting, you will see many vegetarian variations that you may not have thought possible. Some staff or guests will even go back and forth between meatless and meat, depending on the main entrée or what their dietary mood is for that particular meal. If given a choice between meat or meatless items at any given meal, you will find that many staff and guests will want to try the meatless dish.

Being a vegetarian doesn't mean just eating salads. It isn't just eating cheese and peanut butter for protein, either. People (including children) are becoming increasingly more aware of the need to

make dietary changes. With recent beef scares in America

*Meat does not have to be the centerpiece of the meal.*

and Britain, rumors of poor animal raising conditions and meat processing, and general health concerns with fat and cholesterol, many people are looking for alternative menu choices. This is an important opportunity for camp/conference center/cafeteria kitchens to respond to this increasingly large demand for healthier meals.

If you have already integrated a vegetarian side-line in your food service operation, you are already a step ahead. If you want to start, obtain a few new but simple recipes and practice preparing them, calculate costs, and work the new items into the menu slowly. Learn what works best for your kitchen and operation.

**Famous vegetarians:**

Leonardo da Vinci, George Bernard Shaw, Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Einstein, Clara Barton, Mr. Rogers, Madonna, Paul and Linda McCartney.

## **Bio on Viki Kappel Spain**

Viki Kappel Spain is currently the Food Service Director for the Valley of the Sun YMCA Camp Chauncey Ranch located in the high chaparral above Phoenix, Arizona, and has been cooking in the camping industry since 1985.

She is the author of "The Camp Kitchen Guidebook," available through the American Camping Association Bookstore at [www.ACACamps.org](http://www.ACACamps.org)

Visit her website, as well, at [www.campcookbooks.com](http://www.campcookbooks.com)

She is a presenter at American Camping Association and YMCA national, regional and local conferences on food service issues related to camps and conference centers.

She is the author of several published articles in the camping industry, including the *ACA Camping Magazine* and the *Christian Camping International Journal*.

An active member of the Southern California and the Coronado ACA Sections, she coordinates regional and local kitchen staff training conferences.

YMCA Camp Chauncey Ranch is a 5,000-acre year-round family dude ranch, cowboy camp and traditional camp operation that serves 175 campers at a time. The camp, established in 1973 after the land was donated to the YMCA by Arizona rancher Tom Chauncey, features a dynamic equestrian program, an 18-event ropes and climbing tower challenge course, a Y-shaped swimming pool, rodeo performances featuring the cowboy campers, and a myriad of camp activities that keep campers coming back year after year. Part of the land has now been designated as a wildlife preserve, and features Tom Chauncey's famous ranch house where he entertained Roy Rogers, Gene Autry and many other famous friends. The ranch house is now a corporate and family retreat center.