



A NEW TWIST ON  
**F&B**

# NO MEAT, NO WHEAT, NO PROBLEM

*Knott's Berry Farm collaborates with celebrity chef  
on new line of vegan and specialty dishes*

by Stephanie  
Janard

What happens when a theme park culinary wizard teams up with an Internet celebrity famous for her travel dispatches about vegan eating around the world? Some seemingly impossible vegan and gluten-free versions of classic park favorites emerge from the kitchen, including pizza, "buttermilk"-breaded "chicken" strips, and, yes, even the beloved funnel cake.

Thanks to this collaboration between Russ Knibbs, Knott's Berry Farm vice president of food and beverage, and Carolyn Scott-Hamilton, known to her legions of followers as "The Healthy Voyager," these dishes and more are part of an exciting new menu expansion at Knott's Berry Farm. However, Knott's expects the new options won't appeal only to vegans. Anyone concerned with cholesterol intake, diabetes, and other health-related issues may prefer to order from the vegan menu.

To Knibbs, providing such an inclusive dining experience at the park is just good guest relations.

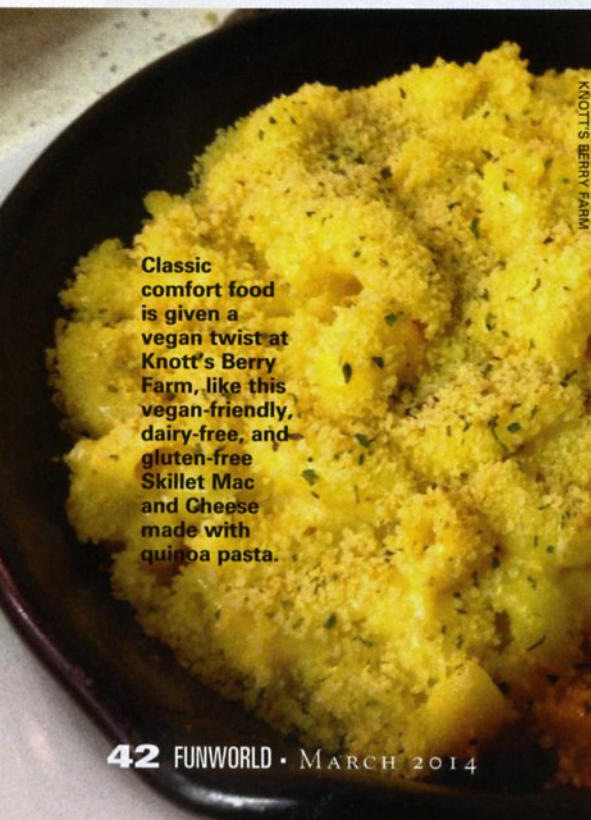
"In this day and age, at least one member out of each of the many families who visit us has a special dietary need. I don't want any of them to miss out on sharing an outstanding meal together at Knott's Berry Farm. I want people to eat as a family here," Knibbs says.

A former chef, Knibbs wasn't daunted by the prospect of developing the vegan and gluten-free dishes to make this happen. He views food as an art and takes issue with special diet recipes created with little imagination—and even

## ONLINE CHATTER: Vegans Talk Theme Park Eats

Unsurprisingly, word has excitedly spread on the Internet about Knott's new vegan and gluten-free menu. In fact, Google "Which theme parks serve vegan food" and you'll quickly discover a number of websites routinely keep track. Here are just a few of the sites and blogs highlighting the vegan fare at various attractions:

- The "Guide to Eating Vegan at Disney World" at [www.cadryskitchen.com](http://www.cadryskitchen.com) gives vegans a virtual walkthrough of what to eat at the Magic Kingdom, from a nondairy ice cream cone at the Main Street Plaza Ice Cream Shop to the vegan burger and vegan sandwich at the Tomorrowland Starlight Café.
- The "Top Five Best Vegan/Vegetarian Choices at Universal Orlando" article at [www.orlandoinform.com](http://www.orlandoinform.com) describes gourmet dishes that would make even a non-vegan's mouth water, like the cilantro cashew tofu at Emeril's Tchoup Chop restaurant and the stuffed peppers with yucca fries at the Bob Marley: Tribute to Freedom restaurant and nightclub.
- Complete with tantalizing pictures, [www.vegansatori.blogspot.com](http://www.vegansatori.blogspot.com) describes nine days of vegan eating at the Walt Disney World Resort, including what the writer describes as the resort's most veggie-friendly offerings at Sanaa and Jiko located in, of all places, the Animal Kingdom Lodge.
- At [www.chowvegan.com](http://www.chowvegan.com) props are given to LEGOLAND California for its Fun Town Market salad bar stocked with fresh and healthy variety, including marinated tofu cubes.
- Carolyn Scott-Hamilton's website [www.healthyvoyager.com](http://www.healthyvoyager.com) keeps visitors updated on what's vegan and delicious at a number of attractions, from sorbet and "veganized" taco salads at Six Flags Magic Mountain, to the new vegan menu expansion at Knott's Berry Farm.



Classic comfort food is given a vegan twist at Knott's Berry Farm, like this vegan-friendly, dairy-free, and gluten-free Skillet Mac and Cheese made with quinoa pasta.

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"The Healthy Voyager"



THOMAS WORTH





Russ Knibbs displays some of Knott's Berry Farm's new vegan options.

KNOTT'S BERRY FARM

less taste. No matter what kind of food is being served, it should be attractive to the eye, Knibbs believes, and make the taste buds come alive.

"When word gets out among vegans that food like this exists for them at theme parks, social media chatter explodes," Knibbs adds.

Scott-Hamilton would agree. She has more than 100,000 followers on Twitter and 700,000 subscribers to her "Healthy Voyager" newsletter who pay close attention to her travelogues about eating vegan and healthy at destinations around the globe. Scott-Hamilton worked closely with Knibbs and his team on developing several of the park's new vegan and gluten-free menu options, including an especially kid-friendly "Skillet Mac and Cheese."

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—Russ Knibbs, Knott's Berry Farm

"There are some great gluten-free pasta products available now, so it's easier to make a dish like that than you might think. We used quinoa-based pasta, which makes it work not just for vegans, but for anyone with gluten or dairy intolerances," Scott-Hamilton says.

### A Changing Customer Base

A 2013 report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveals more children than ever suffer from food allergies, with nuts, milk, and shellfish among the most common allergens. Offering more vegan items makes navigating these issues less complicated for theme parks, Scott-Hamilton says, as many vegan dishes satisfy a number of special diet

communities. She adds that now is an ideal time for parks to develop menus to assure such guests aren't shut out of the dining experience—or worse, have an allergic reaction after consuming a food they weren't aware had an allergen in it.

"The vegan and special diet market is growing by tenfold every year. You look at chain restaurants like Chipotle that are adding new vegan options, and they're saying, you know what, this is a market we can't ignore anymore," Scott-Hamilton notes.

Lack of information about what to serve is likely holding some theme parks back from adopting a similar attitude. "There's definitely a need for more education about vegan and other special diets. The customer base is changing, and parks need to be able to roll with those changes," she says.

### Pleasing the Vegan Palate

Parks don't have to reinvent the wheel to accommodate special diet guests. With more commercial vegan products on the market than ever, just about any park food can be "veganized," from burgers and burritos to lattes and hot chocolate. And most faux meat products take far less time to prepare and cook than their meat-based counterparts.

By the same token, it's much easier to overcook the vegan versions. While the typical commercial vegan burger needs just a few minutes of cooking for a delicious meal, even a minute or two more can render it dry and inedible. The same goes for a product like Gardein brand's "Beefless Tips," which require very little time in a sauté pan to taste astonishingly like actual beef tips but don't hold up well if they simmer for much longer in a liquid-based dish.

So what's the takeaway? Make sure your food staff knows how to prepare these products. Most vegan food manufacturers will be more than happy to provide recipes and best-practice cooking processes, and it's information well worth having. Vegan versions of conventional park fare like chili dogs and ice cream cones can help parks instantly update their menus to include and make more guests happy. Don't forget the little touches, either—providing soy or almond milk for their coffee will also make vegan guests grateful.

The options at Knott's Berry Farm strike a balance between convenience and in-house preparation at the park's own bakery and commissary. Knott's offers a number of ready-made options such as vegan burgers and hot dogs, while also serving up dishes like marinated grilled tofu with fresh vegetables and its own vegan, gluten-free pizza.

### Trust Is as Important as Taste

No matter what you serve, Knibbs reiterates, make it taste great and make sure your guests have confidence it's really vegan or gluten free. Most vegans will object to food that's been fried in the same oil that was used to cook meat, for example, while the gluten intolerant want assurance their food hasn't been cross contaminated with flour that contains gluten.

## Commercial Products Popular with Vegans

With demand for vegan products at an all-time high, the commercial food market has accordingly worked its magic,

offering vegan versions of almost any conventional meat and dairy product you can think of. Some brands that are already tried-and-true vegan favorites follow.

- **Gardein.** Particularly known for its tasty "Beefless" tips and strips and chicken-free "Crispy Tenders," Gardein also offers a number of other products, all of which make excellent vegan additions to salads, burritos, pasta, and more. [www.gardein.com](http://www.gardein.com)
- **Beyond Meat.** It's one of the newest vegan brands on the market, but Beyond Meat has quickly made a name for its "Chicken-Free Strips" product, winning praise from famous foodie Alton Brown and even Bill Gates. The strips come in three different flavors: Grilled, Lightly Seasoned, and Southwest. No matter which one you choose, you'll be amazed at how similar in taste and texture it is to real chicken. [www.beyondmeat.com](http://www.beyondmeat.com)
- **Turtle Island Foods.** Long famous for its vegan "Tofurkey" roast, the company also puts out an extensive line of "dogs and links" products—including vegan beer brats, jumbo hot dogs, and breakfast links—that will score big points with special diet guests. [www.tofurkey.com](http://www.tofurkey.com)
- **Follow Your Heart.** The company's eggless, dairy-free "Vegannaise" mayo has won a cult-like status among vegans and will fool even non-vegans into thinking it's traditional mayonnaise. Follow Your Heart also offers vegan shredded "cheese" and creamy salad dressings that make it easy to create vegan—and delicious—versions of almost any conventional dairy dish. [www.followyourheart.com](http://www.followyourheart.com)

If guests trust these precautions have been taken, they trust the overall brand—and let their fellow special-diet foodies know about it.

"When you do something right with this audience, it goes everywhere on social media," Knibbs affirms.

With that in mind, be sure guest services can provide information about what's available at the park for vegan and other special diet guests to eat. Having that information right at hand on the phone and at the gate is important, Scott-Hamilton stresses, along with really showcasing your new options.

"Even if you think vegan food is a small niche, wear it with pride. Because it's bigger than you think," Scott-Hamilton says. "The people who follow vegan diets are big on word-of-mouth reviews, and the power of their voices is even more powerful than the media's." ■

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