

## ASK THE FOOD NETWORK

**Q:** What is telera bread? – Des Sohn

**A:** Telera bread is a flat, crusty, white bread — the bread of choice for the classic Mexican sandwich called the torta. It's also popular in the Dominican Republic, where, as a traditional Christmas food, it's usually served with barbecued pork.

## AROUND TOWN » TASTINGS

### TEA-LICIOUS

In ancient China, tea was used in all kinds of food preparation. From fish poached in tea broth to duck smoked over tea leaves, tea is a versatile addition to any dish. Learn about cooking with this popular herb, sample dishes made with tea and get recipes to try at home. *Venue: 1 p.m. Sunday at Green Spring Gardens, 4603 Green Spring Road, Alexandria; Tix: \$24; Info: 703-941-7987; greenspring.org*



# Tofu on the Hill

New veg fast foods fare well

By Robin Tierney  
Special to The Examiner

Who says a foodie can't be a vegan? Or that a vegan can't be a foodie?

Fab meat-free fare at trendy restaurants and everyday gourmet plant-based palate-pleasers are shattering stereotypes about vegetarian and vegan food. But what if you don't have time to make vegetable delights from scratch — or your significant others crave only the familiar?

At the annual Meatout lunch Monday on Capitol Hill, congressmen and their aides got to try new additions to the veg fast-food menu.

Three hundred congressional staffers merrily munched on faux kielbasa, imitation ribs, beef-less burgers, soy feta hors d'oeuvres and dreamy cream-free ice cream at the vegan feast. Must all ready-made animal-free foods mimic meaty American mealtime staples? No, but having hosted such events since 1985, the Meatout team chose fare that would show how conveniently one can replace those comfort foods.

There's no stampede, but more folks are choosing animal-free meals. Besides those abstaining for spiritual, ethical and humane reasons, there's growing awareness of benefits of "kicking the meat habit," such as enhancing health, reducing



Meatout served Gardenburgers, BBQ Riblets, Tofurky kielbasa sausage and Sungeria feta-flavored tofu to congressmen and their aides Monday on Capitol Hill.

disease risks, sustaining natural resources and freeing up food needed to fight global hunger. Consider this: It takes some 16 pounds of grain to produce one pound of beef.

One downside to formulating menu items that mimic classics (sausages, burgers, cheese) is that they often don't meet expectations of having the same mouth-feel, texture and flavor, yet the items could win fans on their own merits.

So how did the vegan fare fare at the Rayburn House Office Building? Diner surveillance revealed:

» **Tempting tempeh:** "Hey, this is pretty good!" said a staffer, having overcome his initial skepticism about Tofurky deli slices. After switching to a new certified organic tofu supplier, Turtle Island Foods has lowered the carb count for its lunch-unmeat, which is free from cholesterol, MSG and nitrates. Their nicely spiced vegan hot dogs and kielbasa also drew more votes



than vetoes. (tofurky.com)

» **Best reason to hold the mayo:** Follow Your Heart-brand Vegenaïse, a mayonnaise/dressing substitute free of egg and dairy, fillers, gums, colorings and preservatives, won in a landslide for flavor and texture ("like pudding!"). We need a nonpartisan lobby to get this into local markets. (followyourheart.com)

» **Feta accompli:** Charlottesville-based Sunergia Soyfoods has created a 100 percent dairy-free, vegan, kosher, organic soy feta with half the calories and less than half the

### VEG-OUT

» **Meatout.org:** Facts about diet, health, farming and the environment, factory farm animal conditions

» **Vegkit.org:** Great recipes, fun extras, free vegetarian starter kit, cooking fun site

fat of regular feta cheese. The texture's not a knockoff, but the great flavor will complement salads, pizza or a tasty snack tray. Even vegnewbies who panned other soy appetizers rated this one five toothpicks. (sunergiasoyfoods.com)

» **"These taste like meat.":** Compliment or complaint, several folks agreed with that assessment of Gardenburger's substantial Meatless Riblets — a hit with this congressional crowd. A good choice for mixed company and anyone looking for a tangy source of protein, fiber and antioxidants. (gardenburger.com)

» **Ice dreams:** The Tofutti Cuties meltdown didn't stop politicians from grabbing up the chocolate, vanilla and mint chocolate chip imitation ice cream sandwiches. Luncheon exit polls indicated a clear taste advantage over high-butterfat, higher-calorie counterparts. (tofutti.com)

"Unless people are looking, they don't know [these products] exist, and unless they taste them, they don't know how good they are," said Meatout campaign director Dawn Moncrief.

Meatout — whose national volunteers include Mary Tyler Moore, Bill Maher, Joaquin Phoenix and Tony LaRussa — takes place the first day of spring because it's a good time to start anew.

"Make alternatives convenient and good, and people are willing to make a change," she said.

## COOKING CLASSES

### INTRODUCTION TO TAPAS AND PAELLA

A cooking class and lunch, led by chef Janis McLean. *Venue: Noon Sunday at the Red Dog Cafe, Rock Creek Shopping Center, 8301 Grubb Road, Silver Spring; Tix: \$55; Info: 202-244-3700; tastecdc.com*

### CHOCOLATE TEMPTATION

Learn to make exotic and unique handmade chocolates with wine and samples led by Kingsbury Chocolates' Rob Kingsbury. *Venue: Noon Sunday at TasteDC.com headquarters, 3018 Arizona Ave. NW; Tix: \$65; 202-244-3700*

## TASTINGS

### SPRING WINE PAIRINGS

Passion Food Hospitality Wine & Beverage Director Scott Clime will show how different wines pair with food's flavors and spices — including sweet, sour, acidic, spicy and salty. The class includes eight different wines to taste. *Venue: 11 a.m. Sunday at DC Coast, 1401 K St. NW; Tix: \$75; Info: 202-222-0987*

### VODKA TASTING

A standing reception with samplings of vodka and Ukrainian cuisine. *Venue: 7 p.m. Thursday at the Embassy of the Ukraine, 3350 M St. NW; Tix: \$65; Info: 202-244-3700; tastedc.com*

### WINE SMARTS 101

Confused about the sipping and swirling you see wine experts do? Learn to enhance your palate at this two-hour introductory class. *Venue: 6:30 p.m. Sunday at La Tasca, 2900 Wilson Blvd., Arlington; Tix: \$55, \$100 per couple; Info: 703-741-0404*



### GERMAN RIESLINGS: COMING INTO THEIR OWN

This three-part series of tastings and lectures delves into the history and regional differences of the wine. *Venue: 6:30 p.m. Wednesdays at Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany, 4645 Reservoir Road NW; Tix: \$121; Info: 202-252-0012; residentassociates.org*

# Essential Italian

At a recent pasta-cooking demonstration, "Pasta 101," Giada de Laurentiis shared with food writers insights that carried a certain authority.

After all, she's the author of a cookbook, "Everyday Italian" (Potter, 2005, \$30) and she's host of the television show of the same name on the Food Network. "I've eaten pasta all my life," she said, describing pasta as part of her family lifestyle.

Two basic tips among comments on cooking pasta:

» Drain pasta but don't rinse or add oil (unless you're making salad) or the sauce won't stick.

» Pasta water has flavor and starch, so reserve half a cup of it to use in your sauce.

De Laurentiis advises but she's not dogmatic.

In making pasta, she said, "There's no one way. My way is not the only way. Take what you want from my book and my advice — then find your own way."

At the "Pasta 101" session, organized by Barilla, de Laurentiis also ran through her shortlist of staples to keep on your pantry shelf, items to help give your cooking real Italian flair. Included are:

» Anchovies, olives and capers. "They are great for doctoring things up, adding to a jarred sauce, for

example."

» Balsamic vinegar ("try it on ice cream")

» Red-wine vinegar

» Regular olive oil for cooking; extra-virgin olive oil for flavor, for when it's not going to be cooked

» Dried pasta

» Rice

» Different kinds of salt

» Dried herbs, especially the herbes de Provence blend. "You get it all in one container. It's originally French — but these are all herbs Italians use, too."

» Sun-dried tomatoes

» Canned Italian tuna (add tomato sauce and capers, heat, for a great dish)

» Canned beans — especially chickpeas and cannellini

— Associated Press

