

Chickpea Burger Bar

The University of Pennsylvania

Essay:

When the team at the University of Pennsylvania's 1920 Commons was challenged to the 2024 Wellness Cup Competition, they kept it approachable with a completely vegan falafel-inspired burger bar which proved to be an exciting offering for vegans and meat eaters alike.

The main ingredients in their burger patty included chickpeas, caramelized vegetables (including squash, eggplant, peppers, tomatoes, and onions), and spices such as garam masala, coriander, and cumin. These main ingredients provide significant fiber and anti-inflammatory phytochemicals that are common to whole food plant sources. The roasted red pepper basil hummus and lemon tahini sauce add healthy unsaturated fats through olive oil and tahini. Ingredients for the coconut yogurt tzatziki and pomegranate lemon molasses were intentionally chosen to pack a punch of flavor while keeping the whole bar vegan. Lastly, the dish itself is a healthful alternative to beef burgers, providing an approachable yet desirable option to help students reduce their red meat intake. The customizable approach of the burger bar is another on-trend element for Gen Z. Overall, the burger bar served 128 orders over a single lunch meal period.







As part of the Dine Well, Eat Smart wellness education series, 1920 Commons' burger bar was promoted to guests through Penn Dining's bi-weekly email newsletter, online menus, special event posters, and special menu paper. Vegan icons were used to communicate this special dietary need with guests who visited the station.

From a financial and procurement perspective, the dish provided advantages including cost-effective plant protein and readily available ingredients from broadline vendors. The team, mindful that milk is a common ingredient in pita bread, collaborated with Penn Dining’s registered dietitians to ensure a vegan brand of pita was identified, purchased, and delivered.

Getting the patty correct from a culinary perspective, however, is where the larger challenge arrived. To avoid deep-frying for wellness, cross-contact, and logistical reasons, the culinary team dedicated about 1 week of research and development focused on getting the consistency and texture of the baked patty right. Through testing and team collaboration, they found a longer cook at a lower temperature promoted the best texture while incorporating caramelized vegetables (which, if needed, can be roasted and drained in advance) provided the depth of flavor they sought. Featuring the item through a special event kept the team invested in the final product while highlighting their efforts.

The result? A new student favorite recipe that can be rotated into the menu for years to come. It’s a win for the student body as a whole, regardless of whether they eat meat.

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