

The vegetarian label for the catering industry



These days it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish vegetarian offers (breaded Seitan steaks, for instance) from meat products. Quite often the vegetarian products are even manufactured by the same producers. For the consumers it is therefore becoming ever more difficult to tell these products apart.

Whilst the consumers still can rely on the packing declaration in shops, this is not the case in restaurants. The sauce of each served dish represents a "factor of uncertainty" to any vegetarian who has to trust blindly the statements of the service staff. Furthermore, since the catering trade is better known for traditional meals than for innovative vegetarian menus, this required confidence becomes a growing problem for many clients. An increasing number of people address the vegetarian organisations with complaints about erroneously declared so-called vegetarian menus, which contained fish, bacon, gelatine or similar ingredients.

In this context, the international vegetarian label does offer a solution: it guarantees that the respective restaurant serves strictly vegetarian menus that really deserve this classification (which unfortunately cannot be taken for granted in other cases).

Why this label?

Many reasons speak in favour of using the official vegetarian label:

- It is a widely used and accepted label for the vegetarian way of life.
- In the same context, this label is now made known also in several countries regarding the declaration of products.
- Knowledgeable assistance in all matters of vegetarian nutrition is provided by the label-representatives in the individual countries. Some examples are the composition of vegetarian meals and the guidance as to the best use of non-animal ingredients and supplements.
- The independent and external random controls of companies increase consumer confidence as far as the catering trade using the label is concerned.
- Through cooperation with vegetarian organisations, a growing confidence of critical consumers (especially in vegetarian circles) concerning the catering trade is initiated. This is especially important for restaurants offering also meat-dishes.

Advantages for guests

- The label guarantees a solid standard in view of the competence of personnel and menu-declaration.
- Already at the entrance it becomes evident, by the label, that a restaurant offers also suitable dishes for vegetarians.
- All restaurants using the label are mentioned in special lists and are, on inquiry, recommended to vegetarian guests. Since vegetarians are to be found in a growing number of groups, the availability of vegetarian alternatives in restaurants becomes an important criteria. A list of restaurants working with the V-label is of valuable help to these groups.
- Vegetarian organisations, by means of unannounced controls of the companies, offer maximum security to the guests and ensure that the conditions are constantly respected.
- By means of their special know-how, the responsible vegetarian organizations assist in developing the often meat-based training of chefs and thus prevent misunderstandings between guests and kitchen personnel.
- Laborious analyzing of the composition of dishes as well as unpleasant and time-consuming further inquiries are prevented on both sides.

- People suffering from allergies do not need to fear hidden animal ingredients (allergies regarding egg- and milk-components belong to the most frequent food allergies) since also in this regard the personnel are instructed thoroughly. This system prevents unsatisfied customers.
- Erroneously declared menus are a thing of the past, thanks to the competent consultation process.

Conditions for the label

1. A catering trade company applying for the vegetarian label must constantly offer at least one complete vegetarian menu, which is at least changed as frequently as the standard menu.
2. Additionally to vegetarian dishes already on the normal menu (hors-d'oeuvres, side-dishes, salads, etc.), the restaurant must have at least two dishes on offer (main meals, not necessarily complete menus), which are suitable for vegetarians.
3. The service- and kitchen personnel should know the differences between vegetarian, vegan and raw meals and be able to also identify all beverages and meals accordingly. Under no circumstances, any wrong information must be given (e.g. to declare a menu vegetarian which contains bacon or fish).

The four vegetarian categories:	
ovo-lacto-vegetarian:	with milk and eggs
lacto-vegetarian:	with milk, no eggs
ovo-vegetarian:	with eggs, no milk
vegan:	without any animal products

4. The company accepts random sampling and unannounced kitchen access. Only in exceptional cases there will be more than one undeclared inspection per year.

The advantages of companies having been granted the label:

1. They have the right to use the European vegetarian label in their promotion campaigns. In this context, they receive door stickers, print-assistance for menu-cards and other printed material.
2. On the menu-cards, all vegetarian dishes can be marked by the label.
3. The V-label restaurants are represented in the magazines of the respective vegetarian organisations and as a result made known to a large circle of potential clients.
4. A list with the name of all V-label-restaurants is compiled and the names of those restaurants will be recommended to people demanding information.
5. In coordination with the European Vegetarian Union, the restaurant will be inserted into a list naming all European companies having been granted the label. For all vegetarian tourists, this system allows easy identification of those hotel/restaurant which are of interest at their holiday destination. This list will be inserted into different vegetarian internet-pages.
6. They obtain assistance during their phase of transition (What does vegetarian mean? What does vegan mean? etc) and afterwards receive competent information regarding vegetarian cooking (for example - where are certain vegetarian products available etc.)
7. As a relay between vegetarian guests and the catering industry, they receive information regarding the optimal catering for vegetarian clients, such as the recommendation to prefer free-range animal products or plant-based alternatives.