

Balanced Burger Menu Guide



A Step-by-Step Guidebook for
High-Volume Foodservice Operators

Balanced Burger Menu Guide

A Step-by-Step Guidebook for
High-Volume Foodservice Operators

Introduction	3
How to Use This Guide.....	3
Getting Started	4
Why Use a Balanced Burger?	4
Step One: Choose Your Ingredient Story	5
What's Working in Practice	6
What Testing Suggests	7
Bringing It to Life	7
Step Two: Name It, Place It, and Sell It	9
What's Working in Practice	10
What Testing Suggests	10
Bringing It to Life	11
Step Three: Streamline Your Service	12
What's Working in Practice	13
What Testing Suggests	13
Bringing It to Life	14
What's Next?	16
Ready to Explore a Pilot?	16

Introduction



Courtesy: 50/50 Foods Inc.

The burger remains one of the most dependable items in foodservice. It signals satisfaction, familiarity, indulgence, and value before the first bite. At the same time, rising beef costs, tighter margins, sustainability goals, and nutrition expectations challenge the category.

Balanced burgers—**burger patties that combine animal protein with at least 30% of ingredients made from plants or other complementary ingredients**—are emerging as a solution that ensures high diner satisfaction while meeting all your venue's goals: performance, profit, and planet.

However, adding new ingredients to a familiar product can create friction at the point of choice. In practice, success often comes down to balanced communication. Too little information can feel unclear. Too much can introduce hesitation. The right balance between description and appeal can position your burger to be a crowd-favorite.

To better understand this dynamic, Greener by Default and the Balanced Protein Consortium studied how menu design changes what people choose to eat. Across four studies with nearly 3,000 participants, we tested how naming, descriptions, ingredient communication, and menu placement affect balanced burger selection and perceptions. While these digital tests are not a guarantee of future sales, they provide clear guidance for successful menu strategies.

The results reiterated what we knew from practice: **how a balanced burger is framed on your menu matters as much as the product itself.**

This guide translates those insights—along with real-world operator experience—into a practical framework for high-volume foodservice environments, helping you successfully implement balanced burgers after you've selected your product.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is organized into five sections:

- **Getting Started**
- **Step 1:** Choose Your Ingredient Story
- **Step 2:** Name It, Place It, and Sell It
- **Step 3:** Streamline Your Service
- **What's Next**

The recommendations are grounded in testing and experience, but every operation is different. Use this guide as a framework, and adapt it to fit your guests, menu, and operational realities.

Getting Started

Why Use a Balanced Burger?

Balanced burgers offer operators a way to enhance diner satisfaction while addressing cost, nutrition, and sustainability pressures.

1. Diner Satisfaction

Balanced burgers taste great and have been shown to outperform all-beef burgers in blind taste tests.¹ Ingredients like mushrooms and mycelium can also improve juiciness and deepen savory umami flavor.

2. Yield & Cost Savings

Balanced burgers offer a practical response to rising beef costs. Combining beef with lower-cost ingredients can reduce food costs without lowering perceived value.

3. Nutrition & Wellness

Depending on formulation, balanced burgers can also add fiber and other beneficial nutrients while reducing saturated fat and cholesterol. Tailor your mix to meet wellness goals while enhancing flavor and texture.

4. Environmental Impact

Substituting just a portion of your beef patties can meaningfully reduce emissions, water use, and land demand. Make formulation changes that help you reach your sustainability goals.

DATA POINT:

For a stadium with 220 events per year serving 1,200 burgers per event, switching from a conventional burger to a 50/50 balanced patty results in annual carbon savings exceeding 600,000 kg of CO₂e. This is the equivalent of driving over 1.5 million miles—or more than three round trips to the moon.²

Balanced burgers also offer operational flexibility. Operators can choose the sourcing method that best fits their volume and kitchen capacity:

- Create a signature blend from scratch
- Purchase a ready-to-mix ingredient base
- Buy pre-mixed balanced ground beef
- Source pre-made frozen balanced patties

Balanced burger products and ingredients are increasingly available through major broadline distributors, regional specialty distributors, and direct manufacturer partnerships, making pilots and scaled rollouts feasible for a variety of venues.

Once your team has selected the right product, success comes down to three decisions: how you frame the ingredients, how you present the burger on the menu, and how you execute it in service.

1. NECTAR, Future of the Industry, 2024.

2. World Resource Institute, “Tracking Progress Toward the Cool Food Pledge,” 2019.

Step One:

Choose Your Ingredient Story



Balanced burgers can succeed on product performance alone, but operators still need to introduce them in a way that feels familiar while ensuring that guests know what they are ordering.

This section outlines ingredient framing considerations beyond any regulatory or allergy disclosures.

Core Principle

Ingredient communication is a strategic choice; not a requirement at the point of purchase.

The best practice is to treat your burger like any other burger: make it appetizing while layering in ingredient communication that supports—or at least does not distract from— the headline.

The more you describe the specific ingredients in a balanced burger, the more your menu language must work to build guest confidence in the balanced burger.

Courtesy: 50/50 Foods Inc.

What’s Working in Practice

In market, there is a wide range of approaches to ingredient communication, each with its own tradeoffs:

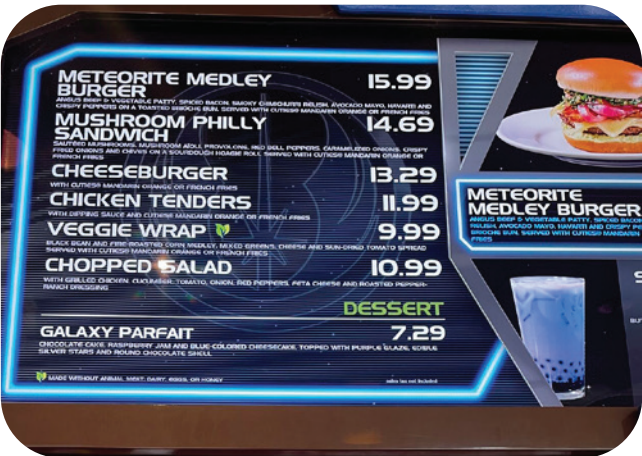
Explicit Technical Language		True Silent Transition
Explicit transparency for guest understanding.	Rationale	Remove friction for guest adoption.
Creates friction for consumers and makes it harder to communicate flavor and satisfaction.	Challenge	May create a feeling of being misled and lose guest trust.
Tyson's Raised & Rooted "The Blend" advertised an "Angus Beef and Pea Protein Isolate" patty.	Example	The 2025 Dutch Grand Prix served 29,000 burgers with a 50/50 blend without informing any guests. ³

Most operators land somewhere in the middle, **but the best results come when you lead with flavor and keep ingredient details minimal unless they add descriptive value.**

At Disneyland’s Galactic Grill, 50/50 Foods Inc. launched burgers under custom menu builds that emphasized flavor and experience. The only reference to composition appears in the sub-line: “angus and vegetable patty.” The product is clear, and its description does not interrupt how guests make decisions.

Fable Food Co focuses on flavor cues tied to its shiitake mushroom ingredients, positioning its shiitake infusion as a driver of taste rather than a replacement. Umami House in Australia—a customer of Fable Food Co—takes this approach, presenting mushrooms as a premium, flavor-first enhancement to familiar beef products.

These successful examples both lead with burger appeal and use simple ingredient communication.



Disneyland Galactic Grill Menu Board

3. de Correspondent, “Tens of thousands of meat lovers have been eating seaweed without knowing it,” October 2025.

What Testing Suggests

Ingredient transparency is most successful when it follows guest confidence.

Listing ingredients improves product understanding, but it can also create hesitation.

In menu testing, asterisks tied to ingredient statements doubled comprehension of the balanced patty composition, but selection fell when those notes made the product feel unfamiliar or overly health-focused.

However, menu callouts such as “Guest Favorite” helped recover performance.

Source: Food System
Innovations, Menu Research,
March 2026, N=300)

Item A
Selection Rate



Bringing It to Life

There is no one-size-fits-all answer for ingredient communication on the menu. The right approach depends on your venue, your guests, and the role food plays in the experience.

However, there are two consistent rules to follow:

1. Avoid Technical, Distracting Language

Ingredient descriptions that feel functional or unfamiliar (e.g., percentages or technical terms) can interrupt the decision and reduce appeal. Regardless of your approach, ingredient language should always sound culinary, appetizing, and additive.

 USE APPEALING LANGUAGE:	 AVOID TECHNICAL LANGUAGE:
"Beef patty with caramelized vegetables"	"Beef + Pea Protein Isolate"
"Classic beef patty with savory mix"	"Hybrid / blended beef patty"
"Shiitake-Infused Beef Patty"	"50% Beef + 50% Plant-based"

If no descriptor fits, use an asterisk and link to a clear ingredient statement rather than forcing technical language into the menu.

2. Be Intentional about the Tradeoff

More explicit ingredient detail can improve understanding and build trust, but it can also introduce hesitation at the point of choice. Each venue must decide where to land on this spectrum based on its goals and guest expectations.

Use the following questions to guide your decision:

Question	Lean toward more ingredient communication	Lean toward a more seamless introduction
Is your primary goal to educate guests about the product, or to maximize trial and sales?	Product Education	Trial & Sales
How much oversight or input do marketing, legal, or brand standards require?	Significant	Minimal
How costly would it be if someone later felt they weren't adequately informed?	High	Low
How much ingredient detail do you typically provide across the rest of your menu?	High-detail menu environment	Minimal-detail menu environment
Can you reinforce guest confidence through strong naming, placement, or menu callouts?	Yes	No

Step Two:

Name It, Place It, and Sell It



Once you've selected your balanced burger product and determined the ingredient story, the next operational questions are: "What should we call it on the menu?" and "How do we market it?"

This section outlines best practices for naming and menu placement.

Core Principle

Reinforce the reasons guests choose burgers in the first place.

Guests choose burgers because they expect indulgence, familiarity, and satisfaction—not health or sustainability benefits. If menu naming, menu placement, or product communication deviate from these expectations, demand can drop quickly.

Courtesy: Upcycled Plant Power

What's Working in Practice

Operators are more successful when balanced burgers are featured as part of the core menu. Placement matters—where an item appears on the menu signals to consumers what to expect and how to perceive it. Here are menuing best practices:



Courtesy: Fable Food Co

- Use normalizing names such as “House Burger” or “Signature Burger.”
- Provide strong, appealing visuals.
- Place balanced burgers first or near the top of the menu.
- Avoid isolating the burger in a healthy or specialty section.

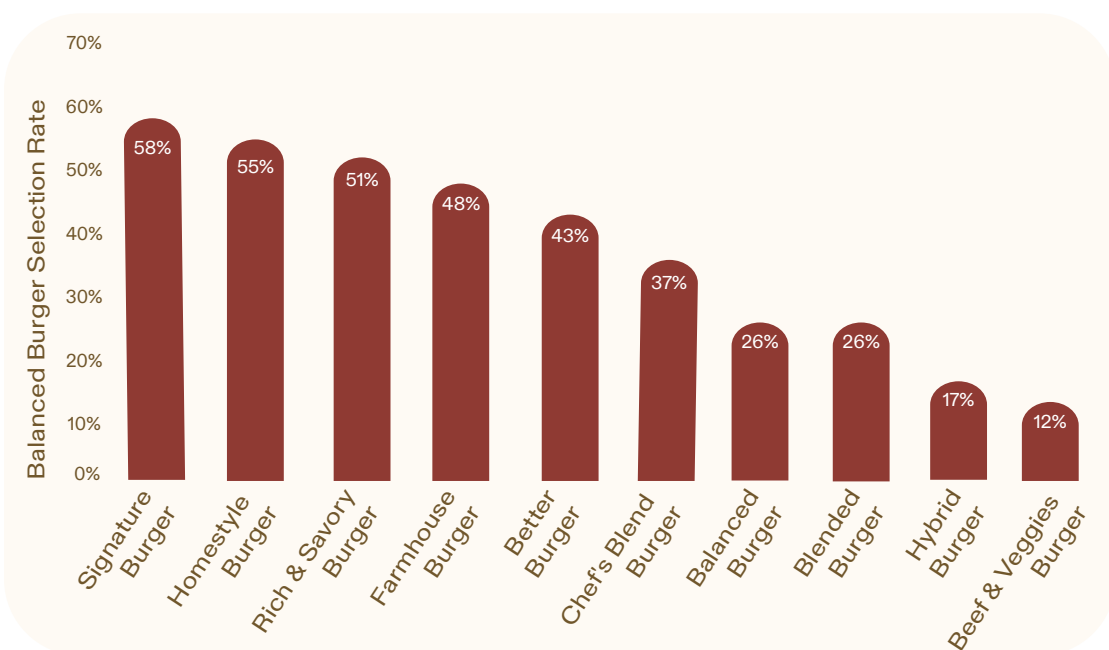
What Testing Suggests

Because balanced burgers naturally carry positive nutritional perceptions, product communication must emphasize taste, familiarity, and satisfaction.

The characteristics that best predict why guests choose burgers are anticipated taste, familiarity, and satisfaction. Positive health perceptions decrease selection.

Flavor-forward and craft-oriented names such as “Signature Burger,” “Homestyle Burger,” and “Rich & Savory Burger” outperformed names centered on health.

Source: Food System Innovations, Menu Research, March 2026, N=1,500)



Bringing It to Life

The product name on the menu is the first place you get to shape guest perceptions of the burger. Build confidence in the choice by following these rules:



WINNING NAMES & CUES

Tasty Titles

Lead with flavor by using words like rich, juicy, savory, smoky. Highlight flavorful ingredients such as shiitake mushrooms or caramelized onions.

Signature / House

Signal confidence and trust. Suggest this is the venue's featured burger.

Most Popular / Crowd Favorite

Offers of "social proof" can help guests make quick decisions about a safe and satisfying choice.

Chef's Recommendation / Culinary Notes

Terms like chef-crafted, hand-made, infused suggest quality and expertise.

Nostalgia / Familiarity

Names like "Homestyle", "Farmhouse" and "Classic" connect to comfort and familiarity.



AVOID

Health Framing

Health messaging decreases anticipated taste. Avoid messaging such as "healthy," "light," or "better-for-you."

Sustainability Framing

Sustainability can support the message, but rarely closes the sale. Leading with sustainability can decrease anticipated taste.

Technical Terms Implying Compromise

Unfamiliar terms create doubt and may suggest that the burger is a compromise. Avoid terms like "blend," "hybrid," "filler," or ingredient percentages.

Alternative Framing

Do not alienate the burger on the menu or in the language you use. Avoid terms like "alternative burger" or "plant-forward burger."

Direct & Indirect Comparisons

Do not invite guests to think deeply about the differences between the balanced and conventional burger. Avoid phrases like "bet you can't taste the difference" or "a new take on the burger."

Step Three:

Streamline Your Service



A menu is a system, and even small changes can meaningfully impact how products perform. When introducing a balanced burger, operators should be intentional about surrounding items, rollout strategy, and how staff are trained on talking about this product.

This section outlines practical menu composition and launch considerations to help set the product up for success.

Core Principle

Operational simplicity wins.

The best menu concept can still fail if it slows service, adds extra prep, or creates staff confusion. Consider piloting a balanced burger in a subsegment of your operations before pursuing a broader rollout.

Courtesy: DUO

What’s Working in Practice

The speed of service and space constraints in high-volume operations require simplified execution. Successful operations tend to do the following:



Photo by Orhan Pergel

- Use one standard balanced patty to reduce ticket times and kitchen errors.
- Pilot in one location to help refine naming, cook procedures, points of service, and guest response before scaling.
- Quietly upgrade the standard burger rather than forcing a choice at the point of sale.
- Gain buy-in and train staff early.

What Testing Suggests

The strongest model is often a single upgraded burger rather than two competing patties.

Direct comparison can create doubt where none previously existed.

When balanced and conventional burgers were listed side-by-side, total burger demand did not materially improve (69% vs. 60%), but confidence in the balanced burger’s taste declined by 26 percentage points (from 84% to 58%).

When the menu structure included default patties with patty substitution options, the substitution rates for balanced and conventional patties were relatively similar, indicating that consumers mostly choose the default option (12% subbed in a balanced patty vs. 15% subbed in a conventional beef patty). However, in this menu composition, guests were less likely to correctly identify which burger patty they were ordering, signaling potential menu confusion.

Source: Food System
Innovations, Menu
Research, March 2026,
N=200

Anticipated Taste of Balanced Burgers Based on Menu Composition		
Answers	One Burger: balanced burger only	Two Burgers: balanced burger + conventional burger
Good or Excellent	84%	58%
Average	14%	27%
Poor or Very Poor	1%	15%

Bringing It to Life

Use one signature balanced burger rather than two competing patties whenever possible.

Benefits Include:

- **Stronger Guest Confidence:** Reinforces the idea that this is your core burger.
- **Simpler Operations:** Improves inventory management, prep time, and storage.
- **Better Quality:** Reduces the risk of serving the wrong item or wrong preparation.
- **Less Waste:** Ensures faster turnover for a single product.

Some operators may choose to retain a conventional patty as a temporary measure during the transition. To ensure streamlined operations, we recommend making the balanced burger the default patty with the option to substitute a conventional beef patty, applying a price markup for the substitution to offset operational complexity.



Courtesy: DUO

Test First in Premium or Controlled Settings

A thoughtful rollout reduces risk and improves long-term success. Rather than launching system-wide, start in a controlled environment where you can measure performance and refine execution.

In premium environments (e.g., clubs, executive dining, and lounges), a balanced burger can be positioned as a chef-driven feature, with greater flexibility in ingredients, preparation, and presentation.

These settings are ideal for early testing because they:

- Offer more control over the guest experience.
- Allow for higher-quality ingredient pairings.
- Position it as a chef-crafted burger designed for deeper flavor and a more satisfying experience.

Training Your Team on Guest Interactions

Front-line staff are the ambassadors of your menu, so it is crucial to invite them into this roll-out process. For example, language matters. If a staff member describes the burger as “having less meat” or “it’s a partial-meat burger,” it undermines the culinary strategy.

Equip Your Team to Succeed:

- **Bring them in early:** Introduce the product in pre-shift meetings to build familiarity.
- **Let them try it:** Host staff tastings so team members can speak from firsthand experience.
- **Align on language:** Emphasize taste and quality, not composition.

How Staff Should Talk about the Balanced Burger		
 DO	 DON'T	GOOD EXAMPLE
Lead with flavor and satisfaction	Lead with ingredients or percentages	Q: <i>What is in this burger?</i> A: <i>It's our signature patty. Premium beef infused with added ingredients to make it extra juicy.</i>
Use familiar, confident language	Frame it as “less meat” or “healthier”	Q: <i>Is it a veggie burger?</i> A: <i>No, it's a beef burger with added ingredients to make it taste better.</i>
Keep explanations simple	Over-explain, unless asked	Q: <i>Why is it blended?</i> A: <i>To taste better!</i>

What's Next?

Balanced proteins are one of the few menu innovations that can improve guest satisfaction, cost management, nutrition, and sustainability goals without requiring guests to change how they order.

The next step is simple: test them in your operation.
Here is a simple checklist to help successful transition to balanced burgers:

Steps & Core Principles	Implementation Checklist
Step One: Choose Your Ingredient Story Ingredient communication is a strategic choice; not a requirement at the point of purchase. The best practice is to treat your burger like any other burger: make it appetizing while layering in ingredient communication that supports—or at least does not distract from—the headline.	☐ Be intentional about the tradeoffs between over and under ingredient communication. ☐ Decide on the level of product disclosure as an operations team. Suggestion: Match the level of ingredient detail with what is already on the rest of your menu.
Step Two: Name It, Place It and Sell It Reinforce the reasons guests choose burgers in the first place. Guests choose burgers because they expect indulgence, familiarity, and satisfaction—not health or sustainability benefits.	☐ Place the balanced burger first on the main menu or first in the burger section. ☐ Use strong food photography. ☐ Use flavor-forward language and names that signal trust like “Signature Burger.” ☐ Avoid direct or indirect comparisons with conventional burgers in marketing. Suggestion: Call it your “Signature Burger.”
Step Three: Streamline Your Service Operational simplicity wins. The best menu concept can still fail if it slows service, complicates prep, lacks team or leader buy-in, or creates staff confusion.	☐ Make your balanced burger your only—or at least your default—patty. ☐ Train staff on communication. ☐ Pilot in one location first. ☐ Measure take rate and guest response. ☐ Scale quietly once proven. Suggestion: Make it your only patty. Test & learn.

Ready to Explore a Pilot?

Greener by Default empowers institutions with behavioral science and practical hands-on guidance to serve inclusive, sustainable, and delicious plant-forward menus. Connect with Greener by Default for implementation support and operator best practices.

Learn more at GreenerByDefault.org



The Balanced Protein Consortium (BPC) is a pre-competitive coalition of industry stakeholders focused on research, communication, and collective action to advance the emerging category of balanced proteins. Connect with the BPC to find suppliers, case studies, and additional tools.

Learn more at BalancedProtein.org



