

OU earns spot on list of vegetarian-friendly colleges

By Natalie Knoth

Athens NEWS Campus Reporter

nk362406@ohio.edu

Vegetarians and vegans at Ohio University don't have to forage for side dishes in the dining halls to create a meal – like a clump of mixed greens here, a baked potato there, and a big scoop of beans. Instead, vegetarian students can choose a vegetarian entree in the dining halls that might include “tofu scramble croissants,” “faux Philly sandwiches” or “vegan chicken parmesan,” depending on the day.

These innovative offerings helped OU land a spot for the second year in a row as one of the top 32 U.S. schools in the fourth annual “Most Vegetarian-Friendly Colleges” competition.

The competition is organized by *peta2* – the young adult division of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) – which selects colleges based on student recommendations and feedback collected on MySpace, Facebook and the *peta2*blog. The organization also conducts research, looks at specific food products offered, and considers how schools respond to student feedback, said Ryan Huling, *peta2*'s senior campaign coordinator. Student feedback is the top factor in selecting finalists, he added.

OU made the list because of its “unique and visually appealing” vegetarian foods, Huling said. Other Ohio schools nominated are Case Western Reserve University and Oberlin College.

The three main reasons students choose a vegetarian diet, Huling said, is out of concerns for the environment, personal health, and concerns about animal cruelty.

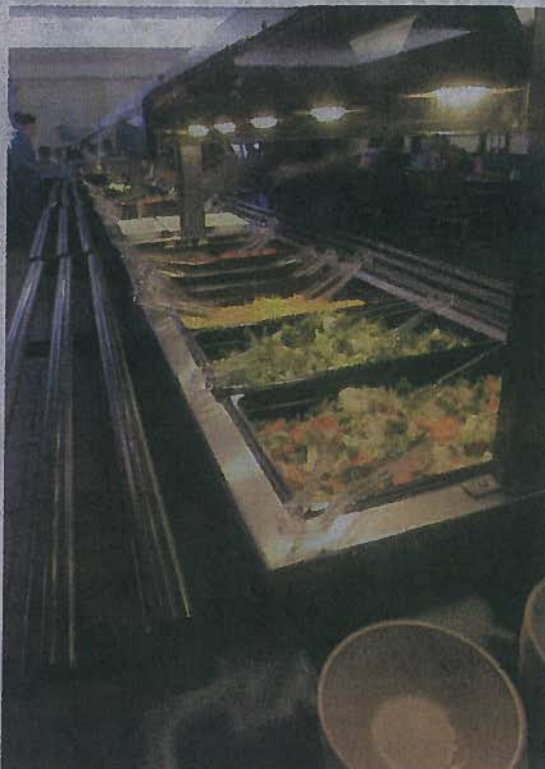
Matt Rapposelli, executive chef at OU, said the university likely broke into the list last year after stepping up its vegetarian options in the dining halls.

“We started to make things more interesting and ethnically diverse,” Rapposelli said, adding that companies such as Tofurkey and Pure Vegetarian now offer a wider selection of vegetarian products that can be used as base ingredients in dishes.

People who are meat eaters are less likely to choose dishes distinctly labeled vegetarian, Rapposelli said. For example, he said spinach and four-cheese lasagna would have fewer takers if “vegetarian” were added to the label. “It's the psychological aspect,” he said.

Rapposelli said there is definitely one student favorite. “Anything that's a quesadilla is really popular,” he said with a laugh.

Junior Morgan Augur said she decided to become a vegan winter quarter of her freshman year, thus excluding all animal products from her diet. She said she contacted Dining Services and made arrangements with the head chef at Boyd to have vegan meals prepared for her. She would walk back to the



The Nelson Hall dining hall, like the others on campus, offers a full salad bar, though Dining Services is also trying to offer more vegetarian entrees.

kitchen to pick up her meal at the same time everyday.

“They had a special meal for me every night and were sure to tailor it to what I like... like brown rice instead of white rice, and sweet potatoes,” Augur said. A typical meal consisted of vegetable soup, brown rice, steamed vegetables and tofu – often marinated in hot sauce. “It's really good,” Augur said of the tofu.

While Augur said she enjoyed the specially

prepared meals, she wasn't as pleased with the options available in the dining hall lines.

“The majority of vegetarians are very health-conscious and like vegetables, so vegetarians won't go for fried veggie nuggets and cream-based stuff,” Augur said.

As for the meatless, meat-inspired offerings, Augur was a little skeptical: “Usually I'm wary of things like that... I'm not a big fan of lots of preservatives. I try to eat things that are really simple.”

Rapposelli said Dining Services has been increasing the use of local produce in the dining halls, and West 82 and Latitude 39 in Baker Center. From spring until mid-October, fresh produce was purchased at the Chesterhill Produce Auction in neighboring Morgan County once or twice a week.

Students can meet with Rapposelli during orientation or the first week of the quarter to make requests for vegetarian or vegan meals. About 20 to 40 students typically contact him, he said, mostly vegans as opposed to non-vegan vegetarians, who may consume some animal products. The students submit a list of their likes and dislikes and can participate in taste-testing new products, Rapposelli said.

Last year the dining halls began using a uniform system for categorizing and labeling foods, using symbols, based on recommendations from student groups. Students interested in issues regarding the dining halls can join the Dining Services Development Committee (DSDC), which meets every two weeks.

Students can vote in the competition at www.peta2.com/College through Nov. 2.