

## **More Than Your Average Tofu Platter Put some soy in your diet**

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Even though soy beans are one of the staple crops grown in the United States, many Americans are still lacking soy in their diets.

“Americans have no history of soy foods,” says Cheryl Sullivan, a research dietitian at the Illinois Center for Soy Foods on the University of Illinois campus. “To many, especially in this area, it’s animal feed.”

One of the main goals of the Center is to teach people about soy foods—their health benefits and how to use them. Through a series of studies, demonstrations and cookbooks, the Center for Soy Foods is promoting the use of soy across Illinois.

“It used to be if you would see a recipe that used soy, it was for a traditional Asian dish,” Sullivan says. “Many Americans may try that, or they may be afraid to bite into a piece of tofu because they just weren’t used to it.”

In order to change this aversion to soy, the Center for Soy Foods put out a series of cookbooks called “Soy for the American Kitchen.”

Sullivan says the goal of the cookbooks is to show people “that there were easy, tasty ways to use soy foods, that didn’t mean they had to change their whole diet to incorporate them.”

The cookbooks, all of which are available through the Center for Soy Food’s website, include Soy for the Last Minute • Chef, Baking with Soy, and Around the World with Soy. The center also offers a Food Service Cookbook and smaller books like Soy for Vegetarians.

Two of the most popular dishes are tofu lasagna and cupcakes.

“You don’t taste the difference, but the calorie and fat content have gone way down,” Sullivan says. “It kind of breaks the barrier that some new users might have, because they realize that this can be normal food.”

In addition, the center does several presentations and demonstrations to educate consumers about soy.

“Many people would like to use soy foods,” Sullivan says. “They may even buy one and take it home, and then their stuck...but it’s really not hard. So we just talk people through it.”

Sullivan said that the most common misconception people have about soy is that “it doesn’t taste good.” But a lot of people who claim to dislike foods like tofu have never even tried them!

To disprove this misconception, the Center for Soy Food’s ISOY project—which promotes the use of soy foods in schools—did a plate waste study in Illinois elementary schools. One day students would get a dish containing meat and another day they would receive the same dish, but with soy. The amount of waste on both days was virtually identical, whether it had soy or not.

“Students didn’t know which they were getting,” says Sullivan. The amount of waste on both days “was virtually identical, whether it had soy or not. [Now] we can say [soy] is fine, it’s acceptable.”

Another reason the ISOY program wanted to introduce soy foods into elementary schools is the “big concern in this country with childhood obesity, and with the increasing epidemic of diabetes.”

Sullivan believes that soy foods can make a difference in schools because “if we can substitute soy for some of the meat in these dishes we can lower the overall fat and calorie content and keep the protein content up at the same time.”

Sullivan adds that soy foods are much more available than in the past.

“It used to be that you had to go to health food stores, or maybe the natural food section,” Sullivan said. But now, “you can buy some [soy foods] in the case next to everything else.”

While some soy foods tend to be more expensive Sullivan says the cheapest form of soy you can buy is called TVP, or Textured Vegetable Protein, which is used as a meat replacement and is easy to use. It can be tossed in with spaghetti sauce instead of meat to give spaghetti a protein boost.

Sullivan assures consumers that soy can be found in many different forms and for many different dishes beyond the commonly associated tofu dishes.

“However people choose to eat, there is a way they can incorporate soy foods into their diet.”