

Meatless burger demonstrates new possibilities

At The Counter in Kahala Mall, the meatless Impossible Burger is served atop a salad (\$19), right. It can also be ordered in sandwich form on an English muffin (\$17).

People usually identify as optimists or pessimists, but I identify with both. I grew up pessimistically thinking I should enjoy all the seafood I could out of certainty that in my lifetime our fish stocks would be depleted or rendered inedible by ocean pollution and toxic buildup.

I never believed in Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny or superheroes, but I optimistically counted on government, science and institutions to save the world from famines, ecological disaster and nuclear missiles.

Ha-ha! How was I to know that was a mere fairy tale, too?

Over time we have been left with the specters of global warming, the vanishing ozone, hunger and poisoned water supplies. The world, it seems, is unable to deal with the growing pains brought on by the quickening pace of technological progress.

In search of answers, the tech industry is now scrambling to come up with solutions for a wide range of 21st-century problems.

BIOCHEMIST Pat Brown, a former professor and Howard Hughes Medical Institute investigator at Stanford University, created his own lab, Impossible Foods, to address climate change and food sustainability. His investors include Bill Gates, Google Ventures and the Open Philanthropy Project.

Brown realized early that talking to politicians was fruitless and that revolutionary change could happen only at the consumer level.

Well, there is no quicker route to people's hearts and minds than through food, and last year Impossible Foods debuted the Impossible Burger, an all-plant product created to mimic beef.

First to introduce the Impossible Burger last summer was David Chang's Momofuku Nishi in New York. It has since made its way across the country, arriving in Hawaii last month at The Counter at Kahala Mall and this week at DB



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THE WEEKLY EATER | Nadine Kam

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Grill at Kapolei Commons.

Distribution has been limited because Impossible Foods needs the burger to make the right first impression, calling for an extensive vetting process. For Henry Yoon and Jin Hong, the young local owners of DB Grill, that meant making a pitch, providing bios of their chefs, submitting recipes for consideration and hosting a site inspection and tasting for Impossible Foods' executives — all before their request to carry the Impossible Burger was approved.

NOW THAT it's here, what can you expect?

The burgers' main components are wheat and potato protein, coconut oil, konjac (konnyaku) and vitamins B1, B2, B6, B12, zinc and niacin. What is unique to this product is the science that determined leghemoglobin, or heme, is what was needed to mimic the meaty flavor of beef.

Heme is an iron-containing molecule present in both plants and animals, and responsible for giving blood its red color. The combination of coconut oil, potato protein and plant-based heme is what gives the Impossible Burger its sizzle on the grill, a crisp crust when seared, and beeflike texture and appearance.

As an avowed meat eater, I wouldn't go as far as saying it tastes like beef. There's a voluptuous, juicy, animal-fat quality that's missing here, while the burger has the flavor and a bit of the bouncy consistency I associate with soy products like aburage and yuba. But as a next-gen option to other overly crunchy, dry, nutty or mushy veggie burgers, it's the best alternative to date, and I'm betting it would fool the sort of eaters who gulp down their meals without tasting.

It's cholesterol free, and you don't have to worry about undesirable additives such as hormones, antibiotics or artificial flavors. It is not a diet option. The burger's

calorie, protein and iron content is equivalent to that of real beef.

Given the recipe restrictions, here's what you'll find at the respective restaurants. Prices are higher than regular beef burgers, partly because of the research and development that went into creating the Impossible Burger.

But by Impossible Foods' count, choosing the no-meat option over a beef burger saves the planet from land erosion, water usage and greenhouse gases equivalent to a 10-minute shower and an 18-mile drive, and that is priceless.

The Counter

Your options are to have your burger patty on an English muffin or a bed of greens.

The Counter's Impossible Burger (\$17) is dressed with herbed goat cheese, tomatoes, grilled red onions, mixed greens, spicy tomato jam and Dijon balsamic, on an English muffin. There's so much going on it's hard to focus on the "meat" itself, but that disguise may be what makes it more palatable to meat eaters who know their beef. The crisp, charlike surface is present, and that is one of the best qualities about the burger.

The Impossible Salad (\$19) presents the patty over a bed of mixed greens tossed with quinoa, alfalfa sprouts, toasted almonds, red onions and grape tomatoes, with a side of vegan sesame-ginger vinaigrette to add to your taste. It works well with the burger.

The Counter is in Kahala Mall. Call 739-5100.

DB Grill

Executive chef Ed Choi Morris has come up with preparations reflecting Hawaii's Asian-influenced cuisine, starting with the DB Impossible Burger (\$15) sandwiched in a brioche bun with kim chee chutney, miso garlic mayo, lettuce, Hamakua tomato and Maui onion.

What I liked better was the Impossible Loco Moco (\$17) with miso-mushroom gravy, kim chee tempura and topped with organic eggs.

It's the flavorful veggie gravy that gives the loco moco the rich umami character the patty itself lacks. Face it, while many have a fetish for seeking out the best burger, the meat isn't as important as the concept when it comes to enjoying a loco moco. The light but delicious gravy deflects enough attention from the burger to deliver the fool-the-tastebud experience needed to win die-hard meatarians over to the meatless revolution. I would order this again.

For comparison, a stripped-down classic Impossible Burger (\$15) on a brioche bun with roasted garlic mayo, lettuce, Hamakua tomatoes and Maui onion is also available.

DB Grill is at Kapolei Commons, 4450 Kapolei Parkway. Call 376-0885.

An Impossible Burger loco moco at DB Grill (\$17) is accompanied by kim chee tempura.



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