



Say Halo

to a healthy new fast food chain



Healthy competition for fast foods' big guns

By Mat Thomas




The Classic Mr. Goodburger, made with non-dairy Tofutti "cheese" slices

Nutritional Facts

A side-by-side comparison shows the Goodburger's across-the-board nutritional superiority over hamburgers and chicken, as well as a competing fast food veggie burger.

	Classic Goodburger®	Big Mac®	Chicken McGrill®	BK Veggie®
Serving Size	203g	219g	213g	183g
Calories	193	600	400	340
Total Fat	7g	33g	16g	10g
Saturated fat	0.7g	11g	3g	1.5g
Cholesterol	0	85g	70g	0
Sodium	710mg	1050mg	1020mg	950mg
Carbohydrates	43g	50g	37g	47g
Protein	34g	25g	27g	14g



Ever more harried by the hectic pace of modern life, it's no wonder that Americans want their food fast.

Convenient, cheap, and ubiquitous, fast food chains have been only too eager to oblige—and profit. By successfully mass-producing food for the multitudes, they've become increasingly central to the American diet over the last half-century. Perhaps they've been too successful, in that they've saturated the market with foods high in fat and cholesterol, in effect feeding an obesity epidemic. Consequently, consumers have been changing their minds lately about what fast food should be: no longer insatiably scarfing down bacon double cheeseburgers, many are seeking a healthier alternative that's just as fast, affordable, and tasty. Consistent with the rising popularity of soy and growing concern over meat's health impact, fast food joints have even started to offer—gasp!—vegetarian fare.

On the crest of this new wave rides Mr. Goodburger's—the world's first vegan fast food franchise. It's an enterprise nearly ten years in the making, helmed by one Anthony Spadaro, a fourth-generation sausage maker and former avid carnivore. Spadaro quit the sausage business, and eating meat, after doctors detected an abnormal cell growth on his liver in 1995. Even though he credits dietary change as the reason he's alive and healthy today, the transition wasn't easy: he still liked the taste of meat, and found that other veggie burgers didn't satisfy his appetite. Fortunately, Spadaro's long experience making gourmet sausages enabled him to eventually create what he believes to be “the best tasting meatless burger ever”—the Goodburger™. He then formed a partnership with prominent chef and steakhouse proprietor Wes Zane, and

together they assembled a team of marketing and business development professionals to realize Spadaro's vision: a chain of Mr. Goodburger's stretching across the nation.

A sound business strategy for such a cutting-edge venture is obvious: appeal to the largest demographic of fast food customers—meat eaters—by offering them a healthy choice with a meaty taste. The key to Mr. Goodburger's success is therefore Spadaro's ability to mimic the taste of beef using only soy and a proprietary dry mix. This ability is aided by the fact that, unlike other veggie burgers that are baked and frozen before being grilled, Goodburgers are made on-site using non-GMO soy and fresh vegetables, so they're moist and juicy, never dry or rubbery. Numerous enthusiastic customer testimonials—from confirmed meat eaters, no less—are proof that the recipe is a winner.

Of course, Goodburgers are not only for carnivores: vegetarians love the taste, too. As one prime example, the Goodburger won PETA's prestigious Golden Bun Award for Best Hometown Veggie Burger in 2003. In addition, as the only vegan restaurant franchise, Mr. Goodburger's menu is vastly superior to anything the competition can offer. With eight different burgers (each named after an American city and reflecting its regional cuisine), as well as veggie chili, spiced potato wedges, and fruit smoothies, it's sure to be vegetarians' favorite fast food choice. Plus, vegetarians need not fear cross-contamination of their veggie burgers by meat, and all of Mr. Goodburger's products—from the patties and rolls to the condiments—are vegan.

Perhaps the most exciting part is that, as a national franchise, Mr. Goodburger's provides an excellent investment opportunity for anyone

who's ever dreamed of having his or her own vegan business. *Entrepreneur* magazine places Mr. Goodburger's in the top five most affordable Quick Serve Restaurants (QSRs) to open—six-to-eight times less than a McDonald's, says Spadaro. Their unique business model also fixes operating costs at a fraction of the typical QSR. With less equipment (no deep fryer, for example) and a small inventory, stores require far less space than most burger franchises. Instead of trucking huge batches of pre-made frozen burgers to store locations like the competition, Mr. Goodburger's reduces shipping and manufacturing costs by mailing their patty mix to each restaurant. Mr. Goodburger's prototype store in Honolulu is already flourishing, and a February 2004 grand opening in Missoula, Montana (“Mad Cowboy” Howard Lyman's home state) began the chain's expansion on the mainland.

With the evolution of healthy eating trends, as well as the recent discovery of mad cow disease in Washington, the time seems right for meatless fast food. Mr. Goodburger's provides a way for the vegetarian community to reach out to meat eaters, and perhaps even bring them into our world. Most people cite convenience as the number one reason why they still eat meat. If it were as easy to get a healthy, delicious veggie burger, as it now is to buy, say, a Big Mac, how many animals' lives would be spared? How many more people would become vegetarians? Like the increased availability of soy products in supermarkets, such widespread accessibility to quality meatless food would go a long way towards bringing vegetarianism into the mainstream. VN

Mat Thomas is a writer living in San Francisco. His review of Obligate Carnivore appeared in VN #35.