



Smile and Say “Daiya”

Andre Kroecher and Greg Blake hoped to make a splash at the 2009 Natural Products Expo West in Anaheim, Calif. The cofounders of Daiya Foods in Vancouver, British Columbia, shipped an oven, 900 pizza crusts, and 31 gallons of sauce to the trade event to showcase their new nondairy shredded cheese.

Three days and more than 8,000 pizza slices later, the pair had generated a tidal wave of excitement. Tasters were wild for Daiya’s flavor

and texture, and *VegNews* magazine awarded Daiya (pronounced *day-uh*) a coveted Best of Show Award—all before the product had hit the market.

For Kroecher, the journey began two decades ago when he learned about the suffering of cows and calves in the dairy industry. He experimented in his kitchen for years to create a nondairy cheese that would appeal to vegans, people allergic to dairy, and those looking to reduce their consumption of animal products. A fortuitous cooking disaster resulted in the product he named Daiya, a play on *dairy* and *daya*, a Sanskrit word for compassion.

Tapioca and arrowroot flours give Kroecher’s creation the melt and stretch qualities of dairy cheeses—minus the hormones and antibiotics. Daiya is also free of soy, nuts, and other common allergens, prompting *Allergic Living* magazine to deem it a “dairy-free dream come true.”

“We hear . . . daily from mothers whose children are lactose-intolerant or have an allergy that we’ve changed their lives because they can now enjoy pizza with the other kids at school and birthday parties,” says Ryan Bennett, the company’s vice president of sales and marketing.

Available in a growing number of health food stores and restaurants, Daiya has become so popular that when the company sponsored a recipe contest, more than 7,000 entries were submitted. Dawn Grey of Lawrence, Kansas, whipped up this version of an iconic comfort dish.

— *Arna Cohen*

Creamy Macaroni and Cheese Casserole—Serves 6 to 8

8 ounces pasta, any shape
3 cups Daiya cheddar style shreds
3 tablespoons margarine
¼ teaspoon black pepper
1 tablespoon nutritional yeast
 (a cheesy-flavored inactive yeast full of vitamins and minerals)

2 cups unsweetened soy or rice milk
½ cup bread crumbs
¼ teaspoon paprika
¼ cup vegan parmesan cheese (optional)

1. Cook pasta according to package instructions, and drain. Preheat oven to 350° F.
2. While oven is warming, melt margarine in a small pot. Add pepper and nutritional yeast. Stir in milk. Add Daiya shreds, and cook over low to medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes, stirring frequently to prevent burning. Add the macaroni and mix well.
3. Transfer to an 8-by-8-inch casserole dish. Top with bread crumbs and paprika. Bake for 15 minutes uncovered, or until the cheese is bubbling and the top starts to brown. Remove from oven and top with the parmesan just before serving.

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