



How to Find Your Whole-Food, Plant-Based Community

By Jolia Sidona Allen
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When Tim Kaufman—the inspiring whole-food, plant-based voice behind [FatManRants](#)—first went plant-based after watching *Forks Over Knives*, he was armed with an education but little else. “I didn’t even know what ‘plant-based’ was. I just knew what to do from the movie—what I could pick out of it,” he says. So Kaufman went online in search of others committed to the whole-food, plant-based lifestyle and found plant-powered athlete [Josh LaJaunie](#). “When we first connected online, I felt like I wasn’t this weirdo on an island, like there were other people like me.”

Fast-forward seven years: Kaufman, who’s lost close to 200 pounds and reclaimed his health on the diet, now teaches community courses on the WFPB lifestyle near his home in Alden, New York. He and his wife, Heather, coordinate monthly WFPB potlucks at a local church; movie screenings; and picnics at parks. Once, the Kaufmans even hosted a picnic for 80-plus people on their own front porch! Kaufman is a big believer in the power of community—and for good reason. Going WFPB isn’t always easy, especially if you’re the only one in your household, family, or circle of friends who’s on board with it.



Tim Kaufman hosts meet-ups and potlucks and teaches a WFPB community course in Alden, NY.

“Ongoing support is so important,” says Caryn Dugan, WFPB cooking course instructor and the creator of the STL Veg Girl Official Forks Over Knives Program in St. Louis. “It’s often the missing ingredient when people find it too challenging to maintain this lifestyle, even if they are experiencing incredible health benefits.”



Students in a STL Veg Girl cooking course show off their chili handiwork.

“If you’re doing it by yourself, especially against what the people around you feel, you’re going to be markedly less likely to be successful in the long term,” says [Dr. Steven Lome](#), a cardiovascular disease specialist at Rush Copley Medical Center and organizer of Meetup’s [Chicagoland Plant Based Nutrition Movement](#). But the good news is you don’t have to go it alone. Support is out there! Throughout the U.S. and beyond, like-minded eaters are participating in lively WFPB meet-ups, potlucks, restaurant events, cooking classes, movie screenings, and physician-studded summits. The trick is knowing how to find them. Read on for essential tips on how to get connected.

Start Online

Sure, your end goal is to connect with people in real life, but the internet is the best way to find WFPB eaters in your area. Search on sites such as the Physicians

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Committee for Responsible Medicine's [Building Healthy Communities site](#), Facebook, and Meetup. A simple keyword search for "plant-based" on [Meetup](#) yields over 600 groups. The next step is to make the leap from cyberspace to real life. "For a Meetup, put aside your fears and go," Dugan says. "Remember you already have something in common with every person in the room."

Ditch Diet Labels

If there are no strictly WFPB events in your area, Lome suggests vegan Meetups. "We need to encourage vegan people to eat more whole foods as well," he says.

"We have many people who still eat a normal Western diet that includes animal products, and they come to see what you can eat when you follow a plant-based diet," says Anja Perat, organizer of [Meetup's Melbourne Plant-Based Dinner with Friends](#). "Some are even dragged in by their friends or spouses, and they have all told me that the food is better than they have imagined."

Bethany Davis, community organizer of the [Forks Over Knives Meetup group in Orangevale, California](#), predicts you'll meet quite a range, from plant-curious newbies to full-fledged plant-based veterans. The takeaway? Ditch diet labels at the door and support each member of your newfound community, wherever they are on their plant-based journey.

Be a Trailblazer

Kaufman jokes that every time he posts a picture of a WFPB gathering on his website, people comment that they have nothing like it in their area. "We didn't either!" he says. "If you can't find a Meetup or a group, make one." When Kaufman and his wife started their monthly potluck at a local church, they decided that "even if we were the only people there, we were going to sit there," he says. What started with six or seven participants has steadily grown to 50 or 60 at each potluck. In Orangevale, Davis says, "the FOK Meetup was started in April of 2012 by a few people who watched the movie and wanted to create a local support group for transitioning over to WFPB/oil-free. The group quickly grew to 65-plus members, and now there are 1,585 members!" Davis' best advice for getting started: Offer simple potlucks, cooking demos, workshops, and movie nights at libraries, community centers, parks, or restaurants.



Tim Kaufman's WNY Plant-Based Community meet-up.

Invite a Doc to Dinner

Want to take your WFPB gathering to the next level? Lome suggests inviting a local [WFPB doctor](#) or other plant-based expert to your next event to give a talk or presentation. "The reason people go whole-food, plant-based instead of vegan is more for health reasons. To have a successful potluck that's whole-food, plant-based, try to find a physician champion or a nurse practitioner or somebody locally who is also on board with this concept and get them involved."

Read Next: [Meet the Founder of the Plant-Based Support Group That's Thriving in Michigan](#)

