Nut Milk, Beef Broth, and More Are Heading to a Beer Tap Near You

In almost every corner of the hospitality industry, there’s a tap system designed to cut back on waste.

Neighborhood watering holes, beer halls, and tiki bars alike have been using taps to serve draft lagers and frozen margaritas to the masses for decades, but for a new generation of hospitality professionals, tap systems are proving to be an elegant solution for reducing waste from ingredients that spoil easily.

A year ago, coffee veteran Reagan Petrehn set out to build a tap system that would dispense half and half, whole milk, and a house nut milk blend of cashews, almonds, and raw pumpkin seeds at Felix Roasting Co.’s coffee shop located in New York City. He was told it simply couldn’t be done.

“No one wanted to build it for us,” he says, due to the industry’s hesitance to modify a beer tap for a product as spoilable as dairy. “Especially for milk. No one wanted to take the risk of being our service partner.”
But Petrehn, who currently serves as Felix’s head of brand, remained undeterred by the skepticism he was encountering. The prospect of serving customers a controlled, quality-assured condiment—unlike a carton of milk or cream that might sit out on a counter for hours on a hot summer afternoon—was too perfect, and the opportunity to cut back on waste from spoiled milk was even more appealing.

Because there wasn’t enough room for a fridge under the bar, he had to figure out how to pipe milk across the distance between the café’s ground floor and the refrigerated walk-in box in its cellar, while still keeping the product at a constant temperature. To make sure everything is working properly, the team tests each dairy (and dairy alternative) offering several times a day, and the taps themselves are flushed and cleaned every two weeks. So far, the results have been overwhelmingly positive—both from a quality and design perspective—and Petrehn intends to add oat milk to Felix’s taps in the near future.

Similarly drawn to the opportunity to reduce waste through a polished tap system—though by dispensing a considerably more shelf-stable product—downtown Nashville’s luxury boutique hotel Noelle gives guests the choice of sparkling, ambient, or chilled filtered water on each floor.

“Our guests love the convenience of the water stations,” says Ben Olin, Noelle’s general manager. “They appreciate the sustainability, in that they can re-use our complimentary water bottles as many times as they want throughout their stay, or their own water bottles.”

For Anya Fernald, co-founder and CEO of Californian steakhouse and butcher Belcampo Meat Co., beer taps make for an unconventional way to serve both hot and cold broths. At the new Hudson Yards outpost in New York City, guests can find both beef and poultry bone broth on tap, from which Fernald says the waste-reduction aspect is two-fold. “Bone broth itself is an awesome [way to reduce] waste,” she says. “Since we use whole animals, the broth is a way to extract nutrition from the bones and scraps leftover from butchering beef, pork, lamb and poultry. Serving it on tap further reduces the waste.”
At chef Marco Canora’s New York City broth empire, Brodo, tap systems are used to cold-fill fresh bone broth (from beef alone to a beef, chicken, and turkey blend) in reusable glass jars instead of the usual plastic containers or paper cartons. “This reduces packaging waste and has been really popular with our customers,” says Andrew Garner, Brodo’s CEO. “Also, the tap system heats the broth on demand, which eliminates the evaporation waste that comes along with hot-holding broths and soups for hours.”

The taps also significantly reduce the waste and water required to clean up at the end of the day, especially for messier items like beef broth tomato gazpacho and turmeric tonic.

While many of the tap systems are efficiently tucked away behind a kitchen wall or underneath a bar, those that are on display, like the tap wall at Brodo’s Upper West Side location, or the milk station at Felix, are an attraction and social media talking point in themselves.