

Table Talk: 'Raw food' hits the Middlebury market

[Andrea Suozzo Table Talk](#)

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A weekly blog about food, farmers and everything in between.

If you've been to the Middlebury farmer's market recently, you might have noticed the small tent draped in blue and pink tulle, with a chalked sign proclaiming "Love Bites" at the entrance. Perhaps your eye was drawn by the platter of truffles and plates of smooth, shining cakes. Or maybe you noticed, instead, the woman behind the table.

Her name is Elcin (pronounced El-chin) Oflaz, and this Wednesday morning she sports a crocheted green dress and a Mad Hatter-esque top hat made of yellow straw. As people walk by and eye the decadent desserts, she calls out to them in a strong Turkish accent, suggesting that they try some. Some approach curiously. More shake their heads.

"But I haven't eaten lunch yet," is a common refrain. More common: "I don't need any more calories."



Oflaz with a tray of truffles
Independent photo / Angela Evancie

Oflaz shakes her head. "Maybe we need some other way to explain it."

The whiteboard at the front of Oflaz's tent advertises homemade truffles, zucchini pasta and cheesecake. Not advertised, however, is that the chocolate cake contains no sugar, the cheesecake contains no cheese, and that every one of the foods is raw, made with produce, nuts and plant-based extracts.

Raw foodists eat nothing that has been heated beyond 118 degrees. The heat, they say, breaks down enzymes that are essential to your body's digestive health. Many raw foodists attribute increased health and energy levels to the diet. But others argue that it may not be possible to obtain all necessary nutrients, such as vitamin B12, from a raw foods diet, and that it is difficult to obtain all of the calories necessary to survive.

Oflaz, however, has had only good experiences with the diet.

"After 40, women see the dessert and we run away," she says, pointing to her array of homemade foods. "But (raw food) makes us feel better, sexier and lose weight."

Oflaz lives in New York, where she teaches classes on the benefits of raw food and its preparation, but she has not started to sell her own food. When her boyfriend, John West Townsend, suggested that she sell

her food in his hometown of Middlebury, she got a spot at the farmer's market for the summer.

As new as raw food may be to Middlebury, it is also fairly new to Oflaz. Four months ago she attended Mehmet Ak's raw culinary institute in Chicago, returning home with a whole new way of cooking. Instead of a stove, she uses a food processor, a dehydrator and her freezer.

The beauty of her food, she explains, is that it tastes good, but it is also nutritious. Her truffles are 70 percent cacao and for sweeteners in her desserts she uses agave and fruit. She extols the nutrients of these ingredients.

"Why would you go to the health food store and buy a bottle of zinc, a bottle of magnesium? You can just eat a truffle!" she tells a customer.

The woman, who had expressed major doubt about buying a truffle (her objection was of the caloric nature), hands over the money and picks one from the tray.

"You're good at this," she tells Oflaz. "I would've walked right by."

"I am always the best when I sell what I believe in," Oflaz responds. "It's all about raw, baby. I'm raw and loving it."

She gives me a taste of zucchini pasta which Townsend is grinding on a spiral slicer with a topping of marinara sauce—tomato, garlic and fresh oregano, uncooked and savory. Her real passion, however, is for the sweets.

"I'm all about eating desserts. It helps you. It heals you," she says.

As she gives me a bite of her "cheesecake," she cuts herself a piece as well. I taste it, and she follows suit with a laugh.

"It's weird that I'm not gaining weight. I'm eating all this stuff!"

The cake doesn't taste anything like cheese. It is light and sweet but not too sweet. The cream is filled with bananas and tastes of coconut—it is made of cashew, sweetened with agave and flavored with coconut oil. The chocolate cake is decadent and creamy, but the occasional crunch reminds me that it is made with dates.

"You eat it, but you don't want to eat more and more," says Oflaz, contrasting her own desserts with ones made from conventional sugar and flour.

She traces her love of food to the culture of her native Istanbul.

"Mediterranean culture is all about gathering around food," she says. "When you have guests you give them food to show them love."

She has spent the 14 years since she arrived in New York promoting Mediterranean food as a healthy, lifelong diet. She is a health consultant and yoga therapist, and according to her business card, an "event planner and party chef for your palate and for your figure."

But with her switch to raw foods, the meaning of food has shifted as well.

"Before, food (for me) was more about emotion and conversation," she said. "Now it's about being healthy and staying young."

These days she makes the occasional exception for cooked salmon, but most of her diet is composed of raw food. This, she says, makes her feel great.

I'm not here to convert people. Just to let them know to be conscious of what they're eating. To integrate some good food into their diet," she said.

Note: Although Oflaz will be away for the next month, her stand will be at the farmer's market from August through October.

Andrea does reporting and online media for the Addison Independent. You can find her on Twitter [here](#)^[1] or see other Table Talk entries [here](#)^[2]

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