

# Ranch dressing is what's wrong with America

Fancy restaurants need to stop experimenting with this revolting milk-rot.

By Ben Adler  
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Ranch dressing, the salad dressing invented from buttermilk, is having a moment. New York Magazine [reports](#) that the “Great American Condiment” is appearing on the city’s hippest restaurant menus as a topping or dipping sauce on everything from chicken sandwiches and onion rings to pizza. Last year a restaurant serving ranch dressing on all its dishes [opened](#) in St Louis. National food blogs [recommend](#) putting ranch on every inappropriate food one can imagine, from pasta to [breakfast cereal](#), while [a list](#) of top organic restaurants in L.A. praises one place for putting ranch on french fries and another for adding it to lettuce tacos.

Ranch was invented by a Nebraskan who began [serving it](#) in at a dude ranch in California, but its spiritual home has always been the Midwest. In its purest form, it’s made of buttermilk, salt, garlic, onion, herbs and spices, although the stuff sold in stores and served in chain restaurants has ingredients like sugar, vegetable oil and unpronounceable chemicals.

It’s the kind of topping serious chefs correctly disdained for decades as extravagant and trashy. But now, animated by a kind of faddish philistinism, professional food connoisseurs are giving it another look. Today’s hip chefs revel in finding ways to profit from glorified junk food, from cronuts to little \$8 jars of [artisanal bacon mayonnaise](#), and the food critics cheer them on, as if this were a worthy endeavor. The current ethos is something like this: The more lowbrow a dish is, the more drenched in fat a dish is, the better.

It isn’t. There are three main problems with ranch dressing:

First, it’s disgusting. It tastes like exactly what it is, which is milk that’s halfway rotten. Why would anyone want to take something that they would throw out if they unexpectedly smelled it in their fridge and put that on their salad? The gooey goop doesn’t even spread well when tossed. Since 1992, ranch dressing has been America’s [most popular salad dressing](#), and it currently has twice the market share of its nearest competitor, blue cheese dressing, which is basically a better, more flavorful version of ranch. So Americans have bad taste, as is their right. But the whole point of expensive restaurants that get glowing reviews is to expand a diner’s horizons with something better than the stuff he or she picks up at the supermarket.

Second, diners are using it incorrectly. Putting ranch on salad at least has a rationale: Many people don’t appreciate vegetables and feel compelled to slather everything in processed fat. Fine. But why would anyone use it on french fries? Because deep-fried food isn’t greasy and caloric enough? And putting it on pizza — a horrifying, [common practice](#) — is insane because pizza is already dripping with mozzarella. It’s completely redundant, wildly unhealthy and disrespectful to any halfway decent pizza, the chef who made it and to the Italian people who gave it to us. (One pizzeria in Houston, owned by Italian Americans, has [banned ranch dressing](#).) Pizza does not need a dipping sauce, because it’s already perfect. If it needs ranch to improve the taste, it’s bad pizza, and you shouldn’t eat it at all.

Finally, our vulgar extravagance is going to destroy the planet and starve the global poor. Like meat, dairy [produces](#) more local and climate pollution than most plant-based foods. Dairy cows also [require](#) more land, water and other resources than grains and vegetables. Unless we moderate our habits, we will run out of resources to feed the Earth’s 7 billion-and-growing population and cause massive climate disruption. Here’s an easy way to cut back: Don’t slather milk products on foods already awash in them.

Putting ranch dressing on pizza springs from the same idiotic thinking — that more milk fat on everything is always better — that inspires such revolting innovations as Pizza Hut’s new Grilled Cheese Stuffed Crust Pizza. The dish, which contains “extra gooey cheddar and mozzarella cheese” in the crust and toasted bread crumbs and melted butter on top, prompted Thrillist [to enthuse](#), “It simply contains way too much cheese for any mere mortal to resist.”

