

Veg 'out' for NYC foodies

El Niño price surge

By BETH LANDMAN

This is New York's veggie moment. There are lines outside the vegan mecca By Chloe. Dirt Candy has moved to a bigger space. Jean-Georges Vongerichten is getting ready to open his vegetarian eatery ABCV, and every other ambitious restaurant in town has a vegan option on its menu.

So the strongest El Niño ever couldn't have hit at a worse time — changing weather and rainfall patterns, reducing the bounty from California and Arizona and driving up prices.

"Cauliflower has tripled in price from under \$20 a case to about \$60," says Enrico Proietti, owner of the Upper East Side Italian restaurant Bella Blu. "The vegetables that need a lot of water have been affected the most."

Some hot spots are raising prices, but most are taking signature items off their menus.

"We use a lot of rainbow cauliflower, but it has jumped to about \$70 a case so we aren't buying it now, and we are making Chinese broccoli chips in place of our broccoli rabe chips," says Amanda Cohen, owner of Dirt Candy. "We haven't raised prices because we knew this was coming and de-

ecided to take the hit."

Bustan, the buzzy Middle Eastern restaurant on Amsterdam Avenue, features taboon-roasted whole heirloom cauliflower for \$15. More than once, they've had to remove the dish from the menu.

Many restaurant chefs are getting creative or just eating the cost so it's not passed on to customers.

"We are trying to weather the season and play with the menu," says Cortes. "We are using acorn squash in place of broccoli rabe and baby kale instead of arugula."

The restaurant Butter is still serving its signature cauliflower steak, but has also added more veggie alternatives like rutabaga and brown-butter ravioli to take up some of the demand.

Joey D'Angelo, who just opened the Upper East Side farm-to-table restaurant Copper Kettle Kitchen, says he is staying as local as possible during this period. "I'm keeping away from cauliflower right now, and unless the price for broccoli rabe comes down, I will pull that off the menu ... and replace it with mustard greens from an upstate farm."

Additional reporting by Tim Donnelly