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Newcomer to Food Television Tries for a Little Grit



Michael Nagle for The New York Times (Sharkey); Food Network Canada (Rocco, Calder and Mooking); Cooking Channel (Robinson and Arneson) Clockwise, from top left, David Rocco of "Dolce Vita"; the chef Joshua Sharkey being filmed for "Unique Eats"; Laura Calder of "French Food at Home"; Roger Mooking of "Everyday Exotic"; Bal Arneson of "Spice Goddess"; and Darryl Robinson of "Drink Up."

By ALLEN SALKIN

Published: April 20, 2010

THE Food Network is trying to take it up a notch by taking it down a notch.

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Food Network Canada

From left, Micah Donovan, Nobu Adilman and Christopher Martin of "Food Jammers," a show on the new Cooking Channel.

Deen, the energetic spice-spinner [Linet Lagasse](#) and dozens of other stars to a mass audience are furiously preparing to start a spinoff network on May 31.

Called the Cooking Channel, it is lining up low-key programs targeted at a hipper crowd interested in the grass roots of food culture.

Ms. Deen, for one, will not have a time slot. But three young guys from Canada who build taco vending machines and other weird contraptions for a show called "Food Jammers" will.

In another show, "Unique Eats," taped earlier this month at Bark, a boutique hot-dog shop in Park Slope, Brooklyn, the cameras lavished attention on baked heirloom beans and franks topped with Columbia County sauerkraut.

The new channel, which announced its opening lineup at a presentation for advertisers in Manhattan on Tuesday morning and which will replace the Fine Living Network, is even considering producing documentary-style programming on topics like bulimia and obesity.

"The feel and style we're going for is a little grittier, a little edgier, a little hipper," said Bruce Seidel, the senior vice president for programming and production for the Cooking Channel.

Is America ready for some grit with its grits? The Cooking Channel is the Food Network's effort to regain its pioneering status while overwhelming the competition with the sheer volume of its food programming, 48/7.

The Food Network, which made its debut in 1993, essentially invented the modern era of food television. Its knack for spotting hosts who could appeal to viewers while pan-searing a chicken

DINING

Clip: 'Food Jammers'

breast made it a ratings powerhouse. For the first quarter of 2010, the network was the ninth-highest-rated cable network in prime time across all age groups, up from 20th in 2005, according to Nielsen.

But in recent years, other channels have elbowed into the kitchen, often with edgier fare. This month, TLC announced two new food series and two food specials. Bravo revealed it is developing a spinoff of its "Top Chef" franchise, "Top Chef Desserts," as well as a game show called "Commander in Chef." Meanwhile, "Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution," on ABC, has consistently been the top-rated show in its Friday night time slot among adults ages 18 to 34.

The Food Network "once thought they had cornered the market on food television shows and they have been beaten creatively by [PBS](#), who had much better content and much better thought-out shows," said Robert Sietsema, the restaurant critic of The Village Voice.



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for lacking authenticity.

“When Bravo jumped in, you can imagine the people at the Food Network wringing their hands and thinking, ‘How could they be capitalizing on something we created?’” he said.

The new channel’s success, its executives and other observers say, will depend on the public’s desire for more narrowly focused food programming and the ability of the producers to mint the kind of on-camera talent that propelled Food Network.

In fact, the channel is hedging its bets with new shows by established talent including Mr. Lagasse, Rachael Ray and [Bobby Flay](#). And it has a spinoff of another hit, called “Cook Like an Iron Chef,” in which Michael Symon, a Cleveland chef, makes dishes like those concocted in Kitchen Stadium. But less familiar faces await.

Many of the newcomers are imports from Canada and elsewhere. The Canadian shows include “Food Jammers”; “French Food at Home,” starring Laura Calder; “David Rocco’s Dolce Vita”; “Everyday Exotic,” with the Toronto food personality Roger Mooking; and “Chuck’s Day Off,” featuring a young and enthusiastic Montreal chef, Chuck Hughes.

There is a risk in trying to make a good first impression with so much imported content, admitted Nobu Adilman, a host of “Food Jammers.”

“The question is whether a show about three guys who are happy to be hosers in a very Canadian way will work in America,” he said. “We feel there are a lot of hosers in the U.S. waiting to find themselves on television.”

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This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: April 28, 2010

An article last Wednesday about the Cooking Channel, a cable network scheduled to start on May 31, misidentified the country of origin of “Indian Food Made Easy,” one of its programs. It is England, not Canada.

A version of this article appeared in print on April 21, 2010, on page D1 of the New York edition.

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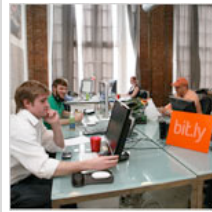
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