

United Airlines takes on nose to tail opportunities

This is a special feature from *PAX International's* October 2024 [IFSA Global EXPO](#) issue.



Aaron McMillan, Managing Director of Hospitality Programs, United

[United Airlines](#) is making significant investments in its food and beverage (F&B) offerings as part of a major refresh. Since late 2023, the airline has added around 60 new dishes to its rotating inflight menus and expanded its premium brand offerings to include [Illy Cold Brew](#), [Twinning's Tea](#), [Tillamook ice cream](#) and more. As part of its Economy wine program overhaul, United has onboarded restaurant quality, premium brands such as [Shafer Vineyards](#), [Gary Farrell](#), [Chartron et Trebuchet](#), [Pascal Jolivet](#) and most recently [Just Enough Wines](#) and [Maker Wine](#).

Earlier this month, *PAX International* sat down with United's Aaron McMillan, Managing Director of Hospitality Programs, to discuss the airline's focus on executing big F&B plans with key partnerships. He says that while United's F&B program may have been behind at some point, that is certainly no longer the case.



United has introduced Just Enough Wines rose, chardonnay and cabernet sauvignon, and Maker Brut Bubbles, to domestic Economy cabins

“We have an opportunity, nose to tail, on the aircraft. We are making incremental investments that go above and beyond to upgrade the level of service,” he explains.

Some of these initiatives include updated high-quality wines, updated drinkware and tableware and an increased focus on sustainability.

Wine not?

Last month United introduced its new domestic Economy cabin wine list that expands the choices for passengers, including a rosé option and a brut bubbles wine, available exclusively onboard United flights. From October 1, passengers can enjoy canned wines from women-owned brands Just Enough Wines and Maker Wine.

According to United, the airline has served more than 20 million glasses of wine system-wide so far this year—1.5 times the number of servings for beer or spirits—and more than 3.2 million glasses of wine in domestic Economy alone.

“This addition increases choice for passengers so that it’s more than just red and white. Both companies are women-owned, which aligns with United’s values, and served in aluminum, recyclable cans. That’s hitting it out of the park in my opinion,” McMillan says, adding that the partnership exclusivity brings a “uniquely United” experience to passengers.

The 250 milliliter cans (approximately 8.5 U.S. fluid ounces) are available for purchase (US\$12) and served with a cup for sipping.

The offerings include Just Enough Wines Rosé—a dry, crisp rosé with a refreshing flavour profile with 2

notes of watermelon and guava, balanced by a refreshing minerality. Maker Brut Bubbles—an aromatic sparkling white with bright citrus, white flowers, stone fruit notes and a crisp minerality. Just Enough Wines Cabernet Sauvignon—a full-bodied cabernet sauvignon with a vibrant and rich flavour profile of bright cherries, vanilla and sandalwood. Just Enough Wines Chardonnay—a medium-bodied chardonnay that features a bright flavour profile with notes of melon, honeysuckle and toasted brioche.

Sustainable sourcing

United is making several upgrades to other elements of its F&B offering. Along with the switch from mini plastic wine bottles in domestic Economy to canned wines, United is introducing new plastic-free cups that are suitable for coffee, tea and other hot beverages. One hundred percent bamboo cutlery will roll out in international Economy soon, ditching the current plastic cutlery. The bamboo cutlery is sustainably sourced and wrapped in kraft paper packaging.

Beyond what passengers see in the cabin, the airline is also investigating the benefits of AI to evaluate meal provisioning. While still in the beginning stages, McMillan says that in a few years' time, this technology will help the airline guarantee passengers the meals they want while reducing food waste and landfill contributions.



United serves Illy Cold Brew onboard as part of its premium brand offerings

United also has plans to introduce more universally inclusive meals so that all passengers can eat without necessarily needing to rely solely on pre-ordering a special meal. This can look like gluten-free, vegan meals that are not only satisfying but safe for more diets.

Outstanding food service

This spring, United Airlines received the award for Outstanding Food Service by a Carrier North America at the annual [PAX Readership Awards](#).

“Winning the award is great validation of the teams’ work. We take a lot of pride in the product that we put onboard—and there’s not a lot of awards hanging around here for our F&B program—so it’s good to get recognition as we make investments in the product,” says McMillan.