FOOD & BEVERAGE INDUSTRY TRENDS 2020
INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE SCENE FOR CHANGE

Every year it’s the same question: What will be the biggest trends? Is gochujang the new sriracha? What’s the next “it” beverage? What’s happening with wellness and nutrition?
INTRODUCTION: THE BIG PICTURE

10 Trends That Will Drive Us

Demographic and societal shifts are spurring many of the most interesting developments in the foodservice industry.

In this report, read about some of the overarching food, beverage, and service trends that are reshaping the industry for a new generation of consumers, including specific ideas, tips, and how-tos that operators in all segments can use to harness the momentum of these trends.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Trend 1: Instagram It!
Trend 2: Mix-and-Match Menus
Trend 3: Nutrition: Have It Your Way
Trend 4: The New Global Pantry
Trend 5: Lemonade and Iced Tea, Year-Round
Trend 6: Food That Tells a Story
Trend 7: “86” Food Waste
Trend 8: The Future Is Flexitarian
Trend 9: Tapping the Draft Beverage Trend
Trend 10: Go Big with Bitter and Sour

Conclusion: An Eye on the Consumer Is Key to Success
INSTAGRAM IT!

A picture is worth more than 1,000 words, as operators encourage picture-taking by making their plate presentations more camera-ready.
TREND 1: MARKETING

Instagram It!

In the age of viral, visual media, the way food looks has become almost as important as how it tastes.

A BEAUTIFUL PICTURE IS WORTH 1,000 VIEWS
Remember the cronut? First introduced in 2013 by Manhattan baker Dominique Ansel, the croissant-donut hybrid was one of the earliest Instagram-fueled food obsessions, and its runaway viral success helped spur a trend that has completely changed the way food is presented. We no longer just eat with our eyes; today we eat with our iPhones.

According to the company, which was launched in 2010, Instagram has more than a billion monthly users, and an astonishing 500 million people are on the platform every day, including 34% of U.S. Millennials. That’s what you call influence.

72% of Instagram users have purchased a product they saw on Instagram.¹

26% of Instagram users make more than $75,000 a year.¹
Small wonder, then, that food businesses have become adept at using Instagram, posting photos of appetizers, entrées, desserts, dining-room ambiance, staff members, and behind-the-scenes operations, along with thoughtful captions that invite likes, comments, and feedback. Instagram is especially useful for calling attention to daily specials, new menu items, projects like remodeling, or to announce special events.

Not surprisingly, operators have begun to cater their food to the Instagram set, creating attention-getting presentations that attract likes, followers, and—most importantly—customers.

Instagram is also being leveraged with other platforms, such as Facebook, Tumblr, Flickr, Foursquare, Twitter, and emails. Videos capture twice the engagement of other posts, so they’ve become more popular as well.

Certain ingredients and flourishes that have become more popular in menu items seem to be tailor-made for Instagram, as well as for flavor and functionality: head-on shrimp, watermelon radishes, multicolored seeds (such as everything spice) and sprinkles, charred lemons, platescaping with colorful sauces, food that’s dusted or burnished with glazes. This may be creating a ripple effect that propels Instagram-popular signature dishes like grain bowls onto menus, speeding up food trend adoption.

Technomic Take: Sensory Thrills Beyond a Snapshot

Over the past few years, Instagram and other photo-sharing apps have revolutionized the food industry. Restaurants have even created food and beverage with social media in mind. But now, Instagram stories, Facebook Live, and YouTube have extended the trend beyond what works in a single snapshot to what plays well through videos. Audio enhancements such as popping candies or items that move or alter in time such as color-changing cocktails, glitter beer, and bonito-topped foods wow diners, especially young ones. Because social media is evolving so quickly, expect menu trends to adapt in funky ways.

Source: Technomic, “7 Key Trends for 2019”
Some savvy operators are even designing their spaces with Instagram in mind, both for location shots and by providing perfect natural lighting and appealing backdrops that are ideal for snapping food photos.

Although critics worry that customers will start caring more about what their food looks like versus what it tastes like, making “grammability” too much of a distraction, Instagram is critical for exposure and attracting customers into locations.

How-To: Up Your Instagram Game

- **Color, shape, and size** of ingredients on the plate are key for better appearance. Pay attention to the color scheme of an entire plate—whether complementary or contrasting. Utilize different sizes and shapes to create visual interest.

- Consider presenting menu items in **distinctive vessels**, like individual casseroles or sauté pans, mini fryer or steamer baskets, paper cones, tabletop stands, and other “look at me” vehicles.

- Video-worthy **service touchpoints** like a tableside cocktail cart, ladling soup out of a tureen at the table, or creating a “smoking” plate can really pay off.

- **Pay attention to the garnish** of plates and glassware; there’s a reason for the popularity of skewers of shrimp, pickles, and olives on Bloody Marys and other edible cocktails.

MIX-AND-MATCH MENUS

Say goodbye to traditional appetizer/entrée/dessert categories, in favor of flexible menu formats that allow customers to build their own dining made-to-order experiences.
**TRENDS 2: CONCEPTS**

**Mix-and-Match Menus**

From small plates to large-format portions, today’s menus are way more flexible than in the past.

**THIS ISN’T YOUR FATHER’S MENU ANYMORE**

At Central Provisions, in Portland, ME, the menu is divided into sections called Raw, Cold, Hot, and Sweet, with prices the only indication of the size of various portions. Hot, for instance, includes $5 frites with Korean chili spice and garlic aioli, as well as $30 Maine halibut.

At Expatriate, in Portland, OR, the Drinking Snacks that are available to accompany the cocktails, wine, and beer are “Biggie Smalls,” “Salad Days,” or “Hungrier,” plus the tacos offered on “Between 5–6 pm and After 10 pm only.”

About one in five consumers (19%) say they purchase small plates at least once a week, and 41% share them.¹
At Radhaus, in San Francisco, the menu is divided into eight different parts, most of which are available throughout the day: Second Breakfast, Brunch, Snacks, Luncheon, Brotzeit (traditional Bavarian specialties), Supper Sides, Dinner, and All Day Morsel.

Meanwhile, at Momofuku, in Las Vegas, there’s a selection of six Large Format items—celebratory meals designed for the whole table, and sized and priced for anywhere from three to six people.

And at Prune, in New York City, the all-day menu comprises a continuous list of about 20 items, beginning with grilled shrimp with anchovy butter and ending with brown butter cake with sour cream and blueberries.

According to Technomic, preference is growing for meals that include several smaller-portioned or shareable dishes instead of a single entrée. Small-plate and appetizer bundles, samplers, and more innovative side dishes are all trending as consumers increasingly opt for meals that feature a variety of flavors. Small plates, in particular, continue to proliferate on menus and are helping to change meal dynamics.¹
What customers do with any of these new-style menus is completely up to them, and that’s the whole point. Pick a few things from here, and a couple more from there. Share them with your friends and go back for one or two more. Still hungry? What haven’t we tried yet? Should we order that rotisserie duck for the whole table?

This One from Column A, Two from Column B approach is completely modular, totally mix-and-match, and infinitely customizable. Scattered among the Cold and the Supper and the Hungrier will be items for vegetarians, samplers for sharing, choices that happen to be gluten free, and specialties that can be enjoyed any time of day or night.

This is a natural extension of the small-plates trend that began taking off earlier in the decade, and it’s a big deal because sharing and sampling is the way Millennials like to eat. This adventurous cohort dines out for the experience and wants to try multiple dishes. According to Technomic’s 2018 Restaurant Directions, Understanding Millennials report, younger Millennials (born 1987–1992) in particular eat out and spend more than any other generation. They’re looking for socialization and adventure when they dine out, and are more likely to visit restaurants that offer new and innovative flavors.


Small-plate menus and concepts continued as a top restaurant concept trend named by chefs for 2019.²

How-To: Leverage the Trend

- **Consider small plates at breakfast**, with curated items like egg sandwich sliders, fruit salad cups, and individual baked goods, allowing customers to try several things.

- **Offer a mix-and-match selection** of five to six prepared salads at lunch that patrons can build their own meal from.

- **Use dim sum-style roving carts or trays** for dinner or special-event catering to encourage sampling.

- **Introduce family-style items** like salad or lasagna for the table, or platters of build-your-own tacos, lettuce wraps, or deli sandwiches that an entire group of diners can share.
Forget rigid diets and nutritional fads. Consumers are taking on a more personalized definition of what’s healthy, and they’re making food and beverage choices accordingly.
TREND 3: HEALTH & WELLNESS

Nutrition: Have It Your Way

Like everything else these days, patrons want to be able to customize better-for-you food choices to suit their individual needs, tastes, and goals.

HEALTH IS A HIGHLY PERSONAL MATTER

It’s not that dieting is dead. But according to Technomic, consumers are increasingly taking on a more personalized, holistic view of health. They’re making food and beverage choices based on their personal definition of health, such as food described as natural, organic, high in protein, or functional (for example, items to help boost energy or de-stress).

Consumers may not necessarily follow a specific diet but they do always eat healthy as they define it (cited by 13% of respondents) or eat mostly healthy (44%).

In fact, the very idea of what healthy means is evolving: 40% of respondents report that their definition of healthy has changed within the past two years. They are increasingly taking a more individualized and holistic approach to health, including mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

Clearly this provides both an opportunity and challenges for foodservice operators. To stay up to date with consumers’ changing expectations of healthful offerings, menus must continually innovate.


HEALTHY TERMS ON MENUS:
WHAT’S UP, WHAT’S DOWN

Diet-related terms such as low-fat and cholesterol-free are declining in favor of more holistic descriptions such as all natural and organic, as well as avoidance signifiers like gluten free and dairy free.

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Source: Datassential Top Lists: Healthy Terms (2019)
Technomic cites two other trends that are affecting menus:

**Functional Eating**—In addition to more traditional better-for-you cues such as gluten free and lower in fat, nearly two-thirds (64%) of consumers agree to eating more so-called functional foods and beverages that provide specific nutritional benefits, such as being high in antioxidants or aiding in digestion, compared to two years ago. In addition, 32% would pay more for items that have other functional benefits, a greater percentage than for avoidant claims such as low-sugar, low-fat, low-calorie, and gluten-free.²

**Cleaner Eating**—The drive away from highly processed foods and toward reducing or eliminating foods that cause digestive issues, including carbohydrates, dairy, and refined sugar, is also affecting the way health-conscious consumers eat. This has led to growing interest in such new diets as Whole30, Ketogenic, and Paleo that eliminate these foods and promote the role of fats and proteins in maintaining health and losing weight.²

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**How-To: Build a Better-for-You Menu**

Providing a number of different choices that fit with current definitions of health can also appeal to less health-conscious diners, however, as long as the usual demands for variety, value, and flavor are met. Consider offering:

- **Fresh, seasonal ingredients**, particularly fruits and vegetables
- **Unprocessed, natural, and organic foods**
- **Lean proteins** such as chicken and fish
- **Foods with favorable nutritional profiles**, such as whole grains, salmon, and dark, leafy greens
- **Customizable menu platforms** such as build-your-own bowls and salads, which allow patrons to control portion size as well as consumption of unwanted ingredients such as gluten and dairy
- **Vegan, vegetarian, and plant-forward selections**, including plant-based proteins
- **Allergen-free items** including gluten-, dairy-, soy-, nut-, and shellfish-free choices

Operators may also want to call out items that make consumers feel good, whether through functional benefits, more transparency, or social responsibility.

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THE NEW GLOBAL PANTRY

Get ready to redo your inventory. Interest in ethnic cuisine and cross-cultural mashups means a more varied and worldly ingredient list.
TREND 4: INGREDIENTS

The New Global Pantry

Growing interest in more adventurous ethnic dining experiences, both authentic and “mashup,” has heightened interest in iconic global ingredients.

REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED TO SRIRACHA?
The spicy condiment’s rocketing growth onto mainstream menus, from macaroni and cheese to ketchup, has influenced the way operators think about the applicability of global ingredients. And the growing popularity of ethnic mashups—where ingredients, flavors, and techniques from several cultures fuse to create a signature restaurant or menu concept—suggest that the foodservice pantry is becoming far more adventurous.

| 34% of consumers (and 40% of Millennials) prefer visiting restaurants that offer menus or dishes with new or innovative flavors/ingredients. | 67% of consumers either love the idea of a mashup concept (23%) or would visit one (44%). |

These are some of the ingredients that are bringing a global touch to menu items such as appetizers and snacks, burgers, sandwiches, flavored spreads and mayo; and more:
**Gochujang** (U.S. menu penetration has increased 299.3% over the past four years) This savory, spicy-sweet condiment brings a Korean kick to items like fries, salads, and sandwiches.³

**Matcha** (+226.3%) Popular in Japan, this powdered green tea is also used in specialty beverages, ice cream, pancakes, and baked goods.⁴

**Chia** (+143.1%) A grain-like seed from Mexico that is very nutrient dense, making it increasingly popular on menus as a protein alternative.⁵

**Calabrian chile pepper** (+116.9%) From the Calabrian region of Italy, this small, bright red chile has a spicy and mildly fruity aroma and taste; it’s used for infusing olive oil or flavoring pizza, pasta, stew, and soup.⁶

**Black rice** (+106.6%) Also known as forbidden rice, this ancient grain is grown in China and parts of India, and can be incorporated into pilafs, mixed with grains such as quinoa, and used in place of more common varieties of rice in dishes like jambalaya or paella.⁷

**Labneh** (+66.4%) Thickened yogurt is widely used in Greek and Middle Eastern cooking, and adds savor to dips, sauces, spreads, and dressings.¹⁰ More tart than the plain variety, **Greek yogurt** (+34.1%) is also growing.¹¹

**Romesco** (+50.4%) Originally hailing from Spain, this colorful red sauce is made from roasted red peppers, nuts, and garlic, and can be used to flavor vegetable specialties (including zoodles), chicken and fish, pasta dishes, flatbreads, burgers, and sandwiches.¹²

**Shishito** (+71.1%) Mild and crisp, this small Asian pepper is most often found blistered on the appetizer menu, but it can also be added to soups or used as a salad topping.⁸

**Harissa** (+69.7%) Like sriracha before it, this spicy North African paste made from fresh, roasted, and/or dried chilies, tomatoes, garlic, olive oil, spices (cumin, coriander, mint), and lemon or vinegar can be used to add a hot, garlicky, smoky flavor to almost any menu item.⁹

**Yuzu** (+44.5%) A tart citrus fruit cultivated in China, Japan, and Korea, the juice and zest are used for flavoring beverages, dressings, and marinades,¹³ including the Japanese **ponzu** (+30.1%), which adds mirin, soy, tuna flakes, and rice vinegar to the dipping sauce mix.¹⁴

**Chimichurri** (+52.4%) Ubiquitous in Argentina, this bright green condiment made from fresh parsley, garlic, olive oil, vinegar, oregano, and red pepper flakes has become extremely popular on grilled meats, burgers, and in spreads and sauces.¹⁵

**Kimchi** (+43.1%) Eaten with nearly every meal in Korea, this traditional fermented-vegetable side dish can now be found topping everything from burgers to benedicts.¹⁶

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¹⁷ 68% of Millennials and Gen Z have gone out of their way to try a novel global food, compared to **50% of Gen X** and **44% of Boomers**. ¹⁷
Discovering Worldly Spice Mixes

Like global shorthand, these spice mixes can be used to bring excitement to dips and spreads, marinades and sauces, dips for bread, a rub or crust for fish or chicken, noodle dishes, and more.

- **Achiote (South America, Mexico)**—Paste or oil made from ground annatto seeds brings vibrant yellow color and an earthy pepperiness to rice dishes and proteins.

- **Berbere (Ethiopia)**—A blend of chili powder and warm spices like allspice, cardamom, cinnamon, cumin, and fenugreek used for stews, soups, and proteins.

- **Chermoula (North Africa)**—Cilantro, garlic, parsley, saffron, cumin, and cayenne are included in this flavorful paste used for fish, chicken, couscous, and vegetables.

- **Dukkah (Egypt)**—Toasted ground nuts, fennel, cumin, coriander, sesame seeds, and paprika add texture as well as flavor to dips, rubs, and vegetables.

- **Garam Masala (India)**—A complex blend of ground spices such as cumin, coriander, cardamom, black pepper, cloves, cinnamon, and nutmeg used as a building block for curries and other specialties.

- **Gremolata (Italy)**—A versatile blend of chopped parsley, garlic, and lemon peel supports many variations (such as fennel, nuts, and breadcrumbs) as a garnish for pasta and braised meats.

- **Ras el Hanout (Morocco)**—Literally meaning “top of the shop,” this complex mixture can include ground cardamom, nutmeg, anise, mace, cinnamon, ginger, various peppers, and turmeric—up to 30 in all for a versatile rub and seasoning.

- **Sichimi Togarashi (Japan)**—Chile pepper, seaweed flakes, sesame and poppy seeds, peppercorns, garlic, and dried tangerine peel add a kick to noodle dishes, yakitori, soups, and rice dishes.

- **Za’atar (Middle East)**—An all-purpose blend of dried thyme, oregano, marjoram, sumac, toasted sesame seeds, and salt that works particularly well with fish, chicken, eggs, meatballs, vegetables, and lamb.

LEMONADE AND ICED TEA, YEAR-ROUND

With iced coffee and cold brew now a year-round favorite, it’s time for lemonade and iced tea to make their 12-month menu debut.
TREND 5: COLD BEVERAGES

Lemonade and Iced Tea, Year-Round

Like iced coffee before them, these once-seasonal refreshers are being enjoyed throughout the year.

REFRESHMENT KNOWS NO SEASON
Iced coffee is gaining in popularity, and not just in the summer months. Now it’s time for lemonade and iced tea to gain a year-round following.

In fact, Datassential reveals that lemonade is now on 66.0% of restaurant menus, the result of 10.8% growth since 2015, particularly in the area of premium applications like cocktails, frosts, and even menu items with a lemonade flavor profile.¹

Lemonade has experienced 21% away-from-home consumption growth over the past four years.¹
As for iced tea, the beverage enjoys 71.1% menu penetration, with flavors like hibiscus, blackberry, and kiwi, as well as iced chai and kombucha, on the cusp of adoption by trendy restaurants and specialty grocers. Clearly, growing sales of these two refreshers depend upon making them more widely available on a year-round basis, as well as offering specialty versions that can’t be replicated at home—and can be menued as premiums.

Lemonade can be turned into a number of craveable signature beverages, such as slushes (lemonade or concentrate, water, and sugar, blended with ice—with or without a flavor such as watermelon or a spirit such as vodka) or frosted lemonade (lemonade and vanilla ice cream). Fizzy lemonade is made with the addition of club soda. And lemonade has long been mixed with iced tea in a 50-50 ratio to create the Arnold Palmer, but variations featuring flavors such as strawberry passionfruit are making news.
Among the most popular nonalcoholic beverages, iced tea is most commonly consumed during mealtimes, rather than as a snack or standalone. That indicates that it could be offered as a unique pairing with food as part of a combo meal. Fried chicken and sweet tea are a time-honored Southern tradition, but there are other possibilities. Partner an Asian-style spring roll with iced ginseng or oolong tea, or pair smoked meat or seafood with a smoky iced organic Lapsang Souchong.

More substantial teas, like bubble milk tea (flavored tea with tapioca boba, or bubbles) or Thai iced tea (black tea, condensed milk, and ice) can be menued as a snack, with or without a food accompaniment.

Iced tea is among the Top 5 beverages at lunch and dinner, enjoyed by 10% of consumers.4

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How-To: Specialty Lemonade and Iced Tea

- Offer these popular refreshers in on-trend flavors like Peach Ginger Tea and Wild Berry Lemonade
- Experiment with tea types such as green tea, rooibos, and chamomile, in addition to calling out varieties like Earl Grey
- Garnishes like fresh fruit, mint leaves, and even a sugared rim will help boost the appeal of both iced tea and lemonade
- Try adding herbal flavors to the lemonade and iced tea mix, such as blueberry basil lemonade or lemon verbena iced tea
- Fresh squeezed lemonade is a premium refinement with a hand-crafted image
- Thai iced tea, iced chai, bubble tea, kombucha, and cold brew tea are all in the Inception Stage of Datassential’s Menu Adoption Cycle for iced tea, and worth keeping an eye on3
- Lemonade and iced tea have become popular mixers in craft cocktails, from the Shandy (lemonade and beer) to Green Tea Mojitos

FOOD THAT TELLS A STORY

Consumers want to engage in a story about their dining experience. Find out why this means it’s not enough to talk about sustainable sourcing and social responsibility.
TREND 6: SUSTAINABILITY

Food That Tells a Story

In addition to information about ethical sourcing and social responsibility, today’s customers want to know the stories behind where their food comes from.

THE EXPERIENCE OF FOOD HAS BECOME A CONVERSATION

The sun has barely risen, and a young chef is gathering edible seaweed—destined for the night’s dinner menu—along a rocky coast, careful to harvest it in a way that it will grow back again and again. In the afternoon, a forager will bring him an unexpected trove of wild mushrooms, which will become the basis of an à la minute appetizer. For a whole generation of chefs, this is what it’s all about: making food is not just about buying it, it’s also about living it.

Humanely raised is at the top of the list of Inception Level descriptors Millennials want to see on menus.¹

Social responsibility is equally important to Gen Zers, Gen Xers, and Millennials, but Gen Zers and Millennials are most likely to cite sustainability as a purchase driver.²
The audience is appreciative. Qualities like local, organic, sustainable, free-range, and Fair Trade are all important to diners in varying degrees, but today that’s just the cost of entry. More than that, successful brands also need a differentiated story that consumers can relate to and retell to their friends and family. And increasingly, diners want to know the story of where their food comes from—how it’s sourced (cited by 44% of consumers, according to Datassential), who produces it (40%), how they treat their employees (36%), and more. In other words, that chef will be sure to showcase, on the menu and via the serving staff, where the seaweed comes from and who foraged the mushrooms.

All of which means that signifiers of ingredient sustainability and ethical sourcing such as seasonal and locally farmed produce, wild-caught seafood, grass-fed beef, and cage-free eggs are becoming more commonplace on menus and in mission statements on websites and point-of-sale, as well as in social media.

But there’s another aspect to the message, emphasizing the quality of specialty products, such as artisan-made breads, hand-crafted and farmstead cheeses, small-batch jams and jellies, craft beer, and single-origin coffee. These suggest the story behind the food and how it’s made.

Chefs and foodservice operators are also sharing more information about themselves and their ideals.

45% of students say it’s important that their school is transparent about how ingredients are sourced.4

How-To: The Language of Storytelling

- **Wild caught** seafood is in the Proliferation Stage of Datassential’s Menu Adoption Cycle, having arrived at chain restaurants and mainstream grocery stores5

- **Hand crafted** is on 4.4% of U.S. menus, a 47.6% increase over the past four years,6 and **craft** is on 10.2%, with a 67.9% increase7

- 50% of consumers who often eat beef say it’s important they eat beef that came from animals treated humanely, and 44% of consumers who often eat pork say it’s important8

- **Artisan** is on 8.9% of U.S. menus, representing four-year growth of 22.6%9

- **Local** and **seasonal**, which are associated with both better quality and a lower carbon footprint than imported and out-of-season foods, appear on 16.4% and 44.1% of U.S. menus, respectively10,11
The Kenwood, an all-day café in Minneapolis, bills itself as an egalitarian eatery “dedicated to serving the neighborhood everything from coffee and pastries, everyday brunch and lunch to delectable dinners with beer and wine”—a little something for everybody.

Indigo, a soul food restaurant in Houston, takes a more active approach, aiming to enlighten diners about African-American history and culture through its modern and ancient foodways. At Restaurant Indigo, says the menu, “we use history, culture, and social experiences to guide our cooking.”

And immi, a pop-up restaurant in San Francisco, is the passion project of married first-generation Asian-Americans (immi is short for “immigrant”) whose menu reflects the couple’s familial and geographic experiences, as well as their extensive travels through Asia.


Technomic Take: A New, Multifaceted Transparency

Mention transparency in years past and consumers would likely connect it to a product story around sourcing, food origins, and growing and processing methods. But tomorrow’s foodservice consumer increasingly will demand a more well-rounded transparency message and, in response, manufacturers and operators will craft a multifaceted approach. This means brands being fully transparent on several fronts, including pricing, revealing true net costs, and unbundled costs; corporate performance, emphasizing Fair Trade, diversity, living wages, and executive compensation; and the planet, publicizing its real environmental impact, conservation initiatives, and progressive stance on animal welfare.

Source: Technomic, “7 Key Trends for 2019”
Find out why keeping food out of landfills has become a serious commitment for operators, and they’re sharing their efforts with consumers.
TREND 7: GREEN OPERATIONS

“86” Food Waste

As social consciousness grows, operators and consumers are becoming more concerned about the staggering amount of food that goes to waste.

AMERICA DOESN’T EAT 40% OF ITS FOOD

The National Resources Defense Council puts it this way: “If the United States went grocery shopping, we would leave the store with five bags and leave two in the parking lot. All told, America throws out more than 1,250 calories per day per person, or more than 400 pounds of food per person annually.” ¹

According to Technomic, the country wastes approximately 63 million tons of food annually, at a cost of more than $218 billion. Twenty-five percent (16 million tons) of the total food waste is generated by the foodservice business alone, at the cost of $36.5 billion.² The staggering environmental, societal, and economic impact of that is gaining attention across the food chain.

41% of college students believe waste reduction is a top initiative food operators should be implementing.³
Operators are doing all kinds of things to both reduce the impact and call attention to the problem, from putting smaller plates at salad bars and serving carrots with carrot-top pesto, to working with local farms to turn waste into animal feed and compost.

- **Skidmore College** eschews trayless dining and preplates meals instead, and conducts food-waste audits early in the fall semester to heighten awareness among the freshman class.
- **Marriott International** has made a global commitment to reduce food waste by 50% by 2025, introducing a Hotel Kitchen Toolkit that provides the background, tools, and resources a property of any size needs to prevent, donate, or divert potential food waste.

- **Dig Inn Seasonal Market** touts its custom “Better OJ,” a blend of orange, carrot, and mint juice that uses sustainable, recovered produce.
- **Google** has kept more than six million pounds of food waste from its cafés out of landfills with projects like using broccoli stems to make pesto and using overripe bananas in crepes or banana bread.
- **Manufacturers** are stepping up with efforts like producing flour from coffee cherries (the fruit around the bean, which is normally thrown out) and upcycling avocado pits into biodegradable straws and disposable cutlery.

- **Equinox Restaurant** hosted a popular multi-course #NotWasted Culinary Arts Experience & Earth Day Dinner highlighted by a menu that turned food scraps into such items as Boston lettuce stem salad with strawberry hull pesto and wilted radicchio, and Burmese tofu fried with purée of shiitake mushroom stems.

Driven largely by cost savings, nearly all operators (96%) consider food-waste reduction to be important to their businesses.2

**Zero Waste** is in the Inception Stage or earliest phase of development, appearing in fine-dining venues.4

Resources

- The Environmental Protection Agency makes available an Excel-based Food and Packaging Waste Prevention Tool, in addition to many other resources.

- The ReFED site includes the Roadmap to Reduce U.S. Food Waste, a first-of-its-kind economic analysis which has identified 27 opportunities for food-waste reduction.

- The Green Restaurant Association helps restaurants, manufacturers, and suppliers tackle a variety of sustainability issues, including food waste. There is also a certification program.

- Solutions provided by Leanpath use technology to weigh and track waste, analyze the financial and environmental impact, and provide actionable insights.

- The Food Waste Reduction Alliance is an initiative of the Grocery Manufacturers Association (representing food and beverage companies), the Food Marketing Institute (food retailers), and the National Restaurant Association (foodservice).

- The recipes on One Green Planet include such creative uses for vegetable trimmings as Carrot Avocado Ginger Soup and Roasted Buffalo Cauliflower Bites.

- The stated mission of The Food Recovery Network: unite students at colleges and universities to fight food waste and hunger by recovering perishable food that would otherwise go to waste from their campus dining halls and donating it to those in need.
THE FUTURE IS FLEXITARIAN

Get ready to fill the center of the plate with fruits, vegetables, grains, and new plant-based proteins to court customers who are eating less meat.
The Future Is Flexitarian

From a center-of-plate focus on produce and grains to a wider range of plant-based protein alternatives, Americans are moving away from meat.

IT’S A NEW PLANT LANDSCAPE ON MENUS

Plant foods are flourishing. In fact, U.S. retail sales of plant-based food and beverages (including milk, cheese, and yogurt) grew 11.3% in the past year, compared to a 2.0% rise in overall food sales, according to a SPINS report commissioned by the Good Food Institute and the Plant Based Foods Association. Plant-based sales were up 31.3% in the two-year period from April 2017 through April 2019, to a total of nearly $4.5 billion.\(^1\)

50% of consumers eat vegetarian or vegan dishes at least once a month, but only 27% of those who eat vegetarian/vegan dishes say restaurants do a good job of providing options that taste good.\(^2\)
Meanwhile, the number of self-identified flexitarians (part-time vegetarians who still occasionally eat meat or fish) is also growing. The NPD Group reports that the incidence of flexible vegetarians or “flexitarians” are 8% of the population with actual vegetarians at 1% and vegans at half that. An even larger percentage of the overall population (18%), are trying to get more plant-based foods into their diets, reports NPD’s Health Aspirations and Behavioral Tracker. The reasons range from health and weight loss to concern about the environment.

**Nearly 70% of Americans** state that protein from plant sources is healthy, while less than 4 in 10 report that animal protein is healthy.4

This plant-curious approach is changing the way operators write menus. From a niche requirement for vegans and vegetarians to a key factor in today’s wellness trends, plants have grown an astonishing 2,462.4% on menus in the past four years, according to Datassential, and more than 300.0% in 2018 alone. Indeed, not only are more diners cutting back on meat, but they’re also far more interested in exciting meatless cuisine.5

That means that plant foods—including fruits, vegetables, grains, seeds, and nuts—are being given serious culinary attention. They’re also moving to the center of the plate in delicious and creative ways, including seasonal, global, and signature preparations, with protein-rich plants like quinoa, soybeans, chickpeas, and almonds standing in for traditional animal proteins. Plant-based beverages, such as nut milks, juices, kombucha, coconut water, and horchata, are also taking their place on menus.
At the same time, meat substitutes are also becoming more mainstream. The plant-based Impossible Burger has already arrived on the menus of chain, independent, and noncommercial foodservice locations, and alt-meats like pulled pork, bacon, seafood, and chicken made from plants are in various stages of market readiness. Many observers expect this plant-based “post-animal meat industry” to follow the trajectory of milk alternatives such as soy and almond milk, which now make 13% of overall milk sales, according to SPINS data.¹

14% of U.S. consumers (over 43 million people) regularly use plant-based alternatives such as almond milk, tofu, and veggie burgers; 86% of these consumers do not consider themselves vegan or vegetarian.⁶

**Bonus: Tips for Getting in on the Trend**

A survey of professional chefs for the National Restaurant Association’s latest What’s Hot Culinary Forecast ranked veggie-centric/vegetable-forward cuisine and plant-based proteins, and plant-based sausages/burgers among the Top 15 hottest trends, proving that plants are no longer just for vegetarians.

- **Don’t Call It “Vegan” or “Vegetarian”:** As perceptions of meatless eating change, so does its terminology. Speak, instead, of plants and plant-based proteins—or just leave it up to savvy customers to spot the difference.

- **Remember That Flavor Is King:** No matter what ingredients you use to prepare your product, flavor is the most important thing. Pay attention to freshness, seasoning, and flavor-building preparation techniques, like grilling and searing—and highlight that authenticity on the menu.

- **Focus on the Positive:** Rather than emphasizing concepts like meatless and gluten free, market to lifestyle. For many consumers, the plant-based trend is about personal wellness and doing right by the planet.

- **Emphasize the Adventure:** In addition to flavor, plant-based dining can be an experience: discovering new fruits and vegetables, learning about plant proteins like grains and seeds, exploring the heritage of global cuisines that are plant-focused, such as Indian and Mexican.

- **Consider the Special and the LTO:** Experimenting with plant-based daily/seasonal specials and limited-time offerings is a good way to test the waters. Like the Meatless Monday promos of years past, create a plant-based special, such as a quinoa and vegetable paella, or add an alt-meat patty to the burger menu.

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TAPPING THE DRAFT BEVERAGE TREND

Put cold brew, kombucha, wine, and cocktails on the spigot, along with beer, to answer the demand for fresh, artisanal beverages—and the need for low-labor service solutions.
TREND 9: BEVERAGE MARKETING

Tapping the Draft Beverage Trend

Beer isn’t the only beverage that can be served on draft—everything from kombucha and cold brew to wine and cocktails are now coming out of the tap.

IT’S A TAP TAKEOVER

Beer is the ultimate draft beverage, with fans lauding not only its fresh flavor and more pleasing mouthfeel but also the way having beer on tap saves storage space and eliminates the waste and time of cans and bottles. It’s also more profitable.

Draft is on 22.6% of U.S. menus, having advanced 4.9% over the previous year, and is mostly associated with beer, as well as nitro cold brew.¹

It’s not just beer that comes off the tap. Thanks to growing interest in fresh, artisanal beverages—and to a need for low-labor service solutions and limited storage space—more products are now served on draft.
The craft and small-batch beer movement made tap service more prevalent. Now other beverages are flowing from the spigot, including housemade sodas, tonics, coffee and tea, kombucha, cold brew, wine, and cocktails. The presentation of beverages on tap is eye-catching and on-trend, and can set an operation apart and create buzz. Dedicated taps for these specialties can also be integrated into a Millennial- and Gen Z-friendly self-service concept.

**Coffee and Tea**

Anything that can be put in a keg can be served on tap, and that includes iced coffee, cold brew, and iced tea. Receiving these beverages already pressurized and ready-to-serve saves time because they don’t have to be brewed and chilled. Premixed specialties like iced lattes and matcha lattes work particularly well on tap, making it easier for staff to serve these ready-to-drink and eliminating the need for a barista.

**Nitro has 4.8% penetration** on U.S. menus, a **130.6% four-year growth pop.**

**Nitro-Infused Beverages**

Adding nitrogen elevates the flavor profile of a beverage, emulates sweetness, and adds a creamy, luxurious mouthfeel without adding calories. Although nitro cold brew is fairly familiar, craft beers, milk (for cold brew or iced coffee), and tea can also be nitrogen-infused at the tap. Many coffee chains, in particular, have added nitro cold brew, including flavor enhancements like chocolate, vanilla, and mocha.

On tap appears on 2.0% of U.S. menus, representing four-year growth of 6.3%. It’s most frequently paired with:

- **31%** WINE
- **35%** BEER
- **7%** KOMBUCHA
- **6%** COCKTAILS

% of Mentions

Source: Datassential SNAP On Tap (2019)
Kombucha

This fermented, sweetened tea beverage has experienced significant growth in recent years—Datassential reports a four-year increase of 387.2% on U.S. menus—thanks to increased consumer interest in unique specialty beverages, as well as kombucha’s place in the health and wellness trend. Its tartness pairs well with flavors like ginger, apple, pineapple, and blueberry. Tap versions heighten kombucha’s fresh flavor and natural effervescence, making it a popular draft option. Many operations encourage customers to bring in their own drinking container, doubling down on the green benefits of not using bottles and cans.³

Draft Choice: Cocktails

As anyone who’s waited several minutes for a handmade cocktail to arrive, the craft cocktail boom had service consequences. Putting a cocktail on draft is basically an effective way to prebatch it. By allowing bartenders to serve multiple drinks in a fraction of the time, the result is faster service, more consistent quality, and bigger profits. Spirit-forward classics like the Manhattan and Negroni are easily tappable, but tap service is also great for specials and house signatures, which can be priced a little lower to encourage sales. Cocktails can be barrel-aged before being dispensed, servers can access the tap, and patrons can even be given a sample before having to commit.

Wine

Traditional wine service can be tricky, requiring special tools and trained staff to open bottles. Storage space and correct temperature are important, bottles are subject to breakage, and even with proper care, the final product can taste “off.” Wine on tap offers an appealing alternative to these operational issues. More wines are now being released in keg format, making wine on tap perfect for enhanced wine-by-the-glass sales, obviating the need to reseal individual bottles and keeping the product fresher. Carafes and quartinos can also be filled from the spout.

GO BIG WITH BITTER AND SOUR

Hot and spicy are so yesterday. Add a jolt of sophisticated bitterness and the acidity and funk of pickled and fermented ingredients to recipes for true on-trend flavor.
TREND 10: FLAVOR

Go Big with Bitter and Sour

These sophisticated flavors are on the rise as chefs and consumers alike increasingly appreciate and crave them in signature-level recipes.

BITTER AND TART BRING BALANCE AND IMPACT
While bitter and sour flavors may have kept our early human ancestors from consuming foods that were poisonous, unripe, or spoiled, today’s chefs understand the important role that bitterness and acidity play in creating balance and craveability in recipes.

Consumers are also getting on board, embracing both the flavor and the perceived health benefits of bitter and fermented foods.

Bitter is on 5.8% of U.S. menus, up 12.2% over the last four years.¹
Bitter is Better

Vegetables: Following in the path of kale and Brussels sprouts, a whole new class of bitter vegetables, from broccoli rabe to dandelion greens, collards, radicchio, and endive, are on the rise.

Coffee, Tea, and Chocolate: The naturally astringent bitterness of these ingredients in their naturally, unsweetened state is useful in both refreshing beverages and complexly flavored food.

Citrus Peel: The zest of lemons, limes, oranges, and grapefruit can bring depth to both savory and sweet foods; the juice of grapefruit is also naturally bitter.

Condiments: Mustard, horseradish, wasabi, Worcestershire, and many hot sauces pack a punch of bitterness as well as varying levels of spice, flavor, and heat.

Spices: Ginger, turmeric, peppercoms, caraway, celery seed, chiles, cilantro/coriander, and cinnamon all have bitter elements in their flavor profiles, which can be manipulated and controlled to create distinctive recipes.

Beer: The popularity of hoppy, IPA-style (India Pale Ale) beers, which can be strong and quite bitter, points to the important role that bitter flavors play in beverages.

Cocktail Bitters: Originally developed as patent medicines, bitters consist of various aromatic herbs, bark, roots, and/or fruit infused into neutral spirits, and are used as a flavoring agent in cocktails.

Spirits: As Americans become increasingly thirsty for all things bitter and low-alcohol, Italian aperitivo liqueurs and digestifs have become more popular. Campari and Aperol are two of the most well-known, but the number of imports is increasing.

Pickled is on 29.0% of menus, with an increase of 39.6% since 2015; fermented has 3.8% U.S. menu penetration, representing four-year growth of 28.8%.

Do you make your own fermented foods or beverages?

- Yes
- No

See results
Acidity can be important in recipes. Vinegar, citrus and other fruits (including tomato), wine, and buttermilk can all be used to bring flavor and balance to food through the introduction of acid, but the real news is in pickling and fermentation. Although both pickling and fermentation are among the oldest food preservation methods on the planet, there is growing interest in both as a preparation technique.

Pickling is a method of preserving fruits, vegetables, and other foods by soaking them in a brine or vinegar solution. According to Datassential, interest in farm-to-table cuisine and old-fashioned, artisanal skills has led a number of chefs to pickle their own vegetables at the height of the growing season.

It’s not uncommon to see a wall of jars with colorful pickled cucumbers, carrots, asparagus, beets, and more behind the counter or in the open kitchen. These housemade pickles can be used in on-trend dishes like street tacos with pickled red onions, a Southern fried chicken sandwich topped with housemade bread-and-butter chips, or a globally inspired rice bowl brightened with curry-scented pickled cauliflower. Pickles are also being merchandised on meat-and-cheese boards, and on their own as a snack or shareable.

Fermentation, on the other hand, is a chemical process of converting natural sugars in the presence of yeast and other micro-organisms. It is commonly used for alcoholic beverages such as cider, beer, and wine; for leavening dough; and for natural and specialty fermented products such as kombucha, kimchi, yogurt and kefir, and sauerkraut. Many of these products have a distinctive sour or even funky flavor that is much appreciated by adventurous food lovers. They’re also fuel for growing consumer interest in probiotics.

The popularity of fermentation today is seen on many menus that highlight global cuisines, each of which has its own iconic fermented specialties and condiments. These include Korean (kimchi, gochujang), Middle Eastern (yogurt, labneh), Indian (dosa, lassi), and Japanese (miso, dashi) cuisine. It taps into the growing appetite for probiotics (kombucha, kefir).

Fermented foods are in the Datassential Adoption Stage, with appearances at trendy restaurants and in specialty grocers.

Menuing Ideas

- Experiment with using coffee in food—use it in a rub, glaze, or marinade for meats, for instance, or add it to smoothies or shakes. It can also be used as a cooking medium for oatmeal, or to add depth to chili, beans, or stews.
- Remember that on-trend cooking techniques like smoking, searing, and charring introduce pleasantly bitter flavor elements.
- Add pickle brine to Bloody Mary mix, and garnish the finished drink with pickled vegetables on a toothpick skewer.
- Take a page from the Vietnamese banh mi and tuck quick-pickled carrots, onions, and radishes into sandwiches, as well as salads.
- Heighten flavor and umami in a variety of recipes with fermented Asian fish sauce.
- Use yogurt in a sauce to provide a gentle contrast for spicy foods.
CONCLUSION: AN EYE ON THE CONSUMER IS KEY

What’s it all mean? Find out why the current demographic landscape favors menu platforms and service features that put more decision-making in the hands of guests.
An Eye on the Consumer Is Key to Success

When evaluating any trend, it’s worth taking a step back to look at the marketplace as a whole. Not surprisingly, it starts with demographics.

Here are the four major cohorts and why it pays to pay attention to them:

The Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964, and aged 56–74 in 2020) are entering retirement age—although more are in the workforce at age 65 than any previous generation, according to The Pew Research Center.¹

While 32% of Boomers are pulling back on how much they eat out, they still have the largest spending power of any generation, and are seeking a balance between tasty and healthful foods as they age.²
**Generation X** (1965–1980; aged 40–55 in 2020) are bookended by the two significantly larger Baby Boom and Millennial cohorts, and while Pew characterizes them demographically as the “neglected middle child,” they are also in a high-earning, high-spending phase of life.¹

Having reached their highest income-earning years, Gen Xers are looking for authentic but comfortable foods with just a hint of adventure. Add to their comfort level by adding context to inception-level concepts.²

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The focus of so much recent marketing attention, **Millennials** (1981–1996; aged 24–39 in 2020) are settling into the career and family formation stages of life. Numbering 75 million strong and 25% of the population, Millennials (a.k.a. Gen Y) are moving through different life stages and their wants are no longer “one size fits all.”¹

Gen Yers with families are more likely to eat out without the kids because of the expense, while nearly one-third of the group overall agree that they are eating out more often than before. And when they do eat out, they seek an experience.²
Now there’s a new generation in town, and its name is Z. Defined by Pew as anyone born after 1996, **Generation Z** is the most racially/ethnically diverse and best-educated generation in American history. This post-Millennial cohort is the first generation of true digital natives and they have come of age in the post-2008 economy. The leading edge of Gen Z is just entering the workforce and they’re spending their own money for the first time.\(^1\)

An ethnically diverse and health-conscious group, the up-and-coming Gen X is socially conscious, known for their adventurous palate, and highly digitally engaged.\(^2\)

As different as these generations are, for the food and beverage industry they all converge around four unified demands.

- Value for the dollar in food and convenience
- Customization and uniqueness
- Inclusivity (including global foods, dietary options, and socially conducive ambiance)
- Sustainability, transparency, and ethical sourcing

Against this backdrop, the usual operational pressures and opportunities of labor shortages and rising costs, technological advances, and changes in supply chains still apply.

Finding success with the trends covered in this report depends on your individual customer profiles and your marketplace dynamics.\(^2\)
About Nestlé Professional

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