

U.S. FOODLINK

The bi-monthly newsletter for importers of U.S. foods

Vol. 17 No. 1



HEALTH, QUALITY AND RESTAURANT-LIKE FOODS Are the Trends to Watch in 2021

Consumers are more accustomed to eating at home now, and this change is being reflected in some of the trends that industry experts are forecasting for 2021. Homebound shoppers are keeping health in mind, eating less but choosing higher quality products, and continuing to explore alternatives to staples like meat and dairy. They're also looking to replicate restaurant meals to recreate the dining-out experience.

"COVID-19 has a massive impact on trend predictions heading into 2021, as consumers cook and eat at home more, turning to everyday meals and special treats to comfort and support their mental and physical well-being," said Denise Purcell, director of content for the Specialty Food Association.

Healthy eating is less of a trend and more of a cultural shift by now, but that just means it will have an even larger impact on food buying habits in the coming year. The International Food Information Council's 2020 Food & Health Survey found that 54% of all consumers cared more about the healthfulness of food and beverages in 2020 than they did in 2010, and they aren't looking back. Additionally, Archer Daniels Midland research discovered that 31% of consumers are purchasing more items tailored for their health, while 50% report a preference for foods and beverages that naturally contain beneficial ingredients.

One way this evolving desire will manifest is by blurring the line between the supplement and grocery aisles, according to Whole Foods Market. The grocer has already witnessed this trend throughout 2020 and expects it to accelerate in 2021. Some of the standout foods in this area will be superfoods, probiotics, broths and sauerkrauts. Additionally, suppliers are incorporating functional ingredients like vitamin C, mushrooms and adaptogens into everyday foods, which can foster a calm headspace and support the immune system.

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The Specialty Food Association (SFA) made a similar assessment, and its panel of expert “Trendspotters” expect products that can boost immunity and manage stress to be particularly in demand. Some of the top trends will be functional ghees to promote women’s health, restful sleep, and cardiovascular health; fermented honey sauce; and prebiotic-laced snacks for digestive health with reported immunity-boosting functionality. Additionally, existing popular ingredients, including mushroom powder and turmeric, will remain in the mainstream for the coming year.

Trendspotters also expect consumers to look for products with low or natural sugar claims as they try to find ways to treat themselves while maintaining their diets. Alternative sweeteners like monk fruit, keto-friendly sugars and coconut sugar are expected to gain ground in 2021, while the natural sugars in carrots, dates and peaches have already been spotted sweetening sauces and jams.

This emphasis on better-for-you foods can also be seen in another up-and-coming trend: “less but better” diet mantras. Mintel believes the origin of this attitude can be found in the product shortages and price hikes that many consumers experienced at the start of the pandemic, but it has now led to shoppers consuming less dairy, meat, poultry and other animal products — but choosing high-quality options when they do treat themselves.

These buyers are looking for animal products that are better-tasting, more nutritious or have ethical or environmental claims — or a combination of these factors — when they do make a purchase. Otherwise, they are replacing a significant portion of their protein intake with beans, legumes and other less expensive substitutions.

Interest in plant-based foods, particularly milk and meat alternatives, is continuing to grow as a result. The SFA believes this category can grow by 10% to 20% annually through 2024. Some of the product trends noted by



for-you vegan candy with an abundance of iron. The SFA noted that items like halva butter made from sesame paste and shelf-stable halva slices in flavors like toasted coconut and triple chocolate are already appearing on shelves.

Health is just one facet for determining food purchases, and Mintel believes price will be a major concern for many post-COVID-19 shoppers as well. The firm suggests that food and drink manufacturers and retailers can take efforts to make sustainable and responsible products affordable to cost-conscious consumers as a way to reach these shoppers. The SFA saw a similar trend, and noted that many consumers are seeking out companies owned by women and people of color, and with B Corps certification, sustainability-focused brands and ethical labor practices.

Price and the possibility of future lockdowns will together cause a rise in interest in foods that replicate the restaurant experience, according to the SFA. The organization expects to see more restaurant-quality condiments, cooking sauces, and cocktail mixes in shoppers’ pantries. Entertaining products will also ride this trend with examples including maple syrup with edible glitter, pretzel bread mix, a unicorn s’mores skillet kit, hot chocolate on a stick and edible spoons in sweet and savory flavors.

“At-home eating will be the name of the game in 2021,” said Melanie Zanoza Bartelme, global food analyst at Mintel and SFA Trendspotter. “We will see consumers looking to brighten and enliven the monotony of preparing so many meals in a row.”

The coming year holds a lot of promise for food manufacturers despite the lingering uncertainty of COVID-19. Companies that understand shoppers’ desires and offer products that will please them for the duration of the pandemic and beyond will have a golden opportunity to develop new customers and keep ahead of the competition.

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Trendspotters include meatless mixes for at-home cooking, dairy-free queso made with aquafaba, cashew cheesy sauce, plant-based tzatziki, oat milk chocolate and cactus-based tortilla chips. In particular, Trendspotter Chris Styler observed trends in “the rebranding of foods as ‘plant-based’ including beverages” and “more options for plant-based foods including plant-based protein to use for chili, soups, tomato sauce.”

The plant-based, low-sugar and healthy trends are converging with the emergence of halva into the limelight, marking the latest sesame-based product to hit the mainstream following on the past success of tahini and black sesame flavoring. Halva is positioning itself as a good-

Reopening Restaurants Can Bring Back Customers With Unique Experiences and High-Quality Food



The foodservice industry has been heavily altered by COVID-19, and restaurateurs will have an entirely different landscape waiting for them as the vaccine rolls out and more consumers return to in-house dining. This new normal will put a focus on safety, experiences and health.

One of the biggest impacts will be consumer tastes shifting away from “handmade” claims in favor of restaurant meals that tout safety and cleanliness. In fact, interest in the term has declined by nearly 36% over the past 12 months, according to *FSR Magazine*. With this in mind, descriptions like “bot-made” and “sanitation-verified” will appear on menus across the country.

However, this doesn't mean the personal touch will disappear – foodservice operators will need to come up with ways to keep the human angle despite losing the handmade label. Giving machinery names like “Sally the salad-making robot” or “Flippy the burger-flipper” will keep restaurants feeling warm and friendly even with less human involvement.

With safety still at the front of mind, shy consumers will need a good reason to return to their old dining habits. This void may be filled by experiential dining, often in the form of restaurants launching limited-edition or experimental dishes to draw shoppers in, according to Menufy. Many restaurants will be looking for new and interesting ingredients to complement their existing menus as a way to drive traffic back to pre-COVID levels, and manufacturers will be well-positioned to help them.

Additionally, luxury dining experiences can help foodservice operators wow their customers. High-end ingredients, artful presentations and expensive drinks can lend an air of exclusivity to consumers' first night out in months, making their first post-pandemic experience a truly memorable one.

These menu shifts don't have to be entirely new ideas – restaurants and suppliers can work together to freshen up menus without completely revamping their supply chains. For instance, restaurants known for their steak could use similar ingredients in a high-end steak and egg breakfast sandwich, adding an air of the unique while making the most of ingredients they're already comfortable sourcing.

Finally, consumers looking to dine out will be just as health conscious as they are when they eat in. The same trends dominating supermarket shelves, including plant-based substitutes and superfoods, will find a good home on restaurant menus. Recovering from the pandemic will be a challenging process, but restaurants that think ahead and listen to what their customers want will be able to thrive in the new environment.



Featured U.S. Midwest & Northeast State Profiles





Small Batch Organics, LLC

Manchester Center, Vermont

Small Batch Organics is an artisanal healthy snack and granola company located in Vermont. At Small Batch Organics, we produce chocolate covered granola bark and granola cereal. All of our products are gluten free, certified organic and certified kosher. At Small Batch Organics, we pride ourselves in ingredient transparency and try when possible to buy our ingredients directly from farms and artisanal producers.

Granola bark is available in 2 oz. snack size or 8 oz. stand up pouch. Granola is available in a 12 oz stand up pouch. For more information and product details visit: smallbatchgranola.com



Mrs. Pruitt's Gourmet CHA CHA

Detroit, Michigan

Fall Harvest Urban Farms, LLC was founded in 2010. The company launched their regional brand, Mrs. Pruitt's Gourmet CHA CHA in 2014; a family recipe dating back to the early 1830's. CHA CHA is a condiment, relish, sauce – an authentic southern cuisine that has deeply rooted traditions of specific U.S. Southern regions. The main ingredients include cabbage, green tomatoes and Mrs. Pruitt's blend of herbs and spices. A burst of unforgettable, unique, delightful pickled, apple cider vinegar taste that comes in Mild, Hot, Motor City Heat, Turbo Heat and Super Charge flavors. A perfect addition to enhance and pump up the flavor to any meal. Awesome on hamburgers, hot dogs, veggie burgers, bratwurst, polish and Italian sausages, tacos, burritos, pulled pork, chicken, seafood, added to chicken salad, potato salad, tuna salad, pastas, meatloaf, on eggs with breakfast, rice and beans, on vegetables, micro-greens, salads, as a chip dip or with your favorite dish.

This Michigan Supplier is on a mission to let the world know about Mrs. Pruitt's Gourmet CHA CHA. A high-quality value-added product, gourmet filled, gluten free and vegan. High in vitamins A and C and low in sodium.

New products launched soon Mrs. Pruitt's Gourmet CHA CHA Seasoning (a blend of CHA CHA dehydrated vegetables) and our Mrs. Pruitt's Gourmet CHA CHA Bar-B-Cue Sauce. You don't want to miss this, a fancy food with a twist. Shelf stable for 12 month shelf life. mrspruittschacha.com



Vermont Tortilla Company

Shelbourne, Vermont

At the Vermont Tortilla Company, we celebrate the Mesoamerican heritage of the original tortilla, and we are proud to share the taste of tradition with you.

Every batch begins with a blend of locally sourced, certified organic corn, pure water and food-grade lime, also known as cal. This mixture is cooked patiently over a steady flame, then carefully washed, hulled and cooled. Nixtamalization unlocks the bioavailability of corn's essential nutrients, and also releases each kernel's rich, nutty aroma and buttery sweet flavor. Once nixtamalized, our organic corn is ground using natural volcanic stones to make masa, the soft golden dough from which our flavor-packed, uniquely pliable tortillas are born.

Every batch of Vermont Tortilla Company tortillas is bursting with authentic taste, alluring texture and clean, organic ingredients. But the secret to our recipe is rooted in our hardworking team and rich local ecosystem. We are dedicated to supporting our community by sourcing certified organic, sun-ripened corn from local farms; and by making mindful, environmentally responsible choices in our supply chain and production practices. vtortillaco.com



Crunchmaster

Loves Park, Illinois

The deliciously baked snack cracker consumers crave. Crunchmaster crackers pair perfectly with the active lifestyles of your consumers. They're packed with wholesome ingredients, free from gluten, artificial colors and flavors and many flavors are free of common allergens like eggs and dairy. Crunchmaster crackers are one of the top-selling brands of gluten-free crackers in North America.

Give your consumers the simple, satisfying snacks they're craving – with over 15 varieties to choose from, including Grain-Free! Crunchmaster.com

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Wise Mouth Inc.

North Attleboro, Massachusetts

Wise Mouth Tea is a Massachusetts-based company established in 2016. After becoming a U.S. teacher, founder Lei Nichols noticed the unhealthy drinks her students were consuming and decided to do something about it. Today, Wise Mouth tea hopes to bring the benefits of ancient herbal remedies to the world.

Products: Wise Mouth has two lines of seven hand-brewed, all-natural, ready-to-drink glass bottled teas. Both recipes are rooted in eastern ancient herbal traditions, with an added American twist. They are hand-brewed with fresh fruits, fresh ginger and herbs, real tea leaves, and flowers. All teas are 100% natural, with no concentrates, additives, preservatives, or any artificial ingredients.

The original line is sweetened with crystallized sugarcane and pure American honey. The new line is sweetened with organic monk fruit and the same honey. All sweeteners used in Wise Mouth teas are widely used in traditional herbal medicine. Each tea has different health benefits to suit a range of needs with an assortment of unique, delicious flavors.

All the teas can be served hot or iced. wisemouthtea.com



Herr Foods, Inc.

Nottingham, Pennsylvania

Herr's line of export products is based on our best-selling snack foods and is complimented by salsas, dips and other unique products specially selected for export success. Herr's is committed to service and is dedicated to providing the flexibility to meet distributors' needs. Herr's has experienced over 65 years of success in the US market and continually introduces innovative products and packaging to satisfy ever-changing appetites and tastes. Our export line of quality snacks consists of more than 40 items including potato chips, tortilla chips and cheese curls. Herr's is owned and operated by the Herr family. We remain true to the founding principles, which have guaranteed satisfaction to our customers year after year. Herr's snacks are distributed in 12 states throughout the Northeast/Mid-Atlantic region through company owned routes and nationally by way of independent distributors and National Retailers. Internationally we export to 50 countries. herrs.com



Tanuk Inc.

Newton Highlands, Massachusetts

Meal Mantra is a line of authentic, all-natural dips, chutneys and curry simmer sauces, crafted in small batches with our heirloom family recipes from the creators of Tandoori Cuisine and simmered to perfection. Indian cuisine is renowned for its healthy options and flavors that elevate many vegetables, and even the humble legume, to an exalted gourmet experience.

Anu, Co-Founder of Meal Mantra, learned to appreciate the wonderful art of cooking at an early age when she would follow her grandfather Kundan Lal Gujral, (inventor of the Tandoori Cuisine) into the kitchens of the legendary Moti Mahal restaurant in India and lose track of time in the aromas, tastes and textures of food.

All-natural ingredients | Clean label | Gluten Free | No fillers, stabilizers or gums | Award-winning century-old, heirloom family recipes | Delectable taste | Quick, easy to do, flavorful sauces | Proudly crafted in the USA mealmantra.com



Godshall's Quality Meats

Telford, PA

Smokehouse Gold offers a wide variety of delicacies from an array of proteins. The company's primary focus is healthier recipes and turkey protein, including turkey bacon, sold across the U.S., that is notable for achieving 80% less fat than pork bacon (per USDA data), with 6 grams of protein per slice and the robust flavor of a real wood smokehouse.

Bacon is available in Wood Smoked Traditional recipe, Uncured All-Natural, and Maple Flavored. In addition, Smokehouse Gold offers Beef Bacon, dinner sized and mini sausages, and snack sticks, jerkies, and Turkey Bites, a softer, flavorful twist on traditional jerky recipes with no nitrites or nitrates and real all-natural flavors like Mango Sriracha, Teriyaki Pineapple, and Korean BBQ. We also offer Halal products including breakfast slices, sausages, pastramis and snacks.

Our three locations in Pennsylvania produce the finest quality meats, employing 4000 state of the art solar panels, water recycling and zero-landfill programs. Our modern, clean production facilities are SQF level 3 Certified and SQF Edition 8 certified for Food Safety and Quality. godshalls.com

For more information about these or other Featured Products please email: FoodLink@foodexport.org.

news briefs

The popularity of online grocery shopping will remain beyond the pandemic. A survey from Oracle Grocery Retail found 53% of respondents shopped online for groceries during the pandemic, with 93% of those who did shop online saying they plan to continue this habit after the pandemic ends.

A majority of consumers, 66%, say they keep more snacks stocked at home than before the coronavirus outbreak. More than half of shoppers, 54%, are planning to stock up on essentials, according to Frito-Lay's U.S. Snack Index survey. Salty snacks are the No. 5 category consumers are looking to stash away, reported *Convenience Store News*.

Global cuisines seen traveling to consumer plates in the coming year. One trend to look out for in 2021 is the rise of global cuisines. With consumers mostly stuck at home, many foodies will look to get their travel fix at home through international flavors, reported *The Food Institute*.

New Korean flavors are popping up throughout the U.S. Korean foods' surge in popularity is exemplified by the growth of KPOP Foods, a company that specializes in Asian sauces. KPOP closed its first equity round this year, raising \$1 million, and the company's products are now sold in 500 grocery stores, reported *Forbes*.

Consumers' top at-home plant-based choices are dairy alternatives. When ordering from restaurants it's meat alternatives, according to a survey from NPD Group. About 93% of meals or snacks that include milk alternatives are consumed at home and 7% are at/from a restaurant or foodservice outlet.



Of the consumers shopping more, over one-third, 38%, attribute their increased trips to changes in their daily routine due to COVID-19 and/or their choice to shop for groceries at a smaller store, reported *Convenience Store News*.

Tofurky sales are up 32% in 2020. This represents its best Thanksgiving bump since 2017, according to Nielsen data. While the company is now 40 years old, it remains smaller than other players in the plant-based meat products category and hopes to move from the produce section to more heavily trafficked grocery departments.

Sales of packaged food are flowing away from big cities as the pandemic drives consumers from the city to the suburbs. Consumer goods industry revenue has grown by about \$85 billion, or 12%, from a year earlier, but more of this spending is coming from suburban and rural regions, Nielsen data showed. The firm's data showed consumers are also buying more at smaller grocers and drugstores, reported *Bloomberg*.

Nearly a quarter of the U.S. population is trying new plant-based meat alternatives. Since the pandemic, buying spree sales of plant-based foods are up 35%, according to a study from Herbalife Nutrition. More Americans who do not define themselves as vegan/plant-based are trying the new meatless offerings entering the market, reported *The Beet*.

Retail coffee sales rose about 10% as of November in 2020. This is compared with a 2% sales increase in many recent years, according to data provided by coffee companies. People are brewing coffee at home again during the COVID-19 pandemic, and a fierce sales battle has emerged between cafes, coffee brands and makers of home-brewing machines for consumer dollars, reported *Wall Street Journal*.



When it comes to meat analogues, restaurants and other foodservice outlets have the largest share of eating occasions at 78% while at home represents 22%.

More than half of consumers, 52%, say they are shopping at convenience stores less during the pandemic. In comparison, only 14% are shopping more.

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