

Healthy Food Trends Drive Sales

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Focus on Consumption



Consumers are influenced by new food trends. Some of the most popular food trends that help drive sales are those that offer health benefits.

From culinary chefs to foodservice and retail deli departments, everyone is experimenting with a mix of new flavors. Whether it's mixing vegetables into desserts, using avocados as a fat replacement, or replacing a portion of meat with mushrooms, these trends add produce to the recipe in an easy and convenient way. It's a win-win for consumers and retailers. Consumers get the added benefit of extra nutrients and flavor; retailers benefit by increasing sales across multiple departments.

The Difference between a Fad and a Trend

Fads are foods that have rapid growth followed by a steep decline. Our culture has an affinity

for adopting and dropping culinary fads with regularity. It's been happening for decades. From gelatin molds in the '20s, TV dinners in the '50s, fondues in the '70s, to potstickers in the '90s, the next fad is just around the corner. For those developing food items that are chasing a fad, the outcome may be short lived. Timing is everything with faulty timing being expensive.

Conversely, long-term trend items have smooth, steady increases that are sustainable. Food trends tend to begin with culinary chefs, become popular in foodservice, are replicated and offered at retail, and end with the home cook. Trends typically become part of the eating culture and drive sales growth for a decade or more. Extra virgin olive oil is an example of a trend. In the late '70s and '80s it was the "talked about" oil. It trickled down in the '90s. Now, it has become a staple item and part of our culture.

Food fads and trends have gained popularity in the past with the support of food media. The rising fame of a product typically started with a local paper covering the food topic with interest spreading by word of mouth. Today, social media helps food fads and trends escalate quickly. Social media helped drive the popularity of the Cronut instantly. The 21st-century food media intensifies the speed, cycle and volume of the fad or trend's impact.

An Emerging Trend for 2015 and Beyond

Eighty-three percent of the general population eats ground beef at least once a month, which translates to almost \$8.4 billion in retail sales. Many consumers enjoy eating red meat, but they want to consume less of it in an effort to eat healthier. To reduce their red meat intake, consumers are opting for meat-free days such as "Meatless Mondays" in addition to using recipes that call for red meat less often. For decades consumers had only two options: eat meat or eat vegetarian meals.

An interesting case study, which helps resolve the issue of consuming less red meat, but not giving it up entirely, is The Blend. The Blend is not a specific product – it is a recipe concept that can be modified and utilized to offer consumers a healthy alternative to classic meals. The Blend, mixing finely chopped mushrooms to blend seamlessly with ground meat, adds a serving of produce and reduces calories, cholesterol, fats and sodium. Consumers can enjoy their iconic food such as burgers, meatloaf and tacos, and determine the percentage of meat and mushrooms they want to consume. And with every serving of meat, the consumer is getting a serving of produce, too. In fact, many consumers claim they prefer The Blend to traditional versions because of the umami the mushrooms add to the dish.

The Blend was developed by the Mushroom Council, a Fusion client. The Blend is gaining traction with food distributors, foodservice, schools, and retail. US Foods, a leading distributor servicing restaurants and other industries, is giving the burger a makeover with the introduction of the Harvest Value Savory Burger with one-third mushrooms and 40 percent less fat. In foodservice, mushrooms are adding great flavor and value by extending the meat. Pizza Hut introduced a mushroom blended meatball to their pizza menu; Applebee's introduced their new mushroom "Smash" burger, which is ground beef mixed with Portobello and white mushrooms; and mushroom blend burgers are making several foodservice trend lists including Virtual Strategy and Burger Business. Additionally, mushrooms are being



blended to makeover school meals. The mushroom Blend adds 1/8 cup of vegetables to every lunch meal, and kids like the taste.

The Blend at Retail

The retail deli, foodservice and meat departments can all offer versions of The Blend as a healthy, value-added product offering to their customers. Moreover, consumers can easily prepare The Blend recipes at home. The Blend meets all the criteria for a food trend: it's easy to buy, make and replicate and it relates to the familiarity of mushrooms and meat. Consumers want to cut back on red meat, but they don't want to sacrifice taste. Consumers gain nutrition and value without losing taste by blending mushrooms with meat.

Unique pairings of vegetables and fruits keep culinary novices and experts testing their art. Pastry chefs have used eggplant in place of apples and pears in pies and cobblers, and in chocolate combinations. Avocados are used to add richness to ice cream and mousse; and beets and black beans make brownies and cakes velvety and rich. From Corn Crème Brulee to Tomato Sorbet, the unique combinations add flavor and a serving of produce. Creative new methods of eating can boost nutrition, flavor and sales. Retailers can drive sales by offering The Blend and other healthy food options.

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