



Limited-Service, Unlimited Possibilities

New Y-Pulse Study Focuses on Gen Z Preferences



July 22, 2015 — Leading foodservice professionals shared their experiences and opinions about the eating habits and preferences of Gen Z consumers in a recent Y-Pulse survey and leadership discussion. The survey delved into the similarities and differences between elementary, middle, and high school students when it comes to what they like to eat and where they enjoy eating away from home.

When asked about up-and-coming menu items that elementary, middle, and high school aged youngsters are likely to be enjoying in the year to come, there were several categories common to all age groups:

- Fruit and veggie smoothies
- Mexican foods
- Fresh, fast, and made from scratch
- More choices

Foods that are made to order or prepared where young customers can see the production are particularly appealing. Handheld foods for on-the-go eating appeal to kids of all ages; it is just the size and composition of the handheld items that evolves. Larger portion sizes appeal to kids as they grow up. For teenagers, larger size portions to fuel those involved in sports and athletic activities are particularly in demand.

School foodservice professionals reported that elementary school age children consider school one of their favorite places to eat and also consider home and fast food restaurants among their favorites. They also reported that middle school tweens and teens like fast food, but they begin to favor casual dining and convenience stores over meals at home or at school, whereas high school teens enjoy more meals away from home. They still like fast food, but less so. They favor fast casual restaurants like Panera and Chipotle, casual dining restaurants, and convenience stores.

“We were heartened to see that more than half of our professionals said tweens and teens have a greater understanding of nutrition than the previous year,” says Sharon Olson, executive director of Y-Pulse. “As kids grow up their sense of culinary adventure increases with more interest in ethnic foods, fresh, and local offerings.”

Children of all ages like pizza, chicken, sandwiches, salads, and fruit. What emerged from the survey were up-and-coming items for children in different age groups. Younger kids tend to like simpler foods rather than combinations. As youngsters grow into middle school their tastes become more diverse to include more flavors and combinations including many ethnic foods. High school teens’ eating habits are beginning to look very similar to college students and young adults as they become more conscious of food, nutrition, and ethical values associated with food production and delivery. Their experiences and interests with ethnic foods continue to grow.