

5 culinary trends expected to dominate college campus dining

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Five food trends, ranging from ethical dining to multicultural menus, are expected to dominate menu development on college campus dining operations in the next few years, according to a study released by Y-Pulse, Chicago.

Y-Pulse explored the dining expectations, attitudes and tendencies of more than 1,000 consumers between the ages of 18-34 years through multiple comprehensive consumer studies.

“We found young consumers are using a sophisticated set of criteria involving health, nutrition, ethical concerns and culinary adventure when making dining out decisions,” says Sharon Olson, executive director. “These trends are most likely to have a great impact on college campus dining in the coming years, if not months.”

[Here are the five culinary trends expected to make a big impact on college foodservice operations:](#)

Replenishing with purpose

Young consumers are very interested in the functional aspect of foods that not only satisfy their hunger, but also pack a nutritional punch. In fact, **73%** of overall consumers surveyed said they [enjoyed eating superfoods that serve specific functional purposes](#). Superfoods, such as dried fruits, nuts and seeds, can easily be integrated into food and beverage concepts. Young consumers are also extremely responsive to organic foods. For instance, **67%** of consumers (ages 18-34) say that eating organic makes them feel better, and **55%** of them are willing to pay more for organic menu items.

Beyond dietary restrictions

Young consumers (ages 18-34) are no longer interested in highly regimented diets. They would like to simply [limit certain ingredients in dishes rather than cut them out completely](#). By taking a more holistic framework to health, young consumers are receptive to alternative food options. For example, younger consumers admire meat-free lifestyles, but are not interested in adopting vegetarian or vegan lifestyles. Young consumers (ages 18-34) say they admire vegetarian (**60%**) and vegan (**56%**) lifestyles, but also overwhelmingly love meat (**82%**). Only **42%** of overall consumers said they enjoy eating meat substitutes. It's likely that college campus dining will need to use customization formats to introduce menu items that appeal to those with dietary restrictions, as well as the broader consumer that believes in quality ingredients, but not restrictive diets.

Ethical concerns

Today's young consumers between ages 18-34 are more aware about ethical issues surrounding food sourcing and production than older generations. Case in point: **64%** of younger consumers surveyed said there were not enough ethically-produced snacks available, and **67%** of them would pay more for ethically-produced snacks. Nearly **70%** of young consumers surveyed said they care about ordering protein that is sustainably raised or caught. With **63%** of consumers stating that they consider themselves an advocate for responsibly produced foods, menu ingredient communication is the perfect starting point for campus foodservice operations to open a dialogue about their ethical practices and efforts.

Healthful without compromise

Today's young consumers want to eat healthy, but do not believe in compromising on taste. That's why **86%** of young consumers between 18-34 years expect healthy food to taste delicious too. They also want healthy eating to be easy, convenient and work around their on-the-go lifestyle. And, **81%** of young consumers said they shouldn't have to try too hard to eat healthy, while **76%** of them said that they are likely to buy raw fruits and vegetables to eat on-the-go. With **66%** of consumers saying they don't mind paying extra for a snack if it's a healthy option, the momentum for healthy but delicious grab-and-go foods seems unstoppable.

The quest for world flavors

The culinary trend of seeking international flavors is linked to **young consumers' interest in discovering vibrant spices and bold flavors.** Besides wanting to sample authentic foods that link them to travel, **young consumers are also interested in discovering new ways to eat healthy and sustainable foods.** Another great pull toward seeking new world flavors is to explore regional cuisine linked to their own ancestry or new immigrant populations. Authenticity is crucial, with **79%** of consumers agreeing that a restaurant's ethnic food should be authentic. From Latin American ingredients to Middle Eastern spices, colleges and universities have a unique opportunity in teaching students about world dynamics by means of food exploration.