

## Cooking Up a Storm: Gen Alpha Kids Have Become Tiny Tastemakers

SEAN CURRY | MAY 23, 2024



**The next key demographic driving trends in the food industry: your kids.**

**A recent Y-Pulse Youth Lifestyle Monitor survey (as reported by Progressive Grocer) revealed some surprising insights about who's doing an increasing amount of cooking at home. It's not mom, or dad, or multigenerational extended family members – it's kids.**

**Of Generation Alpha members surveyed (children ages 8-18), 56% say they enjoy cooking for the family, while 58% say they like to cook for themselves. And they're not just opening the family cookbook, either: 56% say they watch food content on the Food Network and social media, while 46% say they've tried to cook some of the meals they saw on those shows and channels for themselves.**

“Children want a voice in the food decisions happening in their own homes,” said John Adler, head chef and SVP of physical product at Blue Apron. “It’s important that brands take this into account not only in product and packaging, but at a more strategic level, in terms of creative messaging and positioning.”

Kitchen curiosity is a natural part of childhood, said Felicity Curin, founder of Little Kitchen Academy. “Children are curious by nature and they want to try new things,” she said.

Kids “learn practical life skills through cooking and meal preparation. It helps to build their independence and a sense of self confidence and pride, and can instill lifelong nutritional habits.”

## What's Driving Interest

Dr. Ernest Baskin, associate professor of food, pharma and healthcare at St. Joseph's University, said the larger context is important when it comes to Gen Alpha's interest in cooking. "A large cross-section (not just young people) of the population learned how to cook during the pandemic when restaurant spending went down, grocery spending went up, and people were stuck around the house."

And, more so than Zoom calls or virtual playdates, kids' cooking habits have continued to be helpful in recent months.

"For those in their formative years, the skills they picked up are likely to stick around," Baskin said. "Many realized that the new skills they learned had served them well and continue to use them."

Gen Alpha certainly isn't the first age cohort to have a noticeable effect on the food industry.

"We saw a huge shift when Millennials began focusing on health and sustainability, which led to the growth of the organic and natural foods market," said Petra Khan, senior strategist at ICUC. "Cooking shows were one of the earliest types of TV programming, and have long been inspiring people to learn new cooking skills. With short form content, new ways of cooking can be learned in less than 2 minutes – particularly appealing to the younger generation."

## Opportunities for Food Companies

Smart brands can seize on this growing trend by gearing their products for little home chefs cooking alongside their parents.

"There is opportunity to capitalize on this shift by reinforcing the idea of food as a way to help families stay connected," Adler said. "There is room for growth here in creating recipes with specific callouts for child-friendly preparation steps."

"The challenge will be in positioning themselves as evolving with their audience, knowing full well that the ultimate decision-makers will continue to be their parents."

Companies can take a page from traditional TV and consider ways to create more episodic content, too, according to Khan. "Storytelling will help your content stand out and keep your followers engaged," Khan noted. "For example, creating a series of short, thematic videos that guide young chefs through increasingly complex recipes can build anticipation and loyalty."

"As a brand we are seeing younger people come to the kitchen more and more," says Binuka De Silva, founder of Nomad Blends. "We have been pivoting our marketing towards younger people because they are the ones trying new things in the kitchen."

In the end, of course, it's most important to realize this exciting new passion for what it is: children learning, growing, and discovering the world around them. As noted by Curin, of Little Kitchen Academy, "For those feeling a bit short on time, engaging your children in the process can really help out. Kids can contribute—and want to."