

Why do consumers dine out?

March 24, 2015 — When deciding where to eat out, it is no surprise that “good food” is the number one driver when choosing a restaurant; however, there are four other drivers that consumers take into account that are unrelated to food, according to a recent study by the Culinary Visions Panel. The other top factors include good service, convenient location, family appeal and the restaurant’s reputation. This exclusive research study explored the dining values and attitudes of more than 1,200 consumers.

Consumers have a higher opinion of the food from restaurants that promote positive business practices and responsible ingredient sourcing. Approximately half of survey respondents said they believe food will be fresher, healthier and taste better from establishments promoting positive business practices and responsible ingredient sourcing.

Those restaurants known to treat employees well appeal to 83% of consumers, including 87% of women and 86% of Millennials. Also, 86% of families with four or more members are more likely to patronize these restaurants.

In terms of menu items, most respondents say that premium ingredient brands signify that food is high quality, including 76% of all survey participants, 84% of Millennials and 84% of families with four or more members.

“Consumers often have many choices when they dine out, and successful foodservice operators know that food and service are of paramount importance. Yet, it is interesting to know that today’s restaurant consumers are influenced by many other factors when they dine out. The difference between success and indifference can come when consumers understand and appreciate establishments that treat their employees well and contribute to the community,” said Sharon Olson, executive director of Culinary Visions Panel.

Patrons of fast-casual restaurants also have higher expectations than those dining at quick-service chains, with 90% choosing restaurants known for treating employees well. Of these diners, 83% consider menu items with premium ingredient brands to be higher quality and 82% are more likely to patronize restaurants that support causes they believe in. Fast casual patrons also tend to order menu items that are organic or list ingredient origins. These consumers consider themselves advocates for responsibly-produced foods and are more likely to follow local chefs and restaurants that support their community.

Millennials are more likely than other generations to choose more socially- and environmentally-responsible dining establishments, with 78% patronizing restaurants that support causes they believe in; preferring to order sustainably raised or caught protein and choosing menu items that list the origin of ingredients. These younger consumers also are more likely to seek out restaurants that serve responsibly-produced food and will advocate for this. In addition, 72% of Millennials prefer to order organic menu items and 71% will follow local chefs and restaurants that support their community.

While women are more likely to choose a restaurant that appeals to their family or offers healthy dishes, men and Millennials report they would rather eat at a place that offers indulgent food. Those age 50 and up highly value good food, decent service and a convenient location.

Household size also impacts dining out values and information sourcing. While two-member households primarily value good food and service, families with three or more members are more likely to choose a restaurant with indulgent food. Larger households also are more apt to select restaurants with trusted reputations, and these consumers will often consult online reviews, websites, food writers/bloggers and social media sites for more insight.