

Foodservice Forecast: Foods, Flavors and Concepts

Part 2 in Fare's look at the fuzzy, far-off future of foodservice at retail

It's the time of year when experts and writers begin crafting their predictions for next year's food trends. What will be 2013's equivalent of the cupcake craze? What's the food truck of the future?

While such prognostications are fun, we wanted to burrow a little further into the fuzzy recesses of the future, where we may not quite know how consumer sentiment will manifest itself in a tangible trend, but where you might be able to start crafting your own trends based on those consumer emotions.

Following is Part 2 of our forecast, which focuses on foods, flavors and brand concepts. You can find Part 1, "The Consumer Experience," [here](#).

While those on the cutting edge of food trends—chef-driven restaurants, gourmet food purveyors—are watching Peruvian cuisine, Scandinavian fare and fennel pollen, our group of experts shared some more mainstream trends worth exploring.

Vend-o-Magic. Vending machines popped up in Fare's "Thirty Great Ideas" feature earlier this year with the surfacing of 24-hour cupcake ATMs in Los Angeles, the Smart Butcher meat vending machine in Alabama and Kroger's robotic c-store in Ohio. The strength of vending lies in its convenience, but the potential will come from delivering freshness. Some European concepts are already making quality a priority, says Karen Malody, principal of Seattle-based consultancy Culinary Options.

"You can choose a food and, within the cubicle in which it is stored, microwave-convection technology will heat it within seconds, and off you go," says Malody. "These will replace grab-and-go environments where you still have to go somewhere to pay someone or stand in a line. The food will be of excellent quality and it is refreshed and refilled constantly from behind the scenes."

Revised Authenticity. While claims of authenticity are becoming a bit overused in food culture, The Hartman Group, Bellevue, Wash., is seeing a countertrend combining tradition with modern-day familiarity. "From a mainstream perspective, this looks like good old Hellmann's mayonnaise combined with the wonderfully sweet and spicy Korean gochujang sauce," says Melissa Abbott, senior director of culinary insights. Seattle's Marination Mobile sells a packaged version called Nama sauce.

On the periphery, says Abbott, "revised authenticity" can be found in the soda fountains popping up in major cities, such as San Francisco's Ice Cream bar. These spots combine well-researched old-school syrups and tinctures with modern flavor combinations.

Fast Casual Gets Better. The fast-casual segment has shifted the industry in a revolutionary way, but Aaron Noveshen, founder and president of The Culinary Edge, San Francisco, believes the revolution isn't over yet. He believes fast casual's next evolution will emphasize the atmosphere, calling it "polished fast casual."

Inside Lemonade, Los Angeles "As things continue to segment and micro-segment, are Chipotle and Noodles & Company really the quality level that the next-level consumer is seeking?" he asks. He points to early "polished fast casual" leaders Lemonade, a self-described fast-casual cafeteria, and Mendocino Farms sandwich market, both with locations in Los Angeles. Decor is a big differentiator as newer concepts migrate away from "sterile, cookie-cutter" design, Noveshen says. They are chef-driven, "yet still designed to scale. The burger segment has seen a bit of it, but it will pass into other spaces."

If you're following a trend to see when might be a good time to latch on, good luck. Food trends may be moving from fringe to mainstream faster these days, but they're not necessarily traveling in one direction, says Rachel Tracy, managing director of the Culinary Visions Panel, Chicago.

"Trends won't follow the predicted patterns of the past," she says. "Look at the influence that street markets in Asia and Latin America have had on the U.S."