

MARKETING PERSPECTIVE

\$14.95

Conference Watch



By
Sharon Olson
Executive Director
CULINARY VISIONS
PANEL
CHICAGO, IL

This year's food industry conferences have offered a captivating view of the trends. The year began with the Winter Fancy Food Show followed by Catersource, Natural Product Expo and the National Restaurant Association. To set the stage for the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association, here is a taste of the trends from the first quarter of this year.

CUISINE SPOTLIGHT

Asian and Mediterranean flavors are taking center stage. As consumers are expanding their palates to include more exotic and interesting flavor profiles,

Korea has become the new culinary star of Asia. Korean flavors were in abundance including kimchi, Korean marinades and rubs and convenience grab-and-go.

Importers say Mediterranean is one the most influential emerging cuisines and consumers agree. Italian has become a familiar favorite in American homes and restaurants and other regions of the Mediterranean continue to grow in familiarity and popularity. Look for flavors from the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa to continue developing.

Also emerging are foods from the Philippines. The combination of Malaysian, Chinese, Indian and Spanish influences marry the familiar with the exotic. This tamer version of Asian food is gathering a following.

THE FLAVOR BUZZ

Balsamic: This aged vinegar made its way far beyond the expected in product offerings including jelly, marinades and gelato.

Spicy Ketchup: This mainstream condiment has gone from old to new thanks to imported and artisan ketchup variations.

The New Chip: Hummus-based and bean-based chips are becoming appealing alternatives to the "traditional potato chip" in the salty snack category. Kale chips for kids are finding their way into the trendy kids' lunch bags for ultimate trading power at school lunch.

Hummus: This Mediterranean favorite branched out to include black bean, edamame, and soy-based hummus.

Smoked: Imaginative smoking techniques added flavor interest to meats, cheeses and even ice cream.

Conscious Comfort Food: New varieties of comfort food with a conscience were satisfying and delicious. Some examples are a mac-and-cheese with a secret jolt of squash to add nutrients or an edamame guacamole that packed a big flavor punch.

The Hunt For Truffles: Known by the French as "the diamond of the kitchen," truffles made their way into cheeses, deli meats, spreads and an unexpected jar of honey.

A Pinch of Salt: Although reducing sodium is still a high

priority for convenience-food manufacturers, salt is the "it" ingredient for specialty food consumers. In fact, in a recent Culinary Visions Panel survey, 67 percent of consumers identified themselves as self-described salt lovers.

More companies offered specialty salts than ever before, with many touting the provenance of their salt. New offerings included "dessert" salts such as citron, ginger and vanilla.

Coveted Cheeses: According to a recent U.K. study, cheese is No. 1 on the list of the world's most frequently stolen foods. Approximately 3 percent of the world's supply goes missing every year from theft, and it's clear there is no

decline of interest in this hot commodity. Categories expected to be trendsetters in 2012 are American sheep's milk cheeses, Swiss cheese, Bavarian cheeses and Belgian cheeses.

Ancient Grains: The appeal of ancient grains continues to grow, fueled by market forces that have cre-

ated a perfect storm for their growing popularity — the demand for whole grains, plant-based entrées and gluten-free options. Quinoa is the current star with amaranth, buckwheat, kamut, millet, and new to the line-up, freekeh, all competing for attention.

The Allure of Umami: The savory satisfying allure of umami was seen in a wide range of foods. In addition to appealing to the trained palates of chefs, umami is gaining an appeal with consumer foodies. In the new Culinary Visions Panel flavor study, 61 percent of consumer foodies listed it among their top three flavors.

Food Democracy: The idea of widely available, good healthful food at a reasonable price is becoming more of a reality as caterers and restaurateurs alike take their food to the street. Mobile catering has become a chic new segment of the food industry giving consumers a chance to try new foods that might not otherwise be available. Whole-some, quality ingredients are used in a way that is delicious for the consumer and cost effective for the operator.

IMPLICATIONS

Small Continues to be Big News — Small batches, handcrafted foods and boutique flavors continue to captivate retailers and consumers looking for the secret find.

The Everyday Gourmet — Consumers enjoy treating themselves to a gourmet experience, and offering products that enable them to create the experience on demand is destined for success.

Creating An Experience — Capitalize on creating a memorable experience with food; whether it's a flavor that challenges, transports or comforts, specialty foods have a role in captivating today's consumer. Cookbooks packaged with music that fits the mood of the food are the classic example. **DB**

This year's food industry conferences
have offered a captivating view of the
trends. Here is a taste of the trends
from the first quarter of this year.

The Culinary Visions Panel has been serving up insight and ideas from food professionals and consumer foodies since 2002. Full reports of from each of the shows in this report can be found on the Culinary Visions Panel website www.culinaryvisions.org.