

FoodManagement

Foodies' Favorite Flavors: Study

Sweet and salty are mainstream flavors, while foodies are drawn to more adventurous tastes.

"Foodie" vs. Mainstream Consumer Flavor Preferences		
	FOODIES: (244 consumers)	MAINSTREAM: (242 consumers)
Salty	43%	54%
Sour	59%	35%
Bitter	62%	37%
Sweet	45%	52%
Umami	61%	35%

When asked to rate their flavor preferences on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the most-preferred flavor, self-identified "foodie" consumer types showed a markedly different preference set than those identified as mainstream consumers. (Percentages indicate flavor profiles that received a score of either 1 or 2 in the rankings).

Source: Culinary Visions® Panel, 2012

June 5, 2012—What's the difference between a foodie and a consumer with more mainstream tastes? Foodies (or "adventurous diners") are more likely to choose menu items with bitter, sour or umami flavors, according to a new study by The Culinary Visions Panel. Their plainer, more mainstream counterparts go with the tried-and-true sweet and salty flavors.

Two other groups, Health Seekers and Fuelers, made up a very small part of the sample. Here are how the groups defined themselves in the study:

- Foodies: "I always or usually like to try new dishes and flavors."
- Mainstream: "I sometimes like to try new dishes and flavors but most of the time I stick to my favorites AND I only eat my favorite dishes."

- Health Seekers: "What I eat is primarily determined by my concern for health and wellness."
- Fuelers: "I am not interested in the culinary world. To me, food is fuel and nothing else."

The Essentials of the Flavor Experience study is unique in its comparison of foodies to mainstream customers. If you suspect that foodies make up part of your customer base, it would be wise to introduce a few menu items that stray from traditional flavor profiles.

Everybody has a Sweet Tooth

In the overall sample, which was obtained from more than 1,000 consumers, sweet was the most popular flavor, with 81 percent of consumers reporting sweet as their favorite.

The three other flavors, umami, bitter and sour scored next, with 61, 62 and 59 percent of consumers reporting them as their favorites, respectively. Here's where it gets interesting. Foodies try new dishes and flavors.

Sixty-two percent of those who ranked bitter as their favorite flavor were foodies, as were 61 percent of those who liked umami best were foodies, as were 59 percent of those who liked sour best were foodies.

Also, consumers who said they prefer bitter flavors were more likely to dine out than those who preferred sweet. Foodies in general reported dining out more often than mainstream consumers. Foodies dine out several times a week, as opposed to mainstream consumers who dine out once a week.

While sweet may be considered "so mainstream and boring" to foodies, when given the choice, they dip into the chocolate just like anybody else.

Interestingly, consumer who said they prefer bitter, when presented with menu concepts with a sweet-forward flavor profile, chose these sweet items whether they were foodies or not.

It's up to the operator to know their customers, says Sharon Olson, executive director of the Culinary Visions Panel, "Sweet and salty flavors are sure to please mainstream consumers looking for dining comfort and satisfaction."

Olson suggests challenging customers a bit more and to "take a cue from what foodies prefer and introduce at bitter or sour note into a favorite menu item like chocolate."