

Culinary Visions: Consumers Seek Control, Comfort At Mealtime



As consumers were faced with adapting their daily routines amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, their eating habits have evolved. This shift has left many consumers seeking more control and comfort at mealtime, according to a new study from the **Culinary Visions** Mindful Dining Initiative.

"The pandemic has shifted everyone's eating habits, from the venues they can access to the types of meal experiences available," said **Sharon Olson, executive director of Culinary Visions**. "With so much in limbo, consumers are looking for hands-on ways to regain control over their food choices wherever they can."

The pandemic has made everyday life something that is very much out of control for the vast majority of consumers, yet the new study shows food choices and mealtimes are a source of comfort and empowerment for consumers, according to the report. Consumers are prioritizing foods they enjoy as the standard for self-care at mealtime with 74% agreeing that eating food they feel good about is more important to their wellness than watching their weight.

Pandemic era consumers are taking an active interest in the preparation of their meals. 85% of participants prefer meals they prepare themselves. Additionally, 72% of participants would rather buy items from a deli to prepare at home, rather than have an item prepared by the staff. Even when picking up food from a third party, consumers still want to add the finishing touches to their meals.

Consumers continue to place a high value on information about the food they are consuming. 79% want to know as much as possible about what they are eating from food sourcing to preparation. Past Mindful Dining studies have revealed similar patterns in consumers' transparency seeking behavior.

For example, in 2015, when asked whether certain food claims would influence their decision to purchase an item, respondents were overwhelmingly influenced by descriptive food labeling. 73% of consumers agreed that the term "local" would influence their purchase and 60% were influenced by the phrase "hormone-free."

By 2018 "fresh" was identified as the most influential menu term with 86% of consumers surveyed saying it impacted their choices. The 2018 study focused on restaurant dining behaviors and 70% of consumers surveyed said they relied on their friends and family as sources of information for where to dine.