

Five Ways to Leverage the Demand for Ethically-Sourced Options

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Ethics On the Go, a new report from **Culinary Visions Panel's Mindful Dining Initiative project**, finds younger consumers to have increased expectations for ethical snacks and grab-and-go foods. In this study, 1,500 US consumers were surveyed about their attitudes towards ethically-sourced foods and how it impacts their dining choices of portable and grab-and-go foods outside the home. The study finds that while all consumers care about ethical eating, **consumers under 35 years pay the closest attention to responsible practices behind menus.**

"From sustainable farming to free-range eggs, consumers do not want their dining choices to have unintended negative consequences," says Sharon Olson, executive director of Culinary Visions Panel. "Whether it's rewarding a company's fair trade labor practices or their zero-waste policies, we found that **Millennials are the most serious about ethically-sourced grab-and-go foods.**"

Consumers under 35 years have a deep interest in how their meals are made which indicates that food choices aren't just about the body anymore – they are about the mind too.

The **Culinary Visions Panel** suggests five ways that foodservice operators can leverage consumers' interest in ethics-based grab-and-go foods:

1. Ethical as a Shortcut to Younger Consumers

The report found that the **18-34 year demographic valued ethical eating choices much higher than any other demographic.** Where 50% of general consumers agreed organic foods tasted better, 60% of consumers under 35 equated organic foods with better taste. In order to understand young consumers' preferences for ethical foods, foodservice operators can develop a deeper understanding of ethical food issues and a strong network of suppliers.

2. Ethical Food Options Are "Trendy"

Ethical efforts made in foodservice – from vegan food options to composting on-site - is the new cool "it" factor for Millennial consumers who have to navigate multiple dining options. The report found **76% of consumers under 35 equated ethical efforts made by restaurants as trendy.** Foodservice operators can create a loyal customer base by better communicating the ethical efforts they are making in their ingredient sourcing or onsite operations.

3. Shortage of Ethical Grab-and-Go Options

Millennials don't want to choose between their love of quick, grab-and-go foods and their desire to eat more responsibly. Compared to 57% of overall consumers who said there are not enough ethically produced snacks available to them, 64% of consumers under 35 said the same thing. The fact that many young consumers feel they cannot find enough fast, ethical grab-and-go options means that foodservice operators have an opportunity to stock their menus with choices that meet the criteria of ethical foods.

4. Willing to Pay Premium for Ethical Grab-and-Go

Consumers under 35 are willing to pay extra to eat more ethically while on-the-go. 67% of consumers under 35 said they'd be willing to pay more for ethically produced food that they can grab on-the-go, compared to 55% of overall consumers. This fact creates an exciting opportunity for foodservice operators to expand their menu offerings and tap into young consumers' desire for ethical snacks and grab-and-go foods.

5. Omnivorous Cravings for Grab-and-Go

While consumers said that they love meat, many are also hungry to get more plants into their diets; **88% of all surveyed said that they were keen to add more plant-based foods and ingredients to their meals.** To fulfill consumers' desire to both eat better and help the environment, foodservice operators are in a position to introduce more vegetarian and plant-based grab-and-go food options in their menus.

While ethical grab-and-go foods may seem a niche concept for foodservice operators, it highlights the high expectations consumers under 35 have for dining outside the home. Consumers are not limiting their concerns to ethically-sourced food ingredients but also to the operations on-site. For example, 82% of the consumers surveyed in this study say they wished establishments would use more environmentally friendly business practices, and 65% of them say the environmental impact of take-out containers and to-go packaging concerns them. From eco-friendly utensils to partnerships with local farms, foodservice operators need to start considering how to introduce and communicate ethically-sourced ingredients, menu concepts, and business practices to keep up with evolving consumer expectations.