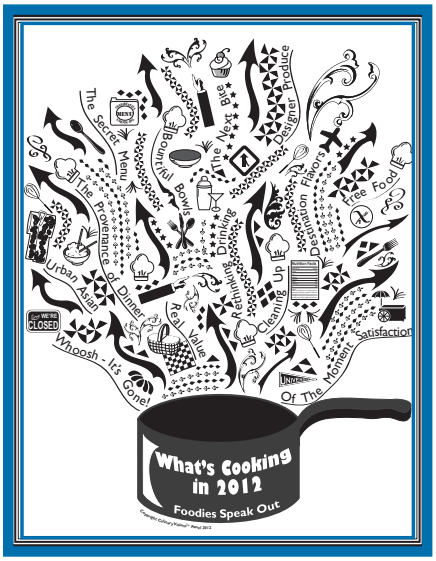
Survey Reveals Foodies' Flavor Secrets



April 25, 2012 – Adventurous diners, often called foodies, are significantly more likely to choose menu items with bitter, sour, and umami flavors, according to the results of a new Culinary Visions Panel survey.

The survey explored over 500 consumers' preferences for all five flavors, including sweet and salty. The Culinary Visions Panel defines a foodie as those who always or usually like to try new dishes and flavors.

Sweet and salty were the clear favorites among the overall sample, with 81% consumers reporting sweet as their personal taste preference and salty close behind at 67%.

The same cannot be said for the other 3 flavors. Umami, bitter, and sour scored the lowest with consumers at 19%, 18%, and 16%. However foodies, those who identify themselves as always or usually liking to try new dishes and flavors, ranked bitter (62%), umami (61%) and sour (59%) as their top flavor preferences.

"Flavor balancing is key to customer satisfaction," says Sharon Olson, Executive Director of Culinary Visions Panel.

"Even though customers will say they gravitate toward one flavor over another, when they choose a menu item, there is a wide variance in the dominant flavors they choose."

Olson went on to say, "It is up to the chef or restaurateur to entice their customers whom they know best. Sweet and salty flavors are sure to please mainstream consumers looking for dining comfort and satisfaction. If you want to challenge your customers a bit more, take a cue from what foodies prefer and introduce a bitter or sour note into a favorite menu item like chocolate for dessert. A bitter chocolate trio was a top scoring menu item concept among the majority of consumers who participated in this survey."

The survey also revealed significant differences in flavor preferences among the age groups as well. Gen X, baby boomers, and seniors preferred salty and sweet more than Millennials, although a high percentage of Millenials also ranked salty and sweet as preferred flavors.

Millennials also ranked the more adventurous flavor profiles like bitter, sour and umami higher than the other age groups. The sour flavor profile was least preferred overall, and especially by Gen X, whereas bitter was the least preferred flavor profile for boomers and seniors.

The genders have much in common when it comes to favorite flavors except for bitter, where men are almost twice as likely to pick menu items with that characteristic.

Surprisingly though, of those consumers who identified themselves as health conscious, none mentioned bitter as a flavor preference, even though bitter is a flavor characteristic in many healthful vegetables.

In addition to exploring consumer flavor preferences, this Culinary Visions Panel, Essentials of Flavor survey also examined other dimensions of flavor such as the taste expectations of consumers at different times of the day, their most trusted sources for culinary discovery, and their taste preferences versus their menu choices.

The Culinary Visions Panel has been serving up insight and ideas from food professionals and consumer foodies since 2002. Go to www.culinaryvisions.org to find out more about what cutting edge chefs, emerging leaders and consumer foodies are saying about tomorrow's menu.