

## Culinary Visions study delves into emotional impact of consumer dining habits



The latest **Culinary Visions** survey of over 2,000 consumers focuses on the emotional impact of the global pandemic on dining away from home. Over the course of the year **Culinary Visions** has surveyed over 4,000 consumers related to their eating habits during the months in and out of sheltering at home to gain an understanding of how pandemic related experiences have affected their eating habits. Consumers are sharing hopeful signs for the foodservice business as news on the global pandemic has taken a positive turn in recent weeks.

*“The daily interaction with restaurants and foodservice establishments that was so much a part of everyday life pre-pandemic is no longer*

*taken for granted. As consumers consider their post pandemic life, many have expressed their appreciation for chefs, restaurants and foodservice operations that have continued to support their community,” said **Sharon Olson, executive director of Culinary Visions.** “Although they have relied on technology to deliver no-contact satisfaction for many months, they are craving the connection of dining with friends and family in a restaurant.”*

### **Three key insights that emerged from the study are likely to impact the emerging new normal for the foodservice industry:**

#### **Consumers are craving connection**

The isolation of the past year has been challenging and home delivery has become a culinary lifeline for many consumers. Yet, less than half (47 percent) of consumers in the latest wave of the study say they prefer online delivery services over going somewhere in person. This is down from 56 percent in the summer wave of the survey.

Although virtual encounters have become a way of life, only 35 percent of consumers agree that they enjoy sharing virtual meals with friends as much as dining out. 78 percent consumers in the latest study say they are looking forward to the experience of dining in a restaurant, and 66 percent miss being around other people when dining in a foodservice establishment.

## **Brands with purpose matter**

Even before the pandemic, consumers were relying on food and restaurant brands they trusted to behave in a responsible way in bringing their products to the table. During the pandemic, support of local communities became front and center for many, and consumers are remembering those who supported their communities. 73 percent agree that chefs have become heroes serving our community in these difficult times in the latest study. That appreciation points to post pandemic loyalty with 53 percent of consumers saying they have changed the restaurants they patronize based on how employees are being taken care of during these difficult times.

## **Heightened awareness of life in balance**

Early in the pandemic interest in healthfulness was set aside for comfort and indulgence. Sales of packaged snack foods that offered flavor memories from childhood and simpler times skyrocketed. Of the consumers surveyed last summer, 65 percent said indulgent comfort food has been their salvation. Yet, 83 percent of consumers said they were looking forward to more healthful eating.

As hope for the new normal appears on the horizon, the interest in healthfulness has returned with 58 percent saying they have used this time to make healthier lifestyle modifications.

### **About the survey:**

*4,000 US consumers have been surveyed during the course of this study. In the most recent wave of the study, 2,000 US consumers were asked closed-ended questions about their food and dining experiences and results were compared to those from previous surveys earlier in the year. 36 percent of the consumers surveyed were under the age of 34, 40 percent were ages 35-54 and 24 percent were ages 55 and over. The consumer female to male ratio was 53:47, respectively. Of those consumers surveyed, 42 percent live in a 1 or 2 person household, 58 percent live in a household of 3 people or more. This study was fielded in December 2020. The first wave of this study was fielded in June 2020 and the next wave is planned for spring/summer 2021 to track evolving behaviors and attitudes of U.S. consumers.*