

Culinary Visions consumer study explores evolution of restaurant dining



New Culinary Visions consumer research with over 2,000 consumers nationwide suggests restaurants that explored new business models to keep their patrons nourished and connected during the pandemic are reaping benefits in the new post pandemic culture. The study was inspired by restaurants that found inventive ways to feed their communities and stay connected with their customers while keeping their businesses alive.

With restaurants and bars reopening, more than half (53%) of the respondents to the survey said they consider themselves to be a regular at their local restaurant. Yet the

pandemic-fueled enthusiasm for cooking at home remains with 91% of respondents saying they enjoy cooking at home. There is no reason this cannot be a win-win for consumers and savvy foodservice operators as one local Chicago establishment, Kite String Cantina, has demonstrated.

Open only two years when the pandemic hit in 2020, chef and co-owner Renee Ragin shared that they created the Kite Food Club, which was a chef-curated collection of restaurant prepared foods combined with bulk produce sourced from local farms. Chef Renee describes their program as meal kit meets CSA (community supported agriculture). It helped them stay in touch with their customers and strengthen their relationships.

As the pandemic wore on, the proprietors created a market inside their restaurant where customers could pick up meals and components. Today, their marketplace is making way for more seats and their food club continues to evolve to meet the desires of their customers at home and when they come into the establishment.

“Restaurant operators have faced incredible challenges over the past two years. It is inspiring to see how some imaginative chefs and restaurateurs have been undaunted and created new ways of doing business to keep their customers engaged with them.” said Sharon Olson, executive director of Culinary Visions. “It is especially gratifying to see that consumers who participated in this survey have responded so positively.”

In the new Culinary Visions study, consumers around the country indicated that many of the hallmarks of these programs continue to appeal to them today when they have vastly more options available. Some highlights from the study include:

Consumers enjoy food adventure

The restrictions of the past two years have done little to dampen consumers' desires to explore new foods and cuisines. 76% of consumers surveyed considered themselves adventurous eaters. This sense of adventures appeals both at home and in restaurants. 84% said they enjoy being creative with ingredients in the kitchen.

Chefs inspire trust

The idea of having a professional chef curate a box of groceries appealed to 71% of those surveyed. 68% said they would enjoy a video tutorial from a local chef to accompany the ingredients in a home cooking kit that they put together. Creative collaboration between local restaurants and farmers is another welcome choice for 72% who said they would be interested in a meal kit with ingredients put together by a restaurant chef and local farmers.

Global flavors appeal at home and dining out

International flavors continue to captivate American consumers and restaurants have been a perennial go-to for patrons looking for global culinary exploration. In a recent survey about restaurant behavior, 80% of consumers surveyed said they enjoy international foods with flavors they cannot easily prepare at home. In this most recent survey 76% said they like to order take out from restaurants for things that are difficult to make at home. When cooking at home, prepared sauces or flavoring components make it easier for 68% of those who participated in this survey bridging the gap between enjoyment and ease of preparation.

About the Survey

2,064 US consumers were surveyed in March 2022. Participants were asked questions about specific aspects of their food and dining experiences at home and away from home. 660 of those surveyed were ages 18-34, 792 were ages 35-54, and 612 were ages 55 and over. The consumer female to male ratio was 56:44, respectively. Of those consumers surveyed, 1,243 live in a 1 or 2 person household and 821 live in a household of 3 people or more.