

## New Culinary Visions study provides unconventional perspective of senior diners



Culinary Visions has been exploring senior living dynamics for over a decade and the latest study released this month provides a glimpse at the food culture created by today's maturing Baby Boomers.

Serving the 55+ consumer has many of the same challenges and opportunities that foodservice operators face in all other segments of the foodservice business according to the latest research from Culinary Visions. More than 4,000 consumers throughout the US were surveyed, and insight for this report focuses on the 1,240 seniors who participated.

"The results of this survey paint a contemporary picture of Baby Boomers, now in their late 50's to early 70's who drove so much of the growth and innovation in the restaurant business when they were younger," said Sharon Olson, executive director of Culinary Visions. "Their insight is important for foodservice professionals because even though they may not be considering a senior community for themselves, many are exploring the option for their parents with their own values in mind."

Five key takeaways from the study break from conventional thinking on the part of the general public. However, they are likely to reinforce some of the important characteristics that senior living professionals see in the communities they serve.

### **Self-described "adventurous eaters"**

Contrary to conventional thinking that seniors are set in their culinary ways, the majority (63%) of the 55+ consumers surveyed consider themselves to be adventurous eaters. This generation is accustomed to restaurant dining with 62% reporting that they usually like to try new dishes and flavors when they dine out. Restaurants can be places for culinary exploration especially for international cuisines. 72% of the survey respondents said they enjoy international foods with flavors they cannot easily prepare at home when they dine out. *cont.*

## **Foodservice aficionados**

In Culinary Visions studies of senior dining 15 years ago, home cooking was considered the quality standard for senior communities, yet Baby Boomers are bringing their own set of expectations to senior dining. This is a group that appreciates restaurant experiences with 82% saying they appreciate the artistry of chefs who create beautifully composed meals. Restaurants have become the standard for quality with 63% saying they believe that sandwiches in restaurants are better than the sandwiches they make at home.

Fresh food is a priority in restaurants. 87% agreed that they look for the freshest food possible when dining out. Today's senior diners are likely to compare their restaurant experience to senior community dining.

## **Information enthusiasts**

This new generation of seniors likes to be in-the-know on subjects that are important to them. They want more than basic nutrition label information on the food they consume. 68% of survey participants say knowing details about the source of their food is important to them.

They expect restaurants to have the information they need to be accurate and readily available. 79% expressed impatience with restaurants that do not have updated menus, which has been a wide scale challenge for restaurants since the pandemic fueled supply chain issues and labor shortages that make it difficult to keep menus current.

## **Omnivorous diners**

The 55+ consumers surveyed are enthusiastic omnivores with 73% describing themselves as a carnivore that loves vegetables. Although the study did not delve into a large number of lifestyle diets, it was notable that less than 9% described themselves as committed to a vegan lifestyle.

In addition to their omnivorous habits, this group also reported fewer dietary restrictions, sensitivities or allergies. Although it remains important for those serving senior diners to pay close attention to special dietary needs, it was somewhat surprising to learn that only 30% report that someone in their household has dietary restrictions, sensitivities, or allergies. This is substantially lower than households with younger consumers where 41% report someone in the household has dietary restrictions.

## **Globally and locally concerned consumers**

Concern for everyone involved in bringing food to the table is more than a passing fancy with this group. They care about everyone from food producers to foodservice employees. 96% say they like to dine where employees are treated well.

Championing local producers is also an important issue with 91% saying they appreciate restaurants that focus on supporting local food producers.

Baby Boomers are driving innovation in senior living communities just as they did in the foodservice industry decades ago. Today's senior communities are responding to their residents by offering restaurant style dining, engaging chefs, expanding foodservice variety, and customizing amenities to enhance everyday life for all levels of care.