

New study finds Millennials want more ethically-sourced foods on the go

March 19, 2018

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," she adds.

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. Here are five ways that foodservice operators can leverage consumers' interest in **ethics-based grab-and-go foods**:

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.

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. 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 on-site operations.

A 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.

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.

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.

