

## New Culinary Visions consumer study explores food lifestyle choices post-pandemic



New Culinary Visions consumer research points to the importance of sharing food experiences with friends and family as a new normal emerges for U.S. consumers. The surge in demand for food experiences can mean opportunity for all types of foodservice and retail establishments.

**“The enthusiasm for sharing dining experiences with friends and family is exploding as restaurants reopen and summertime across the country fuels the desire to get out and get on with life,”** said Sharon Olson, executive director of Culinary Visions. **“Restarting an**

**industry is hardly like flipping a switch, and foodservice operators are working beyond overtime to welcome the onslaught.”**

### Convenience reconsidered

During the pandemic when everyday life was fraught with unimagined difficulties, the cost of convenience was almost priceless. More than half (51 percent) of consumers agreed that online delivery services were their lifeline for meals. Consumers are now beginning to scrutinize the cost of delivery with 68 percent saying that delivery fees will determine whether they order takeout from a restaurant.

Home delivery that made lock down life a little easier is losing favor now that restaurant dining experiences are more widely available. Just a year ago, 56 percent of those that participated in a study of pandemic era consumers preferred online delivery services over going somewhere in person. That percentage dropped to 47 percent by the end of the year.

Today’s consumers have come to appreciate eating at home during the past year, and they are discovering a broader range of resources to make at home dining more appetizing and convenient. Although 81 percent agreed that their new normal is going to include more dining at home, it is not necessarily going to involve cooking. In fact, 51 percent prefer purchasing fully prepared foods over making food from scratch. 59 percent of those surveyed said they have gained a new appreciation for the supermarket deli as a source for meals.

## **Appreciating what matters**

Sharing a meal with family and friends is one of life's pleasures and even though virtual encounters have become a way of life, 65 percent of consumers who participated in the recent survey said they did not enjoy sharing virtual meals with friends as much as dining out. 66 percent said they miss being around other people when dining in a foodservice establishment.

They have also gained greater appreciation for everyone involved in bringing those meals to the table from chefs to restaurant employees. 73 percent agreed that chefs became heroes working to serve communities during the past year. And consumers say this new appreciation is impacting their behavior. More than half (53 percent) said they have changed the restaurants they patronize based on how employees were being taken care of in recent months.

## **Culinary adventure is on the menu**

The majority of consumers surveyed (78 percent) said they are looking forward to the experience of dining in a restaurant. Pre-pandemic, consumers were in charge and accustomed to having their foodservice experiences customized and on-demand. Although many gained a new appreciation for a myriad of things they took for granted this past year, they are tiring of the compromises that characterized lock down life in their appetite for the way things used to be. In fact, 56 percent are tired of restaurants that have pared down their regular menus and offer only a limited variety of items.

Sharing food in restaurants has traditionally been a convivial way of appreciating a culinary experience. Just two years before the pandemic emerged, a global study by Culinary Visions found that Americans were more likely to enjoy sharing desserts than restaurant patrons in France, Italy, Germany and Great Britain. However, in the recent study, 67 percent of those surveyed said they are more reluctant to share food when dining out. Although consumers are looking forward to more shared experiences, they are not necessarily keen on sharing their food.

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## **About the survey**

4,000 US consumers have been surveyed during the course of this study that was initiated in 2020 and completed in early 2021. Participants were asked closed-ended questions about their food and dining experiences and results of each wave of the study were compared to those from previous surveys. In the most recent survey of 2,000 consumers, 36 percent of those 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. The Global Indulgence study noted was conducted in 2018 among 2,000 consumers—1,000 in the U.S. and 250 in each Italy, France, Germany and Great Britain.