

## Restaurants Win With New Concepts in Post-Pandemic Normal

Consumers want to eat out, but also explore new ways of purchasing and preparing food.

CHICAGO — Restaurants that explored new business models in order to keep their patrons nourished and connected during the COVID-19 pandemic are now reaping the benefits in a new, post-pandemic culture, according to new research by Culinary Visions. A recent study was inspired by restaurants that found inventive ways to food their communities, stay connected with their customers and keep their businesses alive.

More than half (53 percent) of consumers who participated in the study said they consider themselves to be a regular at their local restaurant. At the same time, 91 percent of respondents also say they enjoy cooking at home, keeping the pandemic-fueled enthusiasm for home cooking alive.

There is no reason this can't be a win-win for both consumers and savvy foodservice operators, as demonstrated by Kite String Cantina, located in Chicago.

Just two years into business when the pandemic hit in 2020, chef and co-owner Renee Ragin responded by creating the Kite Food Club, a chef-curated collection of restaurant prepared foods combined with bulk produce sourced from local farms. The program was a combination of meal kits and community supported agriculture that helped Kite Food Club stay in touch with its customers while strengthening their relationships.

As the pandemic continued, Kite Food Club's proprietors created a market inside their restaurant where customers could pick up meals and components, according to Culinary



Visions. today, the marketplace is making room for more seats and the food club continues to evolve to meet the desires of customers at home and when they come into the restaurant.

“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.”

The Culinary Visions study found that consumers around the United States indicate that many of these programs continue to appeal to them today, a time when they have vastly more options available. Highlights from the study include:

**Consumers enjoy food adventure** — Two years of restrictions have not dampened consumers' desires to explore new foods and cuisines, as 76 percent of survey

participants considered themselves to be adventurous eaters. This sense of adventures appeals both at home and in restaurants, with 84 saying 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 percent of consumers, and 68 percent 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 the 72 percent 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 remain a perennial go-to for

those looking for global culinary exploration. A recent survey on restaurant behavior shows that eight in 10 surveyed consumers said they enjoy international foods with flavors they cannot easily prepare at home. In Culinary Visions' latest survey, 76 percent said they like to order takeout 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 percent of survey participants, bridging the gap between enjoyment and ease of preparation.

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