

Independent Thoughts

Menu trends to watch include less expensive proteins and traditional cooking

A panel of chefs and other foodservice professionals make predictions ranging from continued consumer interest in grab-and-go meals to interactive corporate foodservice experiences.

By Fred Wilkinson, Chief Editor, The National Provisioner

Food industry trends forecasting firm **Culinary Visions** recently brought together a panel of chefs and other culinary professionals from across the U.S. to share their thoughts on finding inspiration for new menu ideas.

During the Oct. 18 event in Chicago, discussions among the panelists — whose 19 members included chefs working in restaurants, cookbook writers, recipe developers and culinary educators — called out some foodservice trends to anticipate on menus in the coming year:

Heritage fare — The majority of panelists agreed that the pandemic provided time for experimentation in the kitchen that has rekindled interest in heritage cooking, immigrant food traditions and American regional fare. Many traditional recipes focus on flavor and use less expensive proteins, enabling foodservice operators to offer greater value without higher prices.

Contemporary dining styles — The panel discussed modern service styles that engage the needs of consumers in light of ongoing workforce instability. Grab-and-go concepts offer convenience and safety as consumers face increasingly hectic everyday routines as the return to the office continues for many. Action stations (where chefs or guests perform actions such as cooking, mixing, adding toppings or plating



meals) in corporate dining rooms encourage foodservice operator creativity along with interaction between patrons with the chef and culinary staff. Destination outdoor dining and an urban restaurant revival post-pandemic were mentioned as other trends to watch.

Foodservice-retail fusion — Many of the strategies foodservice operators incorporated during the pandemic have developed into sustainable businesses that are supporting sales in areas where the reopening of in-person dining is lagging. Meal kits meet the needs of consumers looking to eat and entertain at home while providing the taste experience of restaurant dining. More than nine out of 10 consumers **Culinary Visions** surveyed said they enjoyed cooking at home. Chefs were cited as sources of inspiration for home cooks, with 71% of consumers surveyed saying they liked the idea of a professional chef crafting a box of groceries for them.