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# The Future of Fresh Food: New Research Identifies Five Key Insights

By Sharon Olson, Executive Director, Culinary Visions

**T**oday's shoppers are more aware of everyone involved in bringing food to their table and are ready to embrace personal experience and culinary adventure with renewed enthusiasm.

Culinary Visions' latest research was inspired by revisiting some of the discussions from the World Food Exposition in Milan eight years ago. The expo focused on the power of food to create community and included demonstrations of new technology, massive vertical gardens and an exploration of international cuisines.

The research team at Culinary Visions set out to learn if the futurist scenario of the food world of 2050 presented by the expo was a blueprint for the future or just some lofty ideas. The most recent survey of over 2,100 consumers nationwide was fielded late in 2022. Results indicate substantial consumer interest in personal culinary exploration, the global importance of food and sustainability.

## SEASONAL PLANT FORWARD MENUS

Visitors to World Food Expo were awestruck by the enormous garden walls on the exteriors of the U.S. and Israeli pavilions. The 7,200 square foot vertical farm in the U.S. pavilion was harvested daily, demonstrating the ability of urban agriculture to feed local communities.

Participants in a recent Culinary Visions Professional Panel said today's menus feature seasonal ingredients, more vegetables and modest protein portions. Local producers are also top of mind, according to consumers who participated in the recent study. Eighty-two percent of those surveyed said they appreciated restaurants that focus on supporting local food producers.

The pandemic narrowed the radar screen on sourcing products close to home and that has made local and sustainable food offerings a welcome part of the new normal.

## EXPLORING THE WORLD THROUGH FOOD

The culinary diplomacy witnessed at the World Food Expo showcased history, culture and food traditions in a captivating way. In the most recent Culinary Visions survey, 83% of the consumers surveyed said they enjoy exploring new cultures through food, and 76% considered themselves to be adventurous eaters.

Indoor food halls and marketplaces are bringing American consumers together for culinary exploration, and 74% of consumers surveyed reported the diversity of vendors in a single location was appealing. Seventy-eight percent said experiencing new foods with friends is one of their favorite social activities.

Many international cuisines are focused on vegetables, grains and distinctive flavors to create value-friendly meals. Promoting produce used in international recipes provides an exceptional opportunity to sample new flavors and share a distinctive story.

## SHARING FOOD TRADITIONS

The World Food Expo demonstrated the power of food to bring

people of widely diverse backgrounds together. Today's consumers are creating their own food traditions and sharing their food heritage with friends and family — 78% said they like to share foods that reflect their heritage, and 84% said they like to create their own food traditions when they cook for friends and family.

Sharing family meals has emerged as an important and satisfying lifestyle post-pandemic. Seventy-nine percent of those who participated in the most recent survey said their family makes time to share a meal together more than twice a week. This makes it a perfect time to introduce produce items that make home preparation of heritage recipes accessible.

**A majority of those surveyed said their local supermarket would become their go-to source for meals if there was a chef creating the menu.**

## THE POWER OF AMERICAN CHEFS

American chefs gained recognition at the World Food Expo in pop-up dining experiences. These sold-out events treated guests to a unique and intimate showcase of American gastronomy.

The influence of chefs in the supermarket is growing in importance. In a recent study, 67% of survey participants said their local supermarket would become their go-to source for meals if there was a chef creating the menu. Beyond prepared meals, 71% of survey participants liked the idea of a professional chef curating a box of groceries for them.

The most recent survey points to the opportunity for retailers to publicize not only their food, but the chefs behind the offerings. Eighty-two percent of consumers surveyed said they expect better quality food offerings when they see there is a chef working in the store.

## FOOD ORIGIN INFORMATION ON DEMAND

Consumer interest in the source of their food has been steadily increasing, and the pandemic fueled even greater concern for everyone involved in bringing food to the table. At the World Food Expo, The Future Food District allowed visitors to walk around a prototype supermarket of tomorrow. Augmented labels enabled shoppers to see the story behind a product by simply brushing their hand over a panel and looking at the display screen.

In our survey, 80% of consumers reported they would like to have more information about the sources of the fresh items they purchase in the grocery store. Even without the latest technology, it is important to make it easy for customers to get the information they want about the source of the ingredients in their meals.

When today's consumers are in-store, they want a worthwhile experience. Value is about much more than price for today's shoppers. **pb**



Sharon Olson is executive director of Culinary Visions, a division of Olson Communications Inc. based in Chicago. Culinary Visions is a food-focused insight and trend forecasting firm that provides original consumer and culinary professional research for companies in the food industry.