

AMERICAN CULINARY FEDERATION

2024

TRENDS REPORT



American Culinary Federation
The Standard of Excellence for Chefs

1. CULINARY HERITAGE

Whether it's updating a classical European dish with new plating techniques or modernizing your grandmother's casserole with high-level ingredients, nostalgic dishes and comfort foods have been exciting chefs today as we celebrate our culinary heritage.

Meatloaf, green bean casserole and chicken and dumplings all have a place on today's menus, along with modern takes on boeuf bourguignon, bouillabaisse, cassoulet, steak



On the Menu: 40-Layer Lasagna by Chef David Deshaies of L'Ardente in Washington, D.C.

frites and jambon-beurre. According to third-party research firm Datassential, osso buco and cassoulet are two of the fastest growing comfort food dishes on menus nationwide, while Mexican cuisine remains the go-to for comfort foods in the U.S., especially among Gen Zers and millennials, reported by Unilever consumer research.



139% - the growth of birria tacos on menus between September 2022 and 2023

(Source: Datassential Comfort Food, Sept. 2023)

2. FOOD AS MEDICINE

More consumers today seek tailored meals and nutrition programs, and this has tasked chefs to deliver on those wants and needs. At the same time, increasing numbers of medical and culinary professionals are realizing that healthy diets can prevent, manage and treat various diseases. Culinary nutrition as a discipline is becoming widely recognized in the



On the Menu: Mango & Kale Chaat Salad by Chef Ashfer Biju, Perrine at The Pierre Hotel

health care sector, with groups such as the American Society for Nutrition recognizing that certain diets, ingredients and combinations of nutrients are imperative for improving the health and wellness of our bodies and minds.

The term "keto" used on menus was up **64%**, followed by "plant-based" at **35%**

(Source: Datassential Deep Dive Diet Trends, May 2022)



3. HIGHER CUISINE

With cannabis becoming recreationally legal in much of the U.S., it's also finding its way to the dinner table. We've seen the explosive growth of THC-laced edibles like gummies, chocolates and baked goods over the past couple years; now, chefs and beverage makers are experimenting with infusions in composed dishes and drinks. According to Datassential,

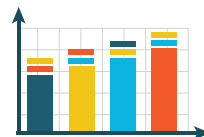
millennials are driving interest and consumption in products containing both cannabis and non-high-inducing CBD, which is said to relieve anxiety and can be found in everything from cocktails to donuts. Last year, ACF launched a Specialized Certificate in Culinary Cannabis and Edibles, available through the Online Learning Center.



On the Menu: While not legally allowed on restaurant menus, chefs are experimenting with THC-infused dishes like sous-vide lamb chops with smoky, THC-laced eggplant puree and marijuana bud "dusting," that can be served at private dinners that don't officially charge guests but might ask for "donations."

Just under half of consumers have tried both **THC (53%)** and **CBD (55%)** products, and the use of CBD oil can be found on **0.6%** of U.S. menus, a **+328%** increase over the past four years

(Source: Datassential Cannabis report, Nov. 2023)



4. MODERN BARBECUE AND SMOKE

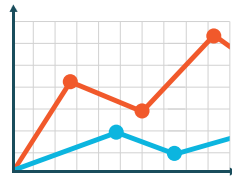
When we picture barbecue, we often think low and slow here in the U.S. Chefs are taking things one step further, exploring the science behind injects and rubs and experimenting with new and bold spices and flavor combinations. Chefs are also reaching beyond pork and beef to include lamb and other proteins in the barbecue mix. On top of that, smoke and live-fire cooking are taking center stage in kitchens with delicacies like smoked chicken wings, smoked salts, smoked cocktails — even smoked cheeses and desserts — hitting the table.



On the Menu: Barbecue Chopped Mutton and Sliced Mutton Plate at Moonlight Bar-B-Q Inn in Owensboro, Ky. (credit: American Lamb)

Honey and Korean barbecue sauce flavors are leading the pack in terms of menu growth, at **5.2%** and **2.7%**, as of last year

(Source: Datassential MenuTrends, Q3 2023)



5. FOOD TRUCK MADNESS

The industry is changing in many ways, and COVID-19 certainly escalated that. Staff shortages and labor challenges are the most talked-about issues among chefs. Now, rising real estate and food costs are becoming a concern. Pre-pandemic, food trucks broke these startup barriers by offering a lower cost of entry in the form of smaller footprint and less staff requirements, not to mention creative freedom. We think food trucks are poised to make a major comeback in the coming years as the culinary landscape continues to evolve.



On the Menu: Food truck at weekly street fair in White Bear Lake, Minn.

74% of consumers say they've visited a food truck; **55%** say they want to see more of them in their city.

(Source: Datassential, Food Trucks, April 2023)



6. GLOBAL PANTRY

With such a diverse culture in the U.S. and how easy it's become to access global ingredients, our pantries have changed dramatically. Sriracha sauce has become as mainstream as ketchup in some parts of the country, with Korean gochujang following closely behind. It's common to see a splash of XO sauce or a dusting of furikake. Japanese matcha is being used more in green sauces, and the availability of chiles from Latin America to Asia continues to grow. According to Datassential, 30% of consumers are familiar with Argentine chimichurri, commonly served with steaks and seafood.



44% of U.S. consumers are interested in global condiments and sauces; **51%** of U.S. operators would menu them today

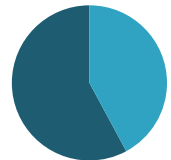
(Source: Datassential Trendspotting: Global Sauces and Condiments, April 2023)

7. THE WHOLE CHEF

From work-life balance to mental health awareness and new exercise regimens, chefs are prioritizing health and wellness in their everyday lives and becoming far more aware of the need to take care of themselves and those in their communities than ever before. Organizations such as CHOW (Culinary Hospitality Outreach Wellness), A Sip of Paradise, the Giving Kitchen, Healthy Pour and I Got Your Back (IGYB) all work to support those in the hospitality industry with a goal to eighty-six stigmas around mental health and substance-free lifestyles.

68% of consumers want to drink more water and exercise more in 2024

(Source: Datassential 2024 Food Trends Report, Nov. 2023)

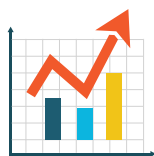


8. FIVE-STAR ELEGANCE FOR EVERYONE

Once reserved only for fine-dining outlets, high-end ingredients like black truffles can be found on a wider swath of menus, from truffle-infused mayo at Popeyes to the truffle-dusted French fries at Dave & Buster's. There is no denying that the everyday guest is looking for an elevated food experience. Barrel-aged soy sauce, flower-specific honeys and new wave barbecue sauces help elevate everyday flavors. At the same time, we're seeing more examples of familiar meeting fancy in the form of Wagyu beef burgers, nduja-topped pizzas and saffron-spiked sauces.



On the Menu: Smoked Lobster Mac and Cheese by Chef Alex Hoefer, Wind Creek Hospitality



The use of hot honey as an ingredient has grown **111%** over the past four years with a **5.6%** growth among restaurants last year

(Source: Datassential MenuTrends Q3 2023)



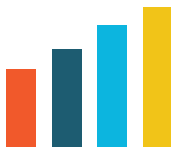
On the Menu: Melon Baller with Watermelon, Citrus and Soda at Fly Trap in San Francisco. (credit: Paprika Studios)

9. THE NEW BAR

Functional beverages like CBD drinks, kombucha, mushroom tea, cold coffee and even energy lemonade are elevating the cocktail experience — with or without alcohol. As more consumers seek low- or no-alcohol libations, these products make it easier to please the sober curious, or just those looking for fun sans booze. Even non-alcoholic beers taste more like the real thing and natural wines with naturally lower ABV are becoming more commonplace.

58% of consumers are interested in low-alcohol drinks and **45%** are interested in no-alcohol drinks

(Source: Datassential Future of Drink, Oct. 2023)



10. CULINARY MASH-UPS

Fusion has been around forever, but it might have been the infamous cronut that brought the kitsch and the fandom. Today, we're focused more on "cross-cultural cooking" — as af&co.'s 2024 Hospitality Trend report called it — with chefs drawing from professional experience and personal backgrounds to create dishes, menus and full restaurant concepts that combine elements from one or two cuisines at a time. Korean tacos and



On the Menu: Ramen Bolognese, Soy Sauce Injected Burrata Fettunta and Temomi Ramen Shrimp Scampi by Chef Robbie Felice of pastaRAMEN (credit: Kikkoman)

Rueben egg rolls got the ball rolling; now we're seeing Vietnamese-Cajun, Mexican-Mediterranean and Jewish deli-Cuban mashups, plus more applications of Wafu cuisine combining Italian and Japanese flavors as well as a wave of fun ingredient combos like chicken bacon ranch, chile garlic and mango habanero.

Compound flavor mango habanero is up **83%** on menus over the past four years

(Source: Datassential Flavor Remix, July 2022)

