

Toward 2000: A Look at Restaurant Trends

by Jane Y. Wallace, Editor/Publisher Emeritus, Restaurants & Institutions Magazine

As the American diet changes, the need for nutritional information also changes. Twenty years ago, who would have thought we would need a nutritional profile of fajitas? And as our lifestyles are changing, more and more food is being consumed away from home. Since new food trends often begin in foodservice, we will look at both lifestyles and foodservice menu trends during this presentation.

1. EATING OUT AND MENU TRENDS

2. Foodservice share of Total Food Market Today--45.9% Total Food Dollars, 34.9% Total Food Volume. Will reach 50% of dollars by 2000.

3. Meals Eaten Away from Home in Average Week: 11.6% Breakfast. 40.1% Lunch. 29.2% Dinner, 19.1% Snacks and Other.

4. Remember When? Although there have been restaurants for centuries, foodservice as we know it has really developed in the last 50 years.

5. Chicken Croquettes, canned peas are a typical restaurant meal from the '40s.

6. Togetherness was the by-word in the '50s--This illustration of mom in her apron with homemade cake made for her traditional family gathered for a family dinner is from the 50's edition of McCall's cookbook

7. Ethnics weren't called that in the '60s, But this spaghetti and meatballs with red wine was popular on menus even then.

8. In the '70s women went to work outside the home. The result was a foodservice revolution. And there's no indication that we will ever return to the traditional '50s meal service.

9. In the '80s, the biological clock caught up with the previous decade's rebels, and couples began to marry and have children. This caused yet another change in foodservice.

10. Mid-Life Crisis: The Influence of Aging Baby Boomers

11. Remember the Couch Potatoes? These two-income families--with a new potato and a tater tot to look after--didn't want to cook, because both were tired when they got home from their jobs. They were even too tired to face the hassle of going out to eat with the kids, so they made take-out and home delivery an important new part of foodservice.

12. These same aging Baby Boomers also focus on healthy lifestyles. They want to control their own bodies. Diet, exercise and genes are the three factors involved. While they haven't yet learned to control genes, diet and exercise are controllable.

13. Movable Feasts: More Meals Delivered to the Home

14. Ordering pizza for home delivery became so popular that it gave birth to a major chain--Domino's. Ultimately, the Couch Potatoes did re-join the eating out population, but take-out and home delivery remain a strong part of the way we eat.

15. Take out and home delivery have come a long way from ordering in pizza or Chinese. In urban areas, can order almost any ethnic or gourmet meal for take-out or home delivery. In fact, my daughter's pantry is full of take-out menus instead of staples!

16. Day Care Centers for Both the Young and Old. Two-income households have also caused other changes that provide opportunities and challenges for foodservice.

17. Eating away from home starts even before school for many children. Day care is a necessity for mothers who must work to support families. School foodservice, despite threatened cutbacks, continues to help children get proper nutrition. These meals are often the source for most of the nutrition inner-city children get.

18. But day care is no longer just for kids. The "sandwich generation" often finds it is necessary for aging parents as well. The same woman who can't be at home with her kids because of her job is also unable to care for older family members. Some experiments with mixing kids and seniors seem to work well.

19. Down-Aging: Increased Life Expectancy and Expectancy from Life. When we look into the mirror today, we see a person who is younger than we remember our parents were at our age. Some of this is perception, but some is also reality.

20. Not only are Americans living longer, but they are living healthier as well. The WOOF's (Well Off Older Folks) have both the means and desire to eat out. They are at the top of their income-earning years, their kids have finished college, and their mortgages are almost paid off. They appreciate The Good Life.

21. Today's retirees are not in the habit of eating three meals a day at home, either. They can exchange time for money, and are great users of "deals"

22. The Old-Old: A Growing Infirm Population

23. In spite of living healthier longer, our aging population has put a strain on nursing home facilities. Nearly half of all the money a person who lives into his or her 89's spends of health care is spent in the last two years of life! Society is seeking ways to deliver both food and health

services to the infirm in their homes to both hold down costs and lessen the psychological impact of "going into a home."

24. Great Expectations: Acceptance of Nutrition's Role in Disease Prevention

25. The idea of using diet and exercise to prevent disease has grown since its beginnings in the late 70's. The danger is that we may begin to expect too much. When we do, we embrace fad diets that may do more harm than good. But following the American Dietetic Assn.'s advice, "Eat what you want, but don't eat too much or too often," is appealing. Many Americans are actually changing the way they eat.

26. Today American diets include more grain and less fat than in the past as shown by this grilled chicken salad. Americans also demand more information on what is in the food they eat, no matter whether it is eaten at home or away. Grilled chicken Caesar salad was the dish most added to menus in 1993, according to R&I's Menu Census.

27. Multi-National Food Fright: International Concern for Food Safety

28. As the world's breadbasket has become multi-national, there is a demand for information on fertilizers and pesticides used not only in this country (remember the apple scare?), but...

29. ...overseas as well (remember the Chilean grape scare?)

30. We've Only Just Begun: Utilizing more of Nature's Bounty

31. As we look around the world for food sources, we add new foods to our diet--such as the kiwi which made its first appearance on menus in the 70's. "New" foods are a challenge to researchers who must provide nutritional data on them. Grains from around the world are currently finding their way onto American menus.

32. Aquaculture is another new area for food production. Seafood is now being farmed instead of hunted. This availability has made fish such as salmon and catfish widely available. But farmed fish may not have the same nutrient profile as wild fish. The good news is that once a farmed fish profile is developed, it is not as likely to change as wild fish.

33. Label of Contents: Greater Demand for Nutritional Content Information

34. The USDA Food Pyramid is only one basic guide, and must be constantly reviewed. What's more, Americans who take its advice seriously are demanding more information and better labeling on the food they consume.

35. Today even companies such as McDonald's are required to provide nutritional data. The demand for nutrient information will continue to grow even faster than in the past.

36. Bioengineered foods are another challenge to those providing nutritional data. The bioengineered tomato has caused foodservice to debate the use of these foods. Many feel that labeling should be required. There is concern that a peanut gene might effect those with peanut allergies, for example. Vegetarians do not want to eat berries that have a fish gene bioengineered into them to keep the berries from freezing as fast as they do naturally. The farther up the scale we go, the more people fear that if we can bioengineer the food we eat, we might also begin to bioengineer humans. John Naisbitt, author of "Megatrends," has called this fear the "abortion issue of the next century."

37. Variations of Vegetarianism; The Alternivoires

38. Vegetarian-type items are one of the fastest-growing categories on today's foodservice menus. Some of the foods are strictly vegetarian, as the stuffed onion, spinach and tomato dish shown. But the big market is not for philosophical vegetarians. It is the group we call "alternivoires." Our research shows that this group orders both vegetarian offerings and hamburgers in the same week. They look at the vegetarian dishes as healthful and as menu variety.

39. Because of the alternivoires, vegetarian dishes have gone mainstream. An example is this Chi-Chi's Veggie Chijita.

40. But don't be fooled. Americans are not embracing a vegetarian philosophy 100%. The other big growth area on the menu is beef. While the beef is much leaner than in earlier years, and, as this photo shows, it is combined with more grains and vegetables, meat is still an American mainstay.

41. Authentic Ethnics Go Mainstream

42. As this chart shows, four of the top five food categories that gained in popularity between 1983 and 1990 were ethnics. They are Mexican, +54.5%; Oriental, +47.4%; Pizza, +47.1%; and Other Italian, +46.7%. (The other category in the top 5 was Breakfast Sandwiches, +50%.)

43. In food service, most ethnic food served falls into the "Big Three" category: Mexican, Italian and Oriental. NRA research shows that 98% of all restaurants have some sort of ethnic dishes on the menu. 2/3 offer Italian. 1/4 offer Mexican, and nearly 1/5 offer some type of Oriental.

44. Italian dishes growing in popularity include the "pizza cousins" such as calzone and other stuffed pizzas, as well as the appetizer pizzas shown here.

45. In 1993, fajitas were the top ethnic entree added to menus, according to R&I's Menu Census.

46. While Oriental foods are not as widely served as other ethnics, dishes like dim sum (pot stickers) shown here, are no longer considered exotic.

47. After the Big Three, we find Second Wave Ethnics. The most popular, according to NRA research, are Hunan/Mandarin/Szechuan, German, Greek and Japanese.

47. Dishes such as the Szechuan Stir-Fry shown, not only have ethnic appeal, but also are perceived as healthful.

48. The sushi bar is only part of the appeal of Japanese food. The showmanship found in Japanese steak houses makes them one of the public's favorites.

49. Emerging ethnics, which are still found mostly in urban areas, but which may move into the mainstream, include Caribbean, Korean, Thai, Middle Eastern and Vietnamese. All of these cuisines tend to be more spicy than traditional American fare, and are part of the trend to foods with a higher flavor profile.

50. Caribbean offerings, such as the dish shown, often combine fruit with poultry and grains.

51. Two ethnics which are "on the horizon" may or may not make an impact. They are Brazilian and Indian.

52. The Indian dishes that seem most likely to find a place on menus are those such as the Grilled Chicken Kebob with Pesto Cous Cous shown. (Incidentally, today's ethnic offerings feature many grains such as cous cous and polenta that have not been a traditional part of American diet.) The other flavor that comes from India is curry, while the Brazilian dishes are often barbecued.

53. In addition to the general ethnics mentioned above, we also see an increase in regional ethnics such as this Tuscan bread tenderloin bread salad.

54. Probably the most important thing about these dishes, and the one that makes developing nutrient profiles difficult, is that they tend to combine several foods. Shown is a chicken lentil cassoulet which combines several different meat and poultry items with a variety of beans and lentils.

55. It Goes Both Ways. In this rapidly shrinking world we live in, it isn't just Americans who are embracing the cuisines from other countries. Other countries are also adding American dishes to menus--and it's not just Big Mac's or KFC chicken.

56. Shown here is one of the first Cajun dishes created by Paul Prudhomme in the 70's. As we all know, Cajun cuisine is now found around the world. This particular dish is not the original blackened redfish. It is Cajun rabbit served with crawfish--and a straight-up martini presented in a Mason jar.

56. Other American foods are also finding their way onto global menus. Shown is American trout with three different American Caviars.

57. But once again, let's not get carried away with the exotic. The US restaurant with the highest sales for an independent single unit is the Hilltop Steak House just outside Boston. It's menu remains basically steak and potatoes.

58. The Roadhouse Returns---Hilltop is not an isolated instance. Comfort food still appeals to our population. The roadhouse atmosphere is a bit of nostalgia. And while its offerings are definitely given a 90's make-over (skin-on mashed potatoes seasoned with swiss cheese and garlic), the old favorites such as meat loaf and beef stew can also be found.

59. Many road-house concepts also feature barbecue--often with a grill or pit as part of the exhibition cooking.

60. The Rotisseries Revolution.

61. Boston Chicken (now Boston Market) probably started the rotisserie trend, although it has been popular in Europe and Australia for decades. Today we find everything from chicken to bread being cooked on a rotisserie.

62. Sides--Shows

63. Vegetables and other side dishes are no longer just go-withs. They are making a name for themselves as independent menu items. Grilled vegetables, shown, are an example.

64. In addition to vegetables, chutney, salsa and relishes are gaining importance. The pork loin with blueberry-peach chutney shown is one example. And today's fruit salsas prove that tomatoes are not the only salsa base--making the development of nutritional profiles even trickier.

65. Daily Breads

66. Breads baked, or baked off, on-premise appeal to both restaurateurs and patrons. Old-fashioned dinner rolls have been replaced with whole-grain breads that come in every shape and size.

67. The Big Gulp. No matter what it is, if you can drink it, Americans will buy it. R&I's 1995 Menu Census shows that five of the top ten items that have grown in menu popularity since the early 70's. 5 are beverages.

68. The cappuccino coffee drink shown is only one of many coffee variations from cappuccino latte to espresso--and on and on. Specialty coffees can be found served everywhere from sports stadiums to hospitals today.

69. Fruit drinks are another big growth area--with cranberry, apple, tropical juices and blends all playing star roles.

70. To sum it all up, here is a list of What's Hot in foodservice:

- Breads--crusty, fresh, often ethnic
- Beans--especially black beans
- Grains, including rice, cornmeal, polenta and cous cous
- Chili--vegetarian or con carne
- Chilies--and other "hot" spices
- Chutney, salsa and relishes
- Marinades and vinaigrette
- Garlic--roasted, chopped, any everything else
- Asian ethnics including curries, satays, noodles and dumplings
- Grilled anything; also stir-fry
- Cheesecake (which has replaced apple pie as our top foodservice dessert)
- Coffee

71. And here's a list of some of the items consumers are ordering more often, based of R&I's Tastes of America Survey:

- Entree salad
- Grilled chicken
- Frozen yogurt
- Vegetarian entrees
- Decaf coffee
- Grilled fish
- Iced tea
- Stir-fry entree
- Grilled chicken sandwich
- Chicken wings
- Mexican food--fajitas
- Oriental food

72. But there are losers as well. Here is the list of some items consumers say they are ordering less:

- Cakes
- Pies
- Pork
- Spirits
- Ice Cream (regular)
- Soups

73. And here are the top items added to menus (in 1993) by category:

- Appetizer Chicken Wings
- Salad Grilled Chicken Caesar
- Vegetable Stir-Fry
- Starch Seasoned Fries
- Center of Plate Chicken-fried Steak
- Ethnic Entree Fajitas

Dessert Specialty Pie
Sandwich Chicken Fillet
Bread Pizza Bread/Focaccia
Beverage Cappuccino

74. According to R&I's 1993 Menu Census, these were the top entrees (sandwiches such as burgers not included) on foodservice menus:

Chicken Breast Fillet
Turkey Breast
Chili
Roast Beef/Prime Rib
Lasagna
Broiled/Grilled Chicken
Fried Chicken
Breaded/Fried Shrimp
Baked/Roast Chicken
Hamburger Steak

75. But it's important to remember that classics remain. While the french fries of the '70s have been given new twists as spiral fries, seasoned fries or skin-on fries, french fries remain on the top ten list year in and year out.

76. And while grilled chicken sandwiches have replaced burger as the top-selling item where served, more restaurants still serve burgers than any other sandwich item.

77. As America moves into the next century, it will be even more important, but also even more challenging, to have a nutritional data bank that is up to date and available to all. I know you will meet the challenge.