

U.S. FOODLINK

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Foodservice Demand Remains Solid IN THE FACE OF INFLATION

While high inflation has more consumers choosing to dine in, demand for foodservice remains strong in the U.S.

In fact, 47% of operators reported an increase in consumer traffic compared to 39% who saw a decline, according to Datassential. Additionally, 46% of adults say they're not using restaurants to dine on-premises as much as they would like, according to the National Restaurant Association.

Restaurants are looking for compelling reasons to convince budget-conscious shoppers to visit their locations, which means they need to be on top of the latest ingredient and menu trends. The right dish at the right price can be the difference between someone choosing to cook for themselves instead of treating themselves to a night out.

The National Restaurant Association (NRA) expects consumers to be on the lookout for comfort fair, and the top food in this category will be fried chicken. A survey found that 70% of chefs say the "chicken sandwich wars" are still in play, creating opportunities to stand out with spicy, sweet or combination variations on the classic sandwich.

The rise of chicken sandwiches coincides with the reopening of offices across the country, which has led more and more consumers to seek convenient lunchtime meals and dinners. This also offers an opportunity for restaurants to fight back against rising ingredient costs, as chicken sandwiches can use less expensive cuts but still make a flavorful meal. Other handheld menu options, such as French toast sticks, are expected to grow in popularity as well due to their convenience.

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Foodservice Demand Remains Solid *Continued*

On the healthier side, cauliflower also has been growing on menus across the U.S., particularly as alternatives to traditionally meat-based appetizers, according to US Foods. Instances of cauliflower wings are up 431% over the past four years, while buffalo cauliflower dishes have experienced 348% growth during the same period. This supports the NRA's survey, in which chefs ranked cauliflower as the second-hottest appetizer, topped only by charcuterie boards.

Foodservice operators looking to comfort customers while maintaining high profit margins will turn to grain-based foods such as breads and pastas, according to Technomic. The firm expects grains to play new roles in different meal parts, including desserts and drinks, and the sheer variety of available grains means that cuisine from around the world can flourish under this trend.

"Operators will harness the versatility of flour by innovating with traditional dishes, such as English muffin pizzas, focaccia French toast and fried lasagna, and global options, including Jamaican coco bread and Sardinian pane carasau flatbread," Technomic said.

"Expect a spotlight on rice in new preparations, such as aging, and international applications, including Philippine suman rice cakes and South Indian appam pancakes, made with fermented rice batter. As for other grains, millet and teff will become more commonplace gluten-free alternatives, while freekeh and emmer will give ever-popular bowls new life," Technomic added.



follow a vegan diet, and the fact that mainstream foodservice operators like Burger King and California Pizza Kitchen are adding meat alternatives and plant-based meats to their menus serves as further proof of this trend. NCR expects options like vegan chicken nuggets, vegan chorizo and vegan bacon to become even more popular in the U.S.

Mushrooms are becoming a popular option in restaurants due to both their health benefits and variety of different flavors. The portabella burger is a classic vegetarian option, and a key part of the plant-based burger's massive 2,824% growth over the past four years, but the incredible versatility and variety of fungus-based ingredients mean mushrooms will make their way into a number of dishes, particularly for vegan and vegetarian restaurants.

Many restaurants are also looking for ways to improve sustainability. While this often means sourcing local foods, most ingredients need to come from somewhere else for at least part of the year. Restaurants are looking for manufacturers and suppliers touting their own sustainable efforts, which makes them perfect partners for foodservice operations looking to do the same.

While there are any number of trends to explore, one overarching theme for the coming year will be price. Ingredients are expected to get more expensive, and restaurants will be seeking ways to avoid passing on the costs to customers while preserving their own bottom lines.

"Inflation is shifting consumer spending habits, and while there is a heightened appetite for restaurant experiences and connection, diners are laser-focused on finding value," said Hudson Riehle, SVP of Research for the NRA.

"The challenge is how to fuse consumer desires for the new and trendy with their expectations for price paid."

No one will be immune to rising prices, but smart manufacturers can find the right avenues to maximize the value of their ingredients by aligning them with up-and-coming trends and high-margin items. Surveys have shown that interest in foodservice is stronger than ever, and it's up to restaurants and suppliers to provide the irresistible menu options that will drive trips even in the face of inflation.



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This interest may converge with an at-home focused trend Whole Foods Market predicted for 2023: plant-based pasta alternatives designed to help consumers up their fruit and vegetable intake. Ingredients like spaghetti squash, hearts of palm and green bananas are expected to join existing alternatives like chickpea pasta and cauliflower gnocchi to create a plant-powered pasta revolution.

A number of sources note that the rise in vegetarian and vegan consumers isn't slowing down.

Surveys have found that as many as one in 10 Americans

Fish, Beans and Lentils Offer Alternatives to Sustainable Ingredient Staples



While organic foods are near-synonymous with sustainability, environmentally focused consumers are expected to turn to a variety of other options, each with their own benefits.

Foods from farmed fish to the humble lentil all bring their own sustainable bona fides, and they can all stand out as ingredients that go above and beyond for companies looking to maximize eco-friendly options.

The Specialty Food Association noted that demand for alternative seafood options is one of the top trends for 2023, driven by overall demand for sustainable options. While plant-based fish is one of the categories, marine farming also is on the rise as a way to offer real fish without harming wild populations. Seaweed and algae also are expected to appear on more consumers' plates as the potential of these plants becomes more mainstream.

A more focused but potentially interesting sustainable seafood trend is copli, or Asian carp. This species is invasive to the American Midwest and has been considered a pest, but there is a push to make it part of the dinner table as a food item. While the effort remains local for now, the fish could provide an opportunity for seafood that can be wild-caught while still providing sustainable benefits.

Beans are another area that hasn't been front-and-center in the sustainability debate, but opportunities exist to connect them with conscious consumers. Some food companies are putting a greater emphasis on soil health and nitrogen in their practices and packaging, which can spice up "boring" ingredients like millet or flax. One example is Alpha Food Labs' Varietal Crop Crackers, which provide information about their three-year crop rotation schedule directly on the packaging.

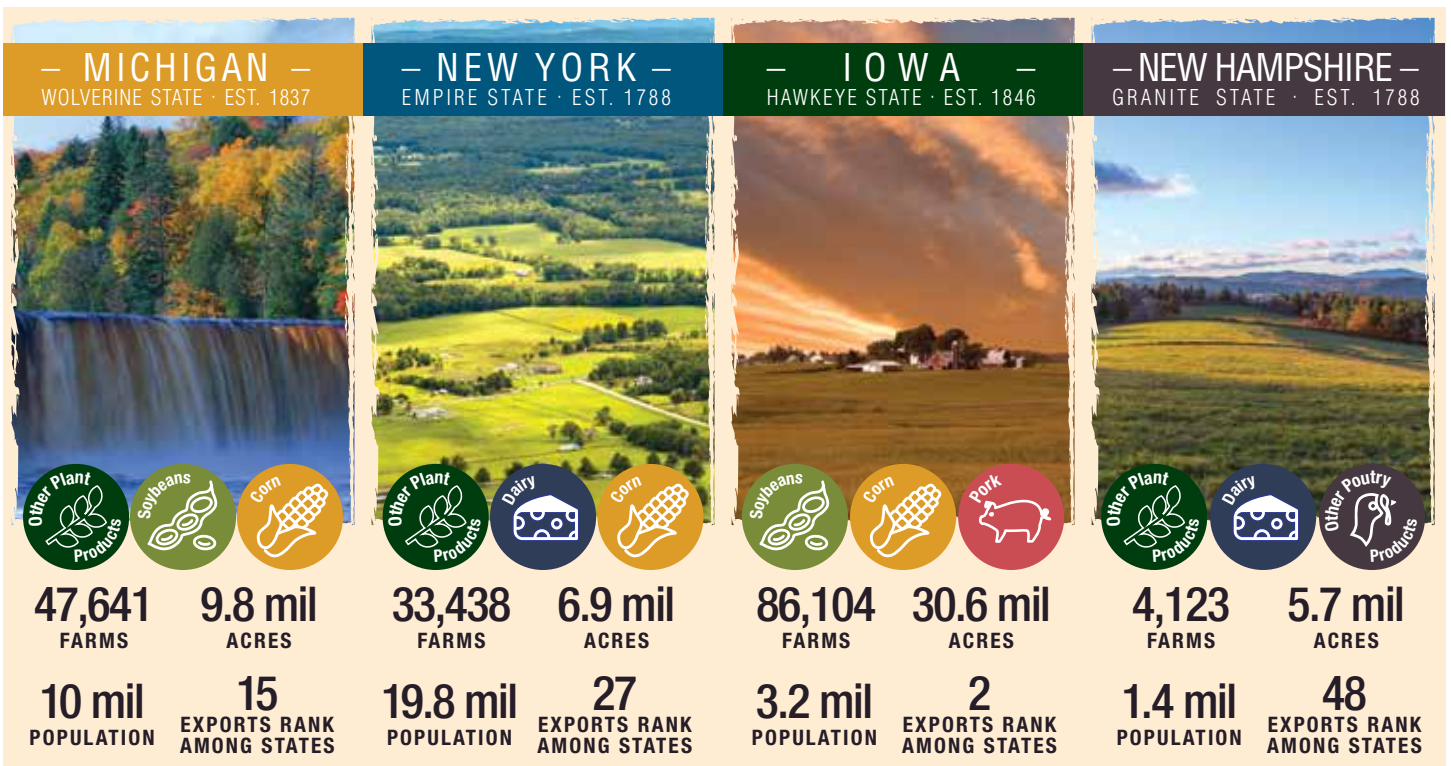
"Currently, the most popular callout we're seeing on pack is food grown using regenerative agriculture," said Ranjana Sundaresan, lead research analyst at Spoonshot. "Smaller companies focus on specific methods of regenerative ag, like crop rotation."

Chickpeas, which are grown in the Midwest and West, also are gaining a boost for their sustainable properties. These legumes are good at returning nitrogen back to the soil, which makes them well-suited to being rotational crops. The liquid in chickpea cans, aquafaba, can be used as an egg substitute in baked goods, which further stretches chickpeas' sustainable capabilities.

Lentils are another ingredient expected to generate more interest due to the plant's unique properties. The Canadian Roundtable for Sustainable Crops found that lentils are actually net-carbon neutral – a growing concern for consumers in their purchasing decisions – and don't require irrigation. Additionally, pods, shells and stems can be distributed back to the land for use as natural fertilizer.



Featured U.S. Midwest & Northeast State Profiles



news briefs

Cargill believes food prices will likely decline next year, even as global crop stockpiles stay tight. CEO David McLennan also asserted that just one bad crop would be enough to send prices higher, reported *Bloomberg*.

Fading supply chain issues could mean a season of plenty for American consumers. Industry executives and analysts expect full store shelves and deals on many products. With global supply chain pressures easing, pricing pressure is moderating even if costs remain elevated when compared to 2021, reported *The Wall Street Journal*.

Nearly half of adult respondents are choosing cheaper snack brands these days. Additionally, a survey from Attest revealed that over half are cutting down on fast food. Attest surveyed 2,000 people across America as part of its research.

Inflation hasn't dissuaded consumer-goods suppliers from upselling premium products. Consumer uptake has eased, but companies like Molson Coors and Procter & Gamble are betting that even when things are austere, consumers will still spend on "simple luxuries," reported *Bloomberg*.

Approximately 42% of consumers worldwide think most people will be eating plant-based food in the next 10 years. These foods will take the place of traditional meat, according to a new study conducted by GlobeScan and science-based nonprofit EAT. The study gauged the opinions of 30,000 global consumers.

When pressed for time, many consumers choose convenience over price. As a result, they eschew more expensive (and often healthier) meal options. Many double-digit price hikes in meat and poultry are prompting grocery buyers to opt for money-saving combo deals and for options with less meat content, reported *Progressive Grocer*.



Grocery store foodservice is trending up. According to research from FMI-The Food Industry Association, deli-prepared food sales jumped 9.3% year-over-year and almost 20% since before the pandemic, to over \$30 billion. Pizza sales were particularly strong, reported *Supermarket News*.

Despite inflation, plant-based shoppers remain loyal to their favorite products. New research from The Kroger Co. and the Plant Based Foods Institute (PBFi) shows that 95% of plant-based consumers have increased or maintained their plant-based spending from 2021, reported *Progressive Grocer*.

Produce and sustainability are a natural match, and responsible produce packaging is a rapidly rising trend among growers. More eco-conscious consumers are demanding sustainable packaging and bills like California's Plastic Pollution Prevention and Packaging Producer Responsibility Act may become more common, reported *The Packer*.

Functional beverages grew in popularity over the past five years. This was driven by consumers seeking better-for-you drinks. Now, Precedence Research estimates the global functional beverages market will grow nearly 9% annually through 2030, when it's forecast to be worth \$279.4 billion, reported *TechCrunch*.



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Perfect Life Nutrition, LLC dba P-nuff Crunch

West Orange, New Jersey

P-nuff Crunch is a baked peanut puffed snack made from a combination of navy beans, peanuts and rice that are blended and baked into a light & crunchy peanut puff. The flavors are described as salty and sweet roasted peanut. As seen on Shark Tank.

Currently available in five roasted peanut flavor combinations: Original (Roasted Peanut), Cinnamon, Cocoa, BBQ, and Cheddar-Jalapeno (vegan). Perfect for anyone that wants to enjoy a healthy and fit treat without the guilt.

Natural and GMO-free ingredients | 5g of complete plant-based protein | 3g of fiber per serving | Low in sugar (2-3g per serving) | Lower sodium | 1/3 less fat than most salty snacks | Gut-friendly | Gluten free | Made in USA pnuff.com



Katz Gluten Free

Mountainville, New York

Established in early 2006 by Mrs. F. Katz, with not much more than a home model kitchen mixer, some thoroughly tested recipes, and an unyielding request for perfection, our famously delicious confections rapidly spread, and so did our base of operation. Today, we operate our state of art facility, certified Gluten Free by the GIG, for our unmatched reliability in complying with strict GF standards. Our facility is also completely nut free, dairy free and Kosher.

We feature an extensive selection to meet the culinary demands of every gluten intolerant individual. Our products consist only of pure, all-natural high quality and fresh ingredients, with no preservatives added, to enjoy absolutely no-guilt consumption!

Today, we are a recognized leader in the category, with nationwide distribution across all channels. We are ranked the #1 brand in the Frozen Breakfast/Dessert category according to *Spins*. We are also experiencing strong global growth, as we are spanning through 20+ counties. katzglutenfree.com



Shullsburg Creamery

Shullsburg, Wisconsin

For nearly a century, Shullsburg Creamery has used the best ingredients, rich traditional recipes, and a hands-on approach to produce some of the most flavorful cheese in the world. The true art of adding flavors to natural cheese is to enhance the flavor of the cheese, not overpower it. Sweet and tangy whole natural blueberries are added to our artisanal white cheddar cheese to find just the right balance of flavors. This new and delightful taste sensation is sure to exceed expectations and excite your tastebuds. Try this award-winning Blueberry Cheddar cheese with grilled pork or roast duck, sweet white wine, Belgian ales, and single malt scotch.

shullsburgcreamery.com



Health Enhanced Foods

Rockaway, New Jersey

Health Enhanced Foods' Ketogenic Seed Flour is made with high-quality seeds and is gluten-free, nut-free, grain-free, plant-based and filled with natural vitamins and minerals – perfect for those looking for a healthier and keto-friendly flour alternative. It's an easy way to enjoy your favorite breads, muffins, pancakes and more with just a simple swap. Our two other ketogenic flour mixes: Ketogenic Almond Baking Mix and Ketogenic Coconut Baking Mix, provide a variety of meal options.

Founder Caroline Egbel's love and proficiency in flour blending started out of desperation when trying to help a family member suffering from a brain tumor and learning that a proper diet could improve health. She turned her knowledge and practice of creating alternative flour blends into Health Enhanced Foods with the goal of serving people with different medical conditions and dietary needs.

100% plant-based | Rich in healthy fat, plant protein and dietary fiber

HealthEnhancedFoods.com

For more information about these or other Featured Products please email: FoodLink@foodexport.org.



Panache. Beverages. Better for you.

Saint Paul, Minnesota

Botanical infusions in apple juice revitalize the body, satisfying your soul. Functional beverages with no empty calories made with Ayurvedic recipes, the food science of yoga, for balance and harmony. Méthode champenoise double fermentation, as good as any fine champagne but at 1/3 the price. Celebrate with a “pop.” It is “the Prosecco of apples.” Pair it with appetizers, main courses, desert and all grilled dishes.

100% Juice, Dry Sparkling 4.5% ABV | Traditional | Hand-crafted | 100% Women owned | Minnesota based | Certifications: WBENC, FFFL, WBE. panacheapple.com



MNR Holdings LLC

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Flower Juice serves either as a supplement for directly infusing other foods (e.g., one sachet added to juice, commercial yogurt, kefir, etc. at time of consumption) or as a starting culture for yogurt fermentation.

Our bacterial species suits the needs of those already fermenting at home, plus anyone new to probiotic-rich foods with delicious on-the-go offerings. Unlike other supplements that customers take as flavorless tablets and pills, Flower Juice’s “on-the-go” line of products can be directly added to your favorite smoothie, iced beverage or yogurt.

Flower Juice products are produced with quality as a top priority. This means non-GMO, gluten-free, vegan, Kosher, and Halal. The probiotics included in our formulations support immune health and digestive health. FlowerJuiceco.com

**Flower Juice is a trademark owned by MNR Holdings LLC. For retailers and fundraisers alike visit our Kidzconfections division too. After creating, manufacturing and successfully selling numerous licensed and private label products, our Kidz Confections® brands surpassed the short-lived concept of novelty. Our Kidz Confections® Brands continue to sell strongly across the globe.*



Masters Gallery Foods Inc.

Plumouth, Wisconsin

As a leading national cheese supplier, Masters Gallery Foods maintains one of the largest privately held cheese inventories in the U.S. Our state-of-the-art production facilities cut and wrap cheese products for distribution throughout the U.S. and Puerto Rico with exports to China, Mexico, and other parts of the world. Masters Gallery serves about half of the top retailers in the U.S. with private label and store brand cheese programs. The company also serves many of the nation’s largest foodservice wholesalers and distributors, national and regional restaurant chains, and the USDA school lunch program. Besides retail and foodservice, our industrial/ingredient sales division is a major cheese supplier to cut and wrap operators, food processors, and cheese ingredient manufacturers. At Masters Gallery Foods, the right cheese matters and the right people make all the difference. mastersgalleryfoods.com



Cherry Central Cooperative Inc.

Traverse City, Michigan

Cherry Central Cooperative has 50 years’ experience; growers from Washington, Utah, Idaho, Michigan, and Canada; and nine processing facilities. We specialize in Montmorency Tart Cherries: dried, frozen, puree, juice or concentrated.

Montmorency Tart Cherries have a sweet-sour taste and unique nutrient profile. The distinctive taste and deep red color of these cherries are due to the concentration of anthocyanins, a type of polyphenol in the flavonoid family. Tart cherries are a good source of Vitamin C, Vitamin A, and copper. Tart cherries are perfect for making pies but can also transition easily from sweet to savory uses. We supply food service, retail, bulk ingredient, co-pack, and private label products.

Clean label ingredients | Gluten, soy, chemical preservative & additive free
cherrycentral.com

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