

Nutrition FORECAST

Healthy foodservice trends for 2016

By Lucia Weiler



March is Nutrition Month in Canada. What better time to freshen up your menu to appeal to changing consumer demands, or update your nutrition knowledge?

Some of the greatest opportunities in foodservice are menu innovation, increased consumer choice, more healthy options, improved ingredient quality and flavour, according to a report from the *2015 Canadian Chain Restaurant Industry Review* (Eating Patterns in Canada - Part 1, 2010 & 2015). With this in mind, here is a look at the top five healthy foodservice trends for 2016.

1. START THE DAY WITH BREAKFAST

We have all heard that breakfast is the most important meal of the day, and consumers are looking for ways to give their morning a healthy start. The older we get, the more likely we are to eat breakfast, while younger people between ages 18 and 34 tend to skip breakfast more often. Canadians are increasingly relying on restaurants for breakfast: the morning meal is growing faster than any other daypart. Greek or regular yogurt parfaits are common on the breakfast menus. Expect to see porridge with a healthy twist using other grains such as rye, spelt, black rice and quinoa. Build on the breakfast sandwich trend with menu items such as frittatas with fresh vegetables, smoked fish and artisan cheeses. This Mediterranean-style eating pattern, in convenient single-serve portions, may be attractive to consumers seeking healthy, fresh, wholesome choices.

2. VEGGIES RULE

Canadians are trying to eat more vegetables and fruit! In the latest Dietitians of Canada Tracking Nutrition Trends report, 85 per cent of Canadians said they made an effort to eat more vegetables and fruit in the past year. Vegetables are ready to take a starring role in the centre of the plate -- and foodservice operators can help consumers meet their goal of eating more

vegetables. One way is to increase the vegetable choices on your menu. In addition, innovative and creative foodservice operations can build on the well-established trend of fresh and local to create veggie-centric meals. Make them healthful yet flavourful to delight consumers looking for plant-based menu choices.

3. PROTEIN IS CHANGING

Higher cost of meat and the desire to reduce waste by using everything from nose to tail has raised interest in under-utilized stewing cuts and organ meats. Chef Leonhard Lechner of Humber College in Toronto believes "there will be a strong increase in the entire industry going from expensive protein to less expensive ones. We will see more stewing and braising meats as well as organ meats on the menu."

Health-conscious consumers will opt for less beef, bacon and other processed and red meats, and instead look to seafood, nuts and seeds, eggs, poultry, and dairy to provide quality protein in their diets, according to a trends forecast from Today's Dietitian. Meatless proteins are also gaining ground and regular menu items such as braised tofu are popular at restaurants including Chipotle. In keeping with this trend, 2016 has been declared the International Year of Pulses by the United Nations -- celebrating the goodness of peas, beans, chick peas and lentils. Stay on trend by including these nutritious and versatile sources of protein on your menu.

4. SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental sustainability is important to many Canadian restaurant operators, and packaging is a great example, says Susan Joseph, chef at Humber College in Toronto. The Foodservice Packaging Institute notes that sustainability is driving foodservice packaging and compostable packaging is a key trend. Registered Dietitian Sue Mah has noted a change taking place at some quick-service restaurants: "I love seeing more plates and silverware at (quick service) eateries now instead of plastic plates and cutlery," says Mah. "Some foodservice establishments also encourage consumers to bring in their own containers for take-out food."

5. FRESH, SEASONAL, LOCAL

Consumers are eager to learn more about their food, where it comes from, the farmer who grew or raised it and how it was prepared. Transparency in ingredient listing and menu planning is an opportunity to build an authentic story in foodservice. Using local ingredients also means eating in season, and highlighting foods at certain times of the year. Locavore consumers also argue that eating local foods is better for the environment, since the food doesn't have to travel very far, meaning less energy is used for transportation.

The goal of National Nutrition Month is to make it a little easier for Canadians to choose, eat and enjoy healthy food. You can play a role by making small, healthy changes one meal at a time. Dietitians are uniquely trained food and nutrition experts who can translate scientific and nutrition information and work closely with you to create healthy and tasty menu items your customers will love.

Lucia Weiler BSc, RD is a registered dietitian-nutritionist who specializes in communication, marketing, education and regulatory affairs related to food and beverages. As principal of Weiler Nutrition Communications Inc., Lucia provides expert services on nutrition trends, food science and labelling compliance. As the co-founder of Nutrition for NON-Nutritionists, TM and a faculty member at Humber College School of Hospitality, Recreation and Tourism, she teaches nutrition, food safety and professional development. Contact lucia@weilernutrition.com, twitter @LuciaWeilerRD.