Consumer Trends: IFT Says Diners Demand Healthier Fast Food

CHICAGO (Newswise) — There is no question that dieting and healthy eating has become a greater topic of conversation in recent years and the fast food industry has taken notice. Eighty-seven percent of fast food operators say their customers are paying more attention to nutrition than they were two years ago (National Restaurant Association). In the March issue of *Food Technology* magazine published by the Institute of Food Technologists [1] (IFT), Contributing Editor A. Elizabeth Sloan writes about the increased demand for healthier options on fast food menus.

1. 60 percent of frequent fast food diners cite healthy menu options among their top reasons for choosing a limited-service restaurant (NRA 2014 Forecast).

2. Almost one-quarter of adults ordered more healthy fast food items in 2013 than they did in 2012; in addition people ages 18-34 were more likely to do so (Mintel 2013 Quick Service Restaurants—U.S. report).

3. 89 percent of diners stated “fresh” is the menu descriptor that best conveys health in fast food restaurants. Other terms such as “real,” “handmade” and “never frozen” also signal health. (Mintel’s 2013 Healthy Dining Trends).

4. The 400-600 calorie range received the most votes for an acceptable level of calories in a healthy fast food meal; only 3 percent of those surveyed see menu items with more than 1,000 calories as healthy (Mintel).

5. Only 13 percent of consumers are regularly counting calories (FMI Shopping Healthy Survey, 2013).

6. More than one-third of parents feel that fast food restaurants do not offer enough healthy breakfast choices for kids (Technomic Breakfast Consumer Trend Report, 2013).

7. Foodservice operators ranked gluten-free as the top menu trend and healthful kids’ meals were second. Other hot trends included: fruit/vegetable sides, locally sourced protein/meat/seafood, low-fat milk/100 percent juice, organic items, grain-based salads, and snack-sized offerings (NRA’s 2014 Forecast).

8. Fresher/better-for-you dominated the list of fastest-growing menu items in 2013, and products perceived as indulgent or unhealthful (e.g. chicken nuggets, French fries, pies, mashed potatoes, fried chicken, and hash browns) were among the poorest performers (NPD/CREST).

9. Healthy/light sandwiches are projected to enjoy strong growth through 2022; turkey sausage and egg whites continue to gain ground in the breakfast department

(NPD Group The Future of Foodservice Report, 2013).

10. Diet, carbonated soft drinks are giving way to flavored/enhanced waters, teas, and hand-squeezed fruit drinks (NPD/CREST).

Read the full Food Technology article here *[2]*

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This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Institute of Food Technologists. Since its founding in 1939, IFT has been committed to advancing the science of food, both today and tomorrow. Our non-profit scientific society—more than 18,000 members from more than 100 countries—brings together food scientists, technologists and related professionals from academia, government and industry. For more information, please visit ift.org *[3].*

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