

# WHAT'S HOT



2022 Culinary Forecast







# WHAT'S HOT in 2022

As the restaurant industry starts to reset and focus on the future, trends old and new will take the spotlight on menus and in off-premises transactions.

For the What's Hot 2022 Culinary Forecast, the Association partnered with the professional chefs of the American Culinary Federation, whose members were invited to review and rank (as Hot, Not Hot and Perennial Favorite) a list of 109 food items and culinary concepts identified by the Association and Technomic's Menu Research & Insights Division.

Using their culinary expertise, chefs forecast what they think will reign on menus in the year ahead in 12 categories of trends, including daypart occasions, menu categories, beverages, flavors, global inspirations, packaging/off-premises trends and industry macro-trends.

This report includes the top three trends from each category.



# What we found

Attention to health is back at center stage.

Immunity-boosting foods and plant-based sandwiches make up three of the Top 10 Trends for 2022, as consumers balance the comfort foods they demanded during the pandemic to refocus on better-for-you options.

Immunity-boosting foods, from tomatoes, seeds and berries to olive oil and dark chocolate, are said to fight cancer, dementia, and viruses among other benefits.

The plant-based market continues to grow and plant-based proteins in sandwiches, breakfast sandwiches and burgers all rank as hot trends. They make the top three in three categories.

In addition to trending, plant-based selections are increasingly providing menu alternatives in the face of animal protein supply shortages and imparting a sense of eco-friendliness and healthiness. Plant-based proteins check a lot of boxes.

Traditional proteins continue to rank hot, but this year, chefs indicate the less expensive cuts—thighs vs. wings, chuck vs. loin—will show up more often on menus. Whether the trend is due to supply issues, rising food costs, culinary exploration or all these influences combined, expect the trend in '22.



## WIDE, WIDE WORLD OF FLAVOR

Global influences traditionally score high on the annual What's Hot Survey and '22's forecast is no different. The top five regions influencing menus next year are:

1. Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Singaporean, Philippine)
2. South American (e.g., Argentinian, Brazilian, Chilean)
3. Caribbean (e.g., Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican)
4. North African (e.g., Moroccan, Algerian, Libyan)
5. Western African (e.g., Nigerian, Ghanaian, Western Saharan)



## Packaging prioritized

Off the menu, what's hot focuses on the sustained demands of off-premises traffic. In this year's survey, the top three rated items were sustainable packaging, packaging that keeps food intact in transit, and packaging that retains temperature.

Packaging's place in the top spots tells us that off-premises traffic will remain high in the coming year. As packaging has quickly evolved during the pandemic, operators are trying new options to provide the best experience for their customers, and they're focused on how to do it sustainably.



# CHEF'S CHOICE

A verbatim response section of the 2022 What's Hot survey invited respondents to type their answer to the question:

**What do you think the Hottest Culinary Trend will be in 2022?**

More than 86% of respondents answered. The following items drew the highest number of verbatim responses.

1. Sustainability
2. Plant-based foods
3. Comfort foods
4. Healthy and immunity-boosting foods
5. Global fare and flavors





# TOP 3 TRENDS

## by Daypart



## BREAKFAST

1. **Nontraditional breakfast proteins**  
(chorizo, *vegan bacon*)
2. Plant-based breakfast sandwiches
3. Egg-based breakfast bowls



NON-TRADITIONAL  
BREAKFAST PROTEIN

EGG-BASED BREAKFAST BOWLS





TOP 3 TRENDS by Daypart  
continued

# LUNCH



1. Plant-based sandwiches
2. Globally inspired salads
3. Grain-based bowls

# DINNER



1. Less-expensive chicken cuts (*thighs vs. wings*)
2. Plant-based burgers
3. Less-expensive beef cuts (*beef chuck vs. loin*)



PLANT-BASED SANDWICHES



LESS-EXPENSIVE CHICKEN CUTS



PLANT-BASED BURGERS



# TOP 3 TRENDS

## by Meal Part



### APPETIZERS & SIDES

1. **Upscale potato chips**  
*(new preparations, flavored with unexpected ingredients)*
2. **New appetizer wings**  
*(flavor-fusion sauces, global accents, plant-based protein vs. chicken)*
3. **Globally spiced fries**  
*(with furikake, za'atar, etc.)*



UPSCALE POTATO CHIPS




NEW APPETIZER "WINGS"



GLOBALLY SPICED FRIES





ALTERNATIVE SWEETENERS

TOP 3 TRENDS by Meal Part  
continued



## DESSERTS

1. **Alternative sweeteners**  
(*maple sugar, coconut sugar*)
2. Alcohol infusions
3. CBD desserts



## SNACKS

1. **Immunity-boosting snacks**
2. CBD-infused snacks
3. Reduced-sugar snacks



ALCOHOL INFUSIONS



IMMUNITY-BOOSTING  
SNACKS



# TOP BEVERAGE TRENDS



## TOP 3 NON-ALCOHOL

1. Nut milks  
(cashew, pistachio, etc.)
2. Non-alcohol seltzers/  
sparkling water
3. CBD-infused beverages

## TOP 3 ALCOHOL

1. Hard seltzer
2. Uniquely spiced cocktail rims  
(Tajin, togarashi, etc.)
3. At-home cocktail kits

HARD SELTZER

UNIQUELY SPICED  
COCKTAIL RIMS



# TOP 3 TRENDS

in Condiments,  
Sauces, Spices,  
Seasonings



1. Gochujang
2. Tajin
3. Harissa



GOCHUJANG, TAJIN



CORN WITH TAJIN

PORK WITH GOCHUJANG SAUCE



# TOP 3 Global Trends



1. **Southeast Asian**  
(Vietnamese, Singaporean, Philippine, etc.)
2. **South American**  
(Argentinian, Brazilian, Chilean, etc.)
3. **Caribbean**  
(Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, etc.)



SOUTHEAST ASIAN



SOUTH AMERICAN



CARIBBEAN



# TOP 3

## Packaging/ off-Premises Trends



1. Sustainable *(reusable/recyclable)*
2. Food quality *(travels intact)*
3. Retains temperature





# TOP 3 Macro Trends



1. Zero waste/sustainability

---

2. Menu streamlining  
*(fewer menu items, cutting SKUs, etc.)*

---

3. Immunity-boosting/  
functional ingredients

---




IMMUNITY-BOOSTING/  
FUNCTIONAL INGREDIENTS





# Methodology

The National Restaurant Association partnered with the American Culinary Federation to conduct its annual What's Hot survey. Targeted to thought leaders in the culinary world, 350 professional chefs offered their expertise to select what they believe will be the leading food and menu trends for 2022.

Presented with a list of 109 food items and culinary concepts compiled by Association experts and Technomic's Menu Research & Insights Division, respondents were asked to rate each item as Hot, Not Hot, and Perennial Favorite.

The top results are here.



## For more information, contact

the National Restaurant Association  
[askus@restaurant.org](mailto:askus@restaurant.org)

### Hudson Riehle

Senior Vice President,  
Research & Knowledge Group

### Bruce Grindy

Vice President & Chief Economist,  
Research & Knowledge Group

### Helen Jane Hearn

Senior Director, Content Strategy

### Beth Lorenzini

Managing Editor, Enterprise Marketing

Design:

### Dani Smith

Creative Director  
National Restaurant Association

### Susan Raynor

Senior Art Director  
National Restaurant Association

Food Styling: **Lisa Cherkasky**

Photography: **Scott Suchman**

Additional Photography: Getty Images

