



American Culinary Federation



ACF 2025 *Trends Report*



TOP 10
Food & Industry
Trends to Watch



DETROIT-STYLE PIZZA

117% GROWTH ON U.S. MENUS

Global PIZZA INSPIRATIONS

Regional Classics, Global Inspirations

Pizza is experiencing an unprecedented renaissance, with chefs reimagining traditional styles and incorporating global inspirations. They're also embracing regional U.S. variations—**Detroit-style pizza**, with its crispy, square edges and brick cheese blend, saw a whopping 117% year-over-year increase in menu penetration in September 2024, according to Datassential research. **Grandma pizza**—a thin, Sicilian-style pizza typically baked in a sheet tray and popular in Long Island, New York—had a 35% increase in menu appearances the last year, followed by classic **New York fold-over style** (20%) and **Chicago-style deep dish** (15%). St. Louis-style, with its cracker-style crust, sweet sauce and Provel cheese is also growing, Datassential noted.

Fusion pies are also taking center stage, with pizzas inspired by Middle Eastern za'atar, Korean bulgogi, or Indian naan. Additionally, af&co notes the rise of Instagram-friendly toppings like pistachios, which add visual appeal and a unique nutty flavor to savory or dessert pizzas.

Exclusive pizza trend research from Datassential highlights emerging ingredients gaining traction on pies. For example, **hot honey** has grown more than five times (430%) on pizza menus in the last four years, adding a sweet-and-spicy dimension that consumers increasingly crave. **Pepperoni cups**, the caramelized, curled meat topper achieved through higher heat applications, have also grown five times more on pizza during that time frame. In just the past year, **cotija cheese** has grown on menus by 115%, sometimes as part of Mexican-inspired street corn pizza. Other trending pizza toppers (ranked in order of menu growth increases in the last year) include garlic herb flavoring, spicy barbecue, poblano peppers, dill pickles and vodka sauce, according to Datassential menu research.

Consumers are also drawn to innovation in crusts. **Cauliflower crusts**, offering gluten-free and health-conscious options, have grown by 367% over the past four years, according to Datassential, reflecting a demand for traditional dough alternatives.

WHAT'S NEXT IN 2025?

ACF proudly presents this 2025 Trends Report, a curated exploration of the trends shaping the future of food.

From soulful dishes with modern twists, to renewed excitement around pizza, new menu innovations for vegetables and groundbreaking technologies transforming kitchen operations, this forecast offers a comprehensive look at how chefs, restaurateurs, and diners are shaping what's next.

Let this report be your guide to navigating 2025's most compelling culinary movements and to prepare for a future full of flavor and inspiration.



HOT HONEY
5X GROWTH
ON MENUS IN 4 YEARS



Classic fried chicken and buttery waffles



Modern chicken livers & waffle with crispy skin, maple-shallot vinaigrette & cornmeal waffle at Burdell (Oakland, Calif.)



Research shows Nashville hot chicken is trending

Soulful SOUL FOOD

Embracing Heritage, Flavor and Comfort

In 2025, soul food continues to evolve as chefs honor its rich heritage, while introducing inventive updates that reflect modern palates. Signature dishes like fried chicken, biscuits, mac n’ cheese, collard greens and sweet potato pie are being elevated with artistic plating, unexpected global spices, and heirloom ingredients.

Many dishes associated with soul food stem from the resourceful cooking of diverse groups, including enslaved people who made do with limited ingredients and homegrown vegetables. Appalachian cuisine similarly reflects ingenuity born of rugged terrain and scarce resources. Today, chefs are using their creations to tell these powerful stories.

At **Burdell Soul Food in Oakland, Calif.**, Chef/Owner **Geoff Davis** reimagines and elevates classic soul food by offering dishes like chicken liver mousse paired with cornmeal waffles. **Chef Ashleigh Shanti** explores Black Appalachian cuisine at his restaurant **Benne on Eagle in Asheville, N.C.**, offering dishes like black-eyed pea hummus and benne-seed biscuits with country ham and hollandaise, fusing African

American foodways with Southern traditions. **ChòpnBlòk in Houston** celebrates West African flavors with traditional dishes like red stew and suya, aimed at providing an immersive cultural experience highlighting the rich culinary heritage of the West African diaspora.

Fried chicken, a hallmark of soul food, is celebrated for its versatility and enduring popularity. Datassential highlights emerging “next-level fried” dishes, from classic bone-in chicken to country-fried steak, along with regional specialties served with local vegetables and sauces like new wave barbecue sauce, comeback sauce or remoulade. **Nashville hot chicken** remains a standout favorite, the research firm notes.

Soul food innovations of today also include vegan adaptations of timeless favorites, such as jackfruit BBQ or plant-based mac and cheese. **Souley Vegan in Oakland, Calif.**, for example, offers a plant-based version of chicken and waffles using seitan, an okra-forward gumbo without the meat, and a vegan-friendly mac n’ cheese creole spice-infused, plant-based cheddar.



Glutinous Rice Dumplings at Mr. H in Boston (Credit: Josh Jamison)

45%
OF DINERS THINK
ASIAN CUISINES
WILL INFLUENCE
FUTURE TRENDS

37%
OF DINNERS VALUE
AUTHENTICITY



Chicken dumplings at Mr. H in Boston (Credit: Josh Jamison)

Exploring CHINESE CUISINE

Journey Through Regional Flavors

Chinese regional cuisines are captivating diners with their diverse flavor profiles and cultural significance. From the fiery, numbing heat of Sichuan dishes to the delicate, savory complexity of Cantonese dim sum, chefs are showcasing the depth and breadth of China's culinary heritage. There's also growing interest in underrepresented regions like Yunnan, known for its fresh herbs and mushrooms, or Xinjiang, where skewered lamb and spices dominate, according to Datassential.

What's more, research shows consumers have a growing interest in the diversity of Asian cuisines. According to MenuMatters, **45% of consumers believe Asian cuisines will have the biggest impact on future food trends, second only to American cuisine at 46%**. Additionally, 18% of consumers are actively seeking more global flavors at restaurants, reflecting a heightened curiosity for authentic dining experiences. MenuMatters also notes that **37% of diners say they perceive a restaurant more positively when people from that culture are eating there**, emphasizing the value of authenticity and cultural connection.

At the Michelin-starred restaurant *Mister Jiu's in San Francisco*, **Chef Brandon Jew** blends traditional Cantonese cuisine with modern Californian influences in dishes like Dutch Crunch BBQ Pork Buns and Sea Urchin Cheong Fun. At *Bonnie's in Brooklyn, N.Y.*, **Chef Calvin Eng** offers a contemporary take on Cantonese-American cuisine, drawing inspiration from his heritage and childhood meals with dishes like Char Siu McRib and Mapo Tofu Lasagna.

Rubato in Boston modernizes owner **Laurence Louie's** family traditions in the form of Fried Chicken Bolo Bao Sandwich combining classic Chinese bakery elements with contemporary flavors. **Chef Qiu Xingzhong** blends Sichuan and Ningbo cuisines at *YongChuan in NYC*, offering dishes such as Braised Bass with Rattan Peppercorns and Yellow Croaker Spring Rolls. Also in *NYC*, *Potluck Club* presents a Cantonese-American menu with dishes like Berkshire pork and chive potstickers with chili crisp and salt and fried rice with classic XO sauce, shrimp and Chinese sausage (lop churng).

Pickles GALORE

The Tangy Revival

Pickles are experiencing a creative revival, with chefs pickling just about everything these days to add pops of flavor through acid and tang. This trend also intersects with sustainability, as pickling allows chefs to preserve peak-season produce and reduce food waste while experimenting with unexpected combinations.

The popularity of pickled items is undeniable, with **31% of menus now featuring pickled ingredients and 67% of consumers having tried pickled items**, according to Datassential. Furthermore, **46% of consumers say they love or like pickled flavors, reinforcing their widespread appeal.**

Datassential highlights pikliz, a Haitian spicy slaw with pickled cabbage, carrots, bell peppers and Scotch bonnet peppers, as an example of bold, briny flavors bringing excitement to dishes.

Recent innovations include pickled fries, a TikTok sensation that involves pickling potato slices in a brine of mustard seeds, dill, and garlic before frying, creating



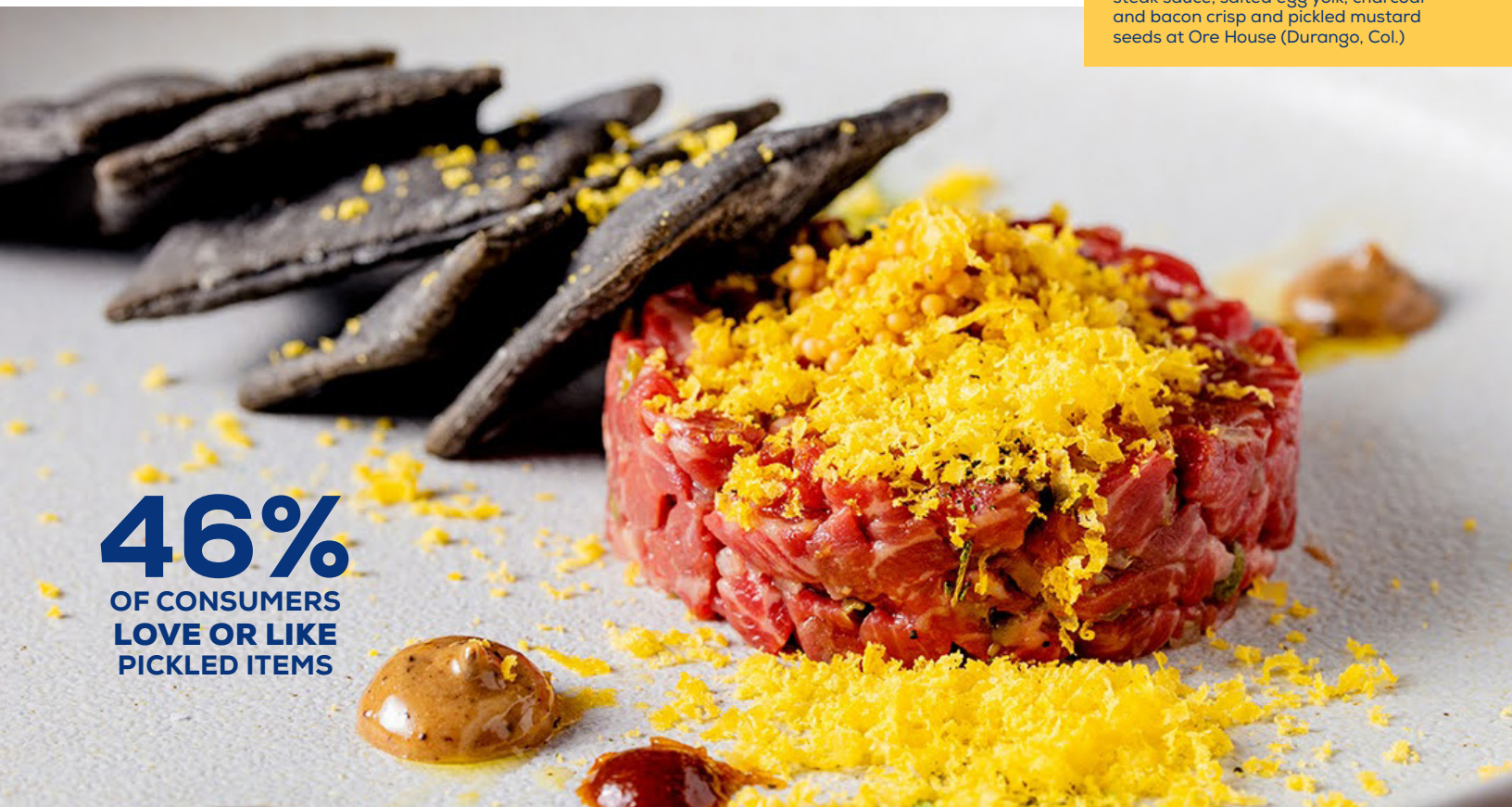
Pickled fries, a new social media sensation

a complex flavor profile beyond traditional seasoning. Pickled mustard seeds, often referred to as “mustard caviar,” are gaining traction for their bold, vinegary flavor and textural intrigue. *The Rockville, Md.-based chain Silver Diner*, features pickled ginger (aka, “sushi ginger”) in the meatless tacos, *Chart House Restaurant, headquartered in Houston*, serves Ahi Nachos made with fried wontons, pickled ginger, and wasabi cream.

Last summer, *Pizza Hut* launched Pickle Pizza for a limited time at a single location in New York City that had to be ordered in-store. The pizza featured buttermilk ranch, crispy breaded chicken breasts seasoned with Nashville hot, onions, and spicy dill pickles. Dill in general is becoming a trending flavor profile, Datassential notes, appearing beyond just the classic dill pickle like in applications such as compound butter, dips, salad dressings, seafood-forward eggs benedict, chicken sandwiches and even infused liquors for cocktails and mocktails.

Steak tartare with black garlic aioli, steak sauce, salted egg yolk, charcoal and bacon crisp and pickled mustard seeds at Ore House (Durango, Col.)

46%
OF CONSUMERS
LOVE OR LIKE
PICKLED ITEMS





Nourishing BEVERAGES

Functional Wellness Meets Smarter Sipping

The rise of non-alcoholic and functional beverages is transforming drink menus as part of a healthier lifestyle shift. Datassential identifies gut-friendly options like kombucha and antioxidant-rich teas as popular choices, while af&co highlights non-alcoholic functional drinks crafted with sparkling teas or adaptogenic ingredients for health-conscious consumers.

Following on the gut health movement, *some consumers are replacing traditional coffee drinks* with mushroom “coffee” as a natural source of energy with enhanced digestion and immune-boosting nutrients. For a gut-enhancing boost and comforting savory notes, some coffee concepts are even adding ferments like miso and shoyu to their coffee concoctions. There is also the rise of nourishing teas like chamomile, matcha and various types of green teas offering antioxidants.



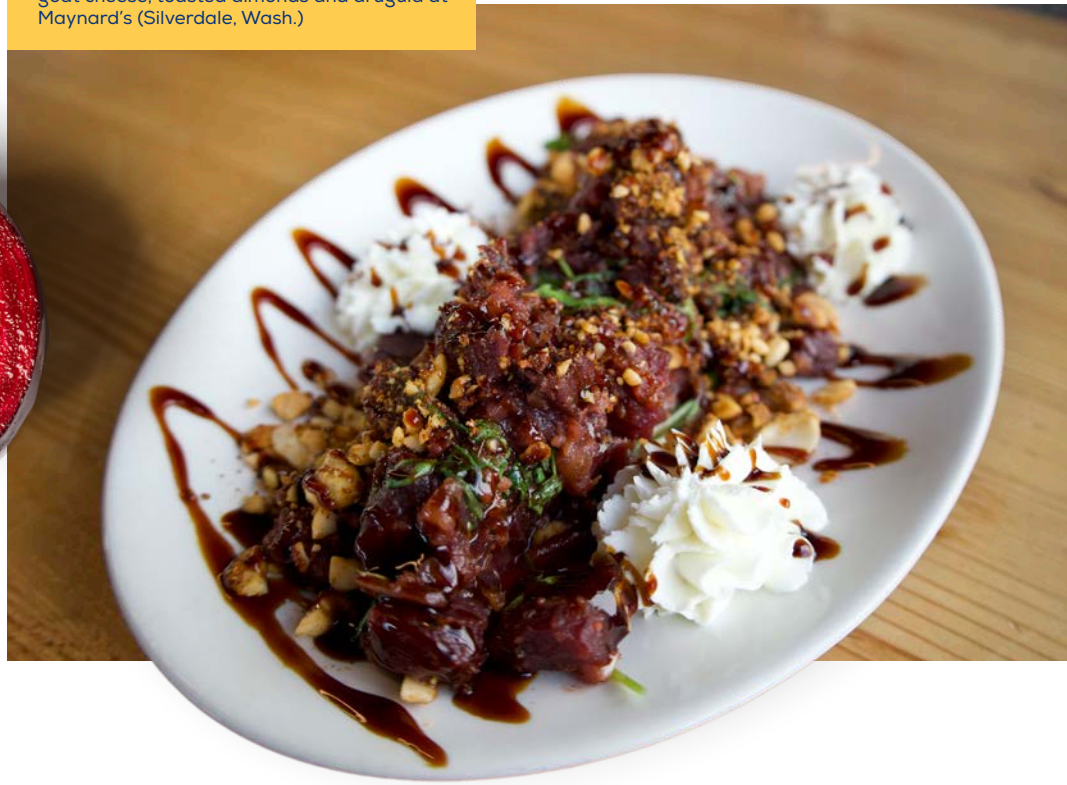
Kombucha, housemade sodas, floral beverages and beverages spiked with CBD and adaptogens—both touted for their naturally calming properties—are becoming *the new alcohol replacements* for a nice night out without the hangover. Datassential notes that *rooh afza* is having a moment; the South Asian, concentrated herbal syrup is typically made from a blend of fruits, veggies, rosewater, water lilies, and herbs like mint, and commonly mixed with milk or water and ice to create a cold, sweet, floral-tasting beverage.

Increasing numbers of operators around the country are offering their own, *housemade soda* tap options, naturally flavored with lemon and citrus, Datassential notes. Hop water—soda flavored with hops—is being positioned as a beer alternative at some breweries and restaurants nationwide. And then there’s *“dirty soda”*—soda water infused with flavored syrups, cream, fruit, tapioca pearls and even cookie crumbs. These beverages are not considered “health” drinks per se, but they’re being positioned as alcohol and coffee replacements, offering a customizable adventure in a cup, af&co notes.





Smoked beets with bacon-date jam, whipped goat cheese, toasted almonds and arugula at Maynard's (Silverdale, Wash.)



THE VEGETABLE *Renaissance*

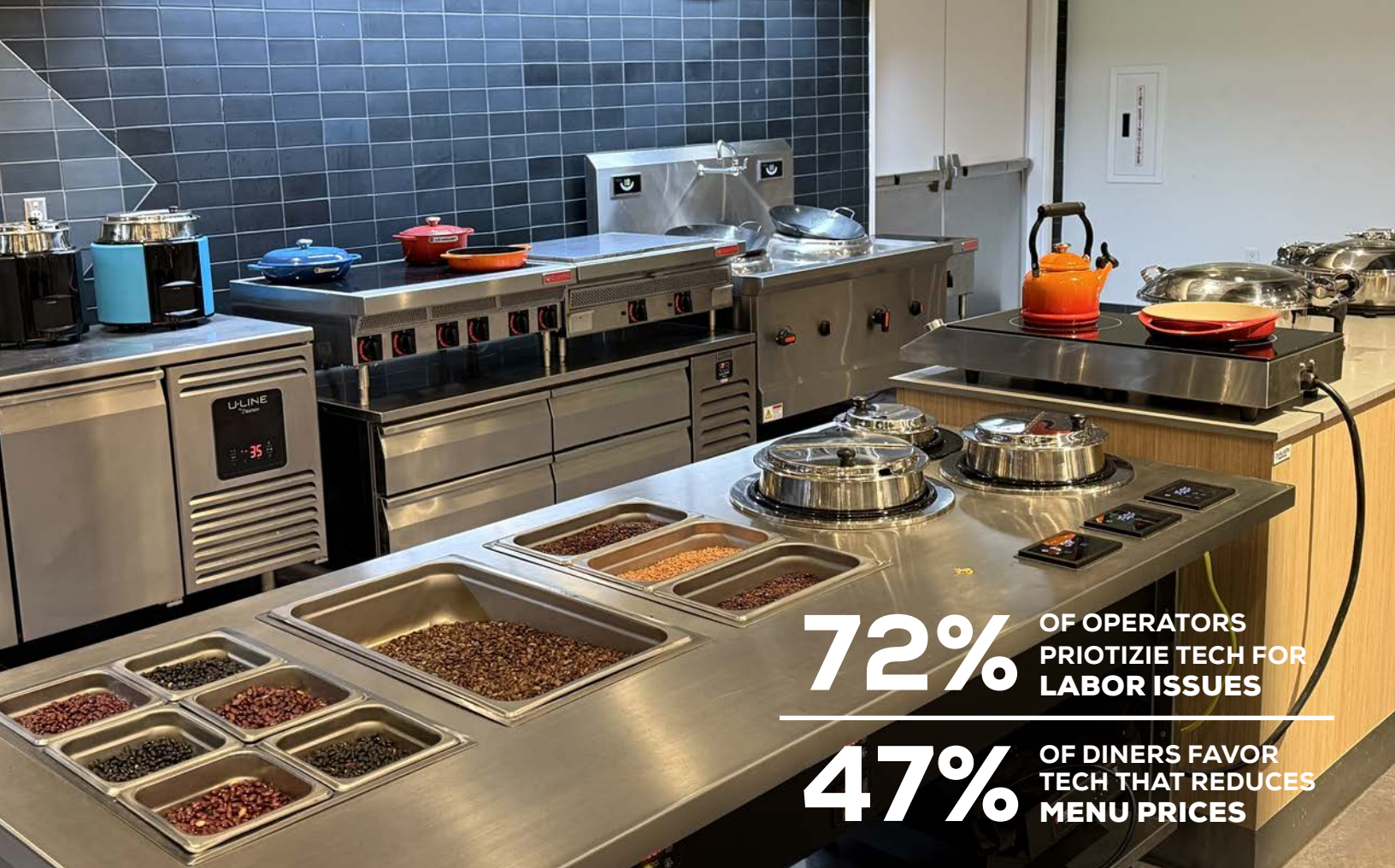
A New Center of the Plate

Vegetables are becoming culinary stars, celebrated for their versatility and vibrant presentation. Chefs are also sourcing more food from regenerative farmers who are employing practices to improve soil health and the nutritional density of our food. What's more, they're continuing to focus on zero-waste initiatives by striving for "root-to-stem" use of the whole vegetable as well as repurposing kitchen scraps into flavorful stocks, sauces, garnishes, desserts and even beverage ingredients. Regenerative farming practices, which support soil health and biodiversity, are playing a vital role in sourcing seasonal ingredients. These efforts not only satisfy eco-conscious diners, but also set a new standard for the culinary industry.

This trend toward vegetables and plants aligns with broader consumer goals around health and happiness. According to MenuMatters research, *being healthy is the second most important life goal for consumers (37%), right after being happy (44%)*. As plant-based options grow in popularity, 35% of consumers believe plants and plant-based foods will be one of the top things we eat more of in the future, following home-cooked meals (39%) and comfort foods (37%).



Innovative plant-based creations, from beet tartare and smoked beets to mushroom-based "meats" and carrot lox, are transforming vegetables into satisfying, protein-rich alternatives. Af&co reports the popularity of chickpea creations—mostly in fried form—as growing, illustrating how humble legumes can serve as hearty, gluten-free menu items. At *Stretch Pizza in NYC*, chickpea fries are infused with basil and served with "stretch sauce." The same type of fries come with harissa aioli at One Market in San Francisco. At *BRASS in NYC*, chickpea fries, referred to as "panisse" replace the traditional potato ones served with mussels. At *Bar Diane in Portland, Ore.*, also serves panisse—here, with a green tahini dipping sauce.



72%

OF OPERATORS
PRIOTIZIE TECH FOR
LABOR ISSUES

47%

OF DINERS FAVOR
TECH THAT REDUCES
MENU PRICES

Sustainability & KITCHEN ELECTRIFICATION

A Greener Path Forward

As concern about the impact of carbon footprints on our environment grows, *Several municipalities, particularly in California, have enacted or proposed restrictions on gas appliances in new constructions to meet climate objectives.* This regulatory shift is prompting restaurants to consider electric alternatives. However, operators and industry stakeholders have expressed concern about the costs associated with this major switch, particularly in states where natural gas provides a cheaper, easier-to-access energy source.

Still, some chains are leading the way on all-electric kitchens. *Chipotle* publicly announced plans to implement all-electric kitchens in new locations to align with sustainability goals and reduce carbon footprint.

Chick-fil-A operates all-electric kitchens in various locations. *Captain D's* upgraded its gas-heated fryers to countertop electric versions. *Legal Sea Foods* has revamped some of its kitchens by replacing traditional gas appliances with smaller, modular electric equipment to enhance operational efficiency and cut carbon footprint.

These transitions reflect a broader industry trend towards electrification, aiming to reduce carbon footprints and comply with emerging regulations. However, the shift involves considerations such as infrastructure upgrades and potential impacts on culinary techniques. Industry experts say that ongoing technological advancements and supportive policies are essential to facilitate this transition within the restaurant industry.



Culinary TECH INTEGRATION

The Future Is Now

The kitchen of the future is here, featuring AI-powered innovations that blend efficiency with creativity. *Tools like robot sous chefs, smart ovens, and automated inventory systems* are helping restaurants streamline operations while maintaining high standards of quality. In addition, chefs are experimenting with tech-enhanced creativity, using tools like *3D food printers* for intricate presentations or *AI to generate new flavor combinations*. Af&co notes the broader societal embrace of artificial intelligence, which also includes behind-the-scenes applications like personalized digital menus and data-driven marketing strategies.

According to Datassential, 72% of operators say that automation and technology should be focused on improving their existing problems. Sales and labor woes are top drivers for operators to use automation, while image-related motivators rank lower, as much of the “coolness factor” of many automations may have worn off. Datassential reported in 2024 that *45% of midscale operators are investing in technology that increases*

sales or brings in patrons and 37% using technology to manage a limited labor pool. On the consumer front, MenuMatters reports that *47% of consumers want to see restaurants and foodservice operations investing in technology if it makes their meals cost less.*

AI is becoming an integral part of both back-of-house operations and customer-facing experiences. *73% of consumers say they would share their data with food companies if it meant having completely customized meals*, highlighting the demand for personalization, according to MenuMatters. What’s more, MenuMatters reports that 23% of diners would always choose an AI-predicted meal if it were 99% accurate, and 27% say they would choose it most of the time, demonstrating an openness to tech-enhanced dining while preserving elements of choice.



73%

OF DINERS ARE WILLING
TO SHARE DATA FOR
CUSTOMIZED MEALS





Poke bowl with salmon, masago and veggies

POKE BOWL GREW
24% OVER 4
YEARS

RAW FISH *Rave*

Simple, Sustainable, Sophisticated

The popularity of raw fish continues, with dishes like *sushi, poke, and ceviche* serving as a canvas for sustainable sourcing and creative expression.

“Simple seafood” was dubbed by af&co as the cuisine of the year as chefs highlight pristine, locally caught seafood. *Raw bars* offer just that—a concise menu, a small line and simple food done really well at a time when inflation, labor and high food costs are having a big impact on the industry, the consultancy notes. *The hot new raw bar and seafood counter Penny in NYC*, for example, demonstrates how simplicity in preparation can still leave room for bold creativity. Meanwhile, af&co notes that interesting dips, housemade hot sauces and zesty mignonettes, like kimchi mignonette, add sophistication and excitement to seafood pairings.





THE SPICY *Revolution*


Heat with a Purpose

Spice has evolved far beyond just adding heat to food; today, it's about creating layers of flavor, exploring regional authenticity, and offering a complex sensory experience. Chefs are looking to the global spice pantry, incorporating variety and diversity into familiar heat. Smoky *chipotle*, tangy *Korean gochujang*, fermented *Chinese doubanjiang*, and the deep richness of *nduja sausage* are just a few examples of how spiciness is being used to add boldness to dishes. *Calabrian chiles* and the fiery *Caribbean Scotch bonnets* also bring a strong flavor to the table, each with its distinctive balance of heat and character.

A particularly notable trend is the rise of *hot honey*, which is gaining popularity with **31% of consumers identifying it as "on trend"** Among Millennials, this number jumps to 36%, according to MenuMatters. Spicy foods are no longer seen as a niche interest, but have become a mainstream culinary movement,

ranking as the fifth most-mentioned option when consumers were asked about the trendiest foods.

The trend is further fueled by the growing interest in small-batch hot sauces and spice blends that allow diners to personalize their heat levels. Another intriguing development is the rising popularity of less conventional peppers. *Sweetie drop peppers*, native to Peru, offer a balance of sweet and mild heat. Meanwhile, *sansho pepper*, made from the peppercorns of a Japanese plant, delivers a citrusy, tingling sensation, enhancing dishes with a unique numbing spice. These developments reflect the exciting evolution of spice, transforming it from a simple heat source to a nuanced, globally inspired culinary trend.



Penne Arrabbiata—a classic Roman dish with red chili-spiked "angry" sauce (Credit: Barilla)