

2015 MENU TRENDS to Watch

Based on Analysis of
What's Hot in 2015
Culinary Forecast



- **WASTE NOT, WANT NOT:** Environmental sustainability remains among the hottest menu trends. As with most maturing trends, sub-trends emerge over time; in 2015, food waste reduction and management is at the forefront of restaurant operations. Composting, recycling and donating are all tactics of food waste strategies tying into both sustainability and social responsibility. In addition, food costs are once again on the rise and back on operators' list of top challenges, spurring restaurants to take a closer look at minimizing waste and surplus as a cost-management tool.
- **OUR HOUSE:** As the local sourcing trend continues at full speed in 2015, so does the hyper-local sub-trend. Beyond restaurant gardens, hyper-local is extending more fully into house-made, farm-branded and artisan items. From ice cream to cheese, pickles to bacon, lemonade to beer, restaurants are producing their own signature menu items from scratch.
- **IN A PICKLE:** Borrowing terminology from social media, pickles are the Throwback Thursday of food trends. Common preparation methods for millennia, pickling and fermenting are making a comeback big time - but with a modern twist. Restaurants are exploring house-made pickles, ethnic flavors and specialty vinegars, small-batch producers with less traditional vegetable varieties, and fermented flavor profiles in a variety of dishes.
- **GOING (MORE) GLOBAL:** An evolving trend for the past decades, ethnic cuisine continues its inroads into mainstream menus. As American palates become more sophisticated and adventurous, so do restaurant offerings. Micro-trending in this category is fusion cuisines, as well as authentic and regional, underscoring the breadth and depth of flavors being explored. Also, ethnic ingredients, including cheeses, flour and condiments, are increasingly finding their way into non-ethnic dishes. Specific dishes, such as ramen, ethnic street-food and kids' entrees are also gaining momentum.
- **MINI GOURMET:** Children's menus are drawing more attention from chefs and restaurant operators. Gone are the days when kids' menus were nothing but hot dogs and things shaped like cartoon characters and dinosaurs. This is the era of gourmet kids' dishes adapted from adult menu items with more adventurous flavor profiles than traditional children's options. Growing in parallel are healthy versions of those gourmet kids' items, featuring whole grains, vegetables, oven-baked items and entrée salads.
- **SHOOTING MENU STARS:** As some items heat up in the menu trends environment, others are losing steam. The meteoric rise of hybrid desserts (looking at you, croissant-donut) is beginning to take a downward trajectory. And while still among the top trends, the momentum of gluten-free cuisine is slowing down. Similarly, the trendiness of Greek yogurt is decelerating. Only time will tell if these items will become perennial favorites or yesterday's news.

