Food Trends - Sustainable, Responsible, Feel-Good Foods on the Rise

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Canadians have a good appetite for tasty and internationally inspired food, but trends also show a desire for sustainable, responsible, feel-good food choices. Health and wellness trends show there is an appetite for healthier options especially as our population ages and faces a growing number of health concerns. There is a continued shift to more snacking, less structured meals and more requests for customized choices. Technology has changed everything about food and nutrition knowledge, cooking and eating out. Consumers will continue to demand more insight about their food, while those supplying it will be called upon for greater transparency about the food they offer.

Sustainability Charges On

The trend for sustainable agriculture, farming and eating is here to stay. According to Agriculture and Agri- Food Canada, there are five broad categories of sustainable food and beverages: organic, locally sourced, fair- trade, carbon footprint and eco-packaging. Canadians have an appetite for foods they can feel good about that will help the whole planet.

According to the Canadian Organic Growers, organic foods were the highest growing trend in the Canadian health and wellness market in 2010 at a 5.4 per cent growth rate with produce growing at an average rate of 20 per cent per year as consumers believe they taste better and are healthier. Globally, the organic food and beverage industry is expected to reach combined sales of $36.1 billion.

Not only will organic food continue to be popular, but so will farmers' markets, community gardens and grow- your-own food initiatives. Menus that have a focused farm-to-fork emphasis and locally inspired, back-to-basics themes will be fashionable. Think about offerings such as organic salad greens, local greenhouse heirloom tomatoes and farm-fresh bread with ancient grains and free-range local eggs.

Green Guilt About Food Waste

As the sustainability of agriculture, farming and eating continues to be of concern for Canadians, you may also hear more discussion around being conscious about food waste. The 2012 *Eco Pulse Survey* by the

Shelton Group found that of any sustainability effort, the highest "green guilt" came from wasting food (which was twice as high as not recycling or forgetting to bring recyclable bags to a grocery store.)

One-third of food produced for humans (1.3 billion tonnes) is wasted somewhere along the food chain each year (The *Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2011).* In Canada, an estimated $27 billion per year of Canadian food ends up in the landfill and composting.

Where does food waste come from? Fifty-one per cent of Canadian waste comes directly from food thrown away in Canadian homes followed by 18 per cent packaging/processing, 11 per cent retail stores, nine per cent field, eight per cent food service and hotel/restaurant/institutional food outlets and three per cent transportation/distribution.

Since food waste creates higher car- bon and methane, there are economic and environmental benefits to wasting less food. The UK website, www.love- foodhatewaste.com, provides some in- sight about waste throughout the food chain.

Key Consumer Groups

According to the 2011 Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's document *Health and Wellness Trends for Canada and the World,* there are three key consumer groups that are keenly interested in health and wellness products. First, the LOHAS (lifestyles of health and sustainability) which are a relatively small but growing group of 41 million individuals who focus on a range of health, fitness, environment, personal development, sustainable living and social justice. The second consumer group is women who are generally concerned with body image and health and who often make purchasing decisions for their children and house- holds. Finally, the ageing population is keenly interested in maintaining a healthier lifestyle. They are educated, spend money on healthy products and represent a growing population (baby boomers aged 65 years are estimated to grow to 6.5 million by 2020).

Also of interest is the emerging role of men in the supermarket and kitchen. ESPN reports that 31 per cent of grocery shoppers are men, which is more than twice the 1985 amount. In a 2012 survey by Cone Communications, 52 per cent of fathers identified themselves as the primary grocery shopper. Also notable is that more dads than moms (52 per cent versus 46 pre cent) are likely to plan meals for the week ahead of time.

Better-For-You (BFY) Foods

A better-for-you (BFY) food is one that has been reformulated to reduce or remove a substance (fats, sugars, salt and carbohydrate). In 2010, the global BFY sales totalled $160.3 billion US with demand largely driven by consumer fear of obesity. Consumers are more educated about food products and health risks and are interested in lower-calorie, reduced-carbohydrate, whole-grain and portion-controlled products as well as foods with less sodium, sugar and fat. They are also interested in fortified or functional foods with more antioxidants, fibre, calcium, probiotics and omega-3 fats. The biggest challenge is delivering on taste while supplying the health benefit. Food producers, grocery stores and restaurants are going to be asked more and more to become transparent about for what they stand.

Naturally Healthy Foods

You can expect Canadians to continue to look for naturally healthy foods that are minimally processed and often contain vitamins, minerals and other nutrients. Unsweetened fruit and vegetable juices, fresh-pressed juices, smoothies, natural mineral water and spring water are all popular. Global sales of naturally healthy beverages are expected to grow to $184.5 billion by 2015.

Sales of tea products continue to grow with consumer awareness of the health benefits of tea. Fermented tea beverages such as iced green tea, kombucha tea are also gaining popularity.

Whole grains and foods with naturally more fibre such as high-fibre pasta and rice are appealing to consumers since approximately 81 per cent of consumers look for products with higher fibre content. Hemp seeds, chia seeds, flax, quinoa and other whole foods are also trendy.

Gourmet condiments, seasonings, dressings and dips that are 100 per cent natural and free of preservatives and colourings are appealing. Dozens of apps such as Chemical Cuisine, Foodditive, Label Lookup and more speak to this trend.

You will also find a growing number of consumers looking for animals that are grass-fed, grain-fed or free-range as well as meats which are freshly cut, minimally processed and free of fillers, gluten and lactose. As the cost of meat and poultry rises and vegetarian diets become more popular, there may be more focus on meat- less meals and inclusion of nut butters, chick peas, Asian and Indian cuisine and tofu-based burgers.

Specialty Foods

Consumers are demanding specialty products such as gluten-free, lactose- free and nut-free products. Gluten- free products are a growing trend and essential for those with celiac disease, which according to the Canadian Celiac Association affects approximately one in 133 people. Those with non-celiac gluten sensitivity (two to six percent), must also eliminate gluten from their diet although it is not an autoimmune disease and the digestive system is not damaged so it is not known if a gluten-free diet needs to be followed as strictly or for life. Regardless, consumers are buying gluten-free products for medically necessary purposes or as recommended popular by fad diets recommended reducing grains, wheat or gluten.

There has also been a rise in specialty products such as Halal food eaten by followers of Islam and Kosher food eaten by followers of the Jewish faith. Globally, the Halal food industry has grown to more than $632 billion U.S. and represents about 17 per cent of the whole global food industry. The demand for Halal meats may surpass organic meat markets in popularity due to the quality, freshness, safety and treatment of the animals. According to OU Kosher, approximately 80 per cent of Kosher products sold globally are purchased outside of the traditional Jewish market.

Medical Issues

The Boomer population will be controlling a large percentage of dollars spent on food in the years to come.

They are concerned about health and nutrition and struggling with obesity, diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure and more. They need solutions that speak to their needs. Studies by NPD Group in Canada and the U.S. show that Boomers are more concerned about nutrition when planning a meal than any other age group, with 72 per cent of Canadians over 65 regarding nutrition as important as taste. Phil Lempert, "The Supermarket Guru" and CEO of the Lempert Report, suggests Boomers are seeking out oily fish, green tea, dark green leafy greens, sweet potatoes, carrots, tomatoes, dark chocolate, seeds, oils, berries, apples and whole grains. They are also looking for antioxidant and potassium-rich reformulations and sodium-reduced items.

Snack Attacks

Overall snacking, particularly healthy snacking, has increased internationally according to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada's 2011 *Report on Health and Wellness Trends for Canada and the World.* Snacking rather than structured meals has become a normal way of life for many people. Breakfast is eaten for supper and lunch can move into dinner. In an interview for *USA Today,* Kelloggs mentioned that once they realized women were eating their cereal as an evening meal and not just for breakfast, they created advertisements that reflected that message.

In the 2011 *Technomic Consumer Trends Report,* only five percent of consumers eat three square meals. They also report two-thirds of consumers over 25 replace lunch with a snack at least once per week and this number doubles for Millenials (age 18 to 25) who tend to snack most frequently.

Restaurants and food producers should create snacks choices that are appealing to eaters at all times of the day. Consumers might want breakfast choices all day, a hot meal at midnight or dessert in the early morning.

Consumers also want choice. Fifty- eight percent of consumers like to customize their restaurant choice when eating out (Mintel, 2011). They are interested in customizing their meals and may want several options for portion sizes (such as a down- sized or snack-sized option) or the opportunity to create a family size value option. Consider offering share plates, mini taster options as well as bundled price points for two or three sides.

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Technology and Transparency

The world of technology and smart phones has changed how we shop, cook and eat. Mobile devices are being used to prepare shopping lists, com- pare prices, find recipes, check sales, share meal photos and rate restaurants. Consumers can search a food's ingredient and track all the details of their food and nutrition.

There are more people blogging, writing and using social media for food and recipe discussions. This year marked the first ever Canadian Food Blogging Conference hosted by Food Bloggers of Canada which speaks to the increase in this topic area.

Lempert suggests new apps are being developed that have sensors that will attach to smart phones and test allergens, ingredients, our blood sugar or blood pressure. Others will determine if produce is ripe or test for foodborne bacteria. Other apps may be able to network with kitchen appliances to tell us how much milk we have in the fridge or to remotely turn on the oven.

Perhaps the biggest way that technology is changing the food industry is by creating transparency. Food producers, grocery stores and restaurants are going to be asked more and more to become transparent about for what they stand. Consumers are craving connection and more of an understanding about who is making their food and why.

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