



Fast and Furious

A look at up-and-coming food trends

Trends in the world of food come and go but here's a look at some of the ones that are expected to have legs. Over the past five years, according to The NPDP Group research firm, the fastest-growing categories (in terms of consumption, not sales) include yogurt, wholesome snacks, meal substitutions, nuts and dips. Other top-10 categories: fruit, ready-to-eat cereals, combo dishes and pizza. **BY NANCY KWON**

"These categories are representative of a larger trend that we are seeing toward snacking and convenience," says Joel Gregoire, an analyst with The NPDP Group. "Snacking occasions are on the rise as people become more time-pressed and look for meals that are easy to prepare and are at times portable. Aside from convenience, these on-the-go meal solutions must also meet requisite nutritional requirements."

Gone are the days of avoiding carbs altogether. Everything is in moderation nowadays. Lucia Weiler, nutrition strategist and marketing consultant, Weiler Nutrition Communications Inc., adds that recent research indicates consumers are

spending more on produce and bakery. "In the bakery aisle healthier breads and better-for-you baked desserts with portion control offer great choices for health-conscious consumers," says Weiler.

Health Trend is Tops

With health concerns top of mind for many consumers, Gregoire notes that people are snacking more as they come to understand that this is a viable companion or even alternative to larger meals. "Many Canadians are accepting that eating smaller portions throughout the day rather than three large meals can yield some health benefits," says Gregoire. "More specifically on yogurt, select Canadian producers have done a good job of communicating the nutritional benefits of yogurt with an emphasis on probiotics and calcium."

Registered dietitian Sue Mah, whose company Nutrition Solutions Inc. specializes in nutrition trends and nutrition communications, adds: "Yogurt is already a nutritious food, but with the addition of probiotics, it really becomes a powerful functional food for consumers who are looking to improve their digestive and overall health." Mah cites food consumption data from Statistics Canada indicating that Canadians are eating 5.4 litres of yogurt per capita, more than twice as much as a decade ago.

Overall Gregoire reports that there's an emphasis on more foods that offer some sort of health benefit. Consumers are not just looking at what foods don't contain, such as trans fats, but they are also looking at what additional health benefits are offered such as omega-3, added fibre and antioxidants to name a few, he says.

It's expected that with time-pressed consumers, functional foods will continue to gain importance. "Functional food categories continue to grow. Interest in vitamin- and mineral-enriched foods are expected to rise with pending regulatory changes to Canada's food fortification policies," says Weiler.

Future of Food

"Flexitarianism" is another trend to keep an eye on. "It's all about being a flexible vegetarian," says Mah, "About 8% of Canadian households self-define themselves as vegetarians, but I predict this number will grow."

With fresh fruit and vegetables accounting for about 25% of all supermarket organic sales, organic is another trend that is expected to continue. Bagged salads, carrots, bananas and apples are the most popular, with organic meat and dairy markets growing. "Consumers are concerned with what's in their food, and what's not," says Mah. "The new mandatory organic regulations in Canada provide reassurance that organic means that the food has no added colours, preservatives, synthetic pesticides, antibiotics or growth hormones have been used."

Along with organic, natural ingredients are expected to gain market share. "Consumers are increasingly more interested about what goes into their food, therefore what's on the ingredient list makes a difference in shopping decisions," says Weiler. "Consumers are looking for more natural, wholesome ingredients. For example, the use of stevia as a sugar substitute is a trend expected in Canada."

For those who can't afford organic, local might be the

next best thing. Dana McCauley, a food trend expert, agrees, adding, "The whole idea of local is becoming profoundly important to consumers due to the economy. People are looking after their own, rallying around those in the community who need the most."

Specialty is Key

Big isn't necessarily the best anymore. Smaller specialty retailers have consumers flocking south of the border. "One of the fastest-growing channels in the U.S. retail grocery market are the specialty grocers, or those focusing on the sale of one main food or beverage category, such as a bakery, butcher, fish/seafood store and green grocer," says Weiler. "According to Agriculture Canada's data, this fast-growing channel in the American retail grocery market is expected to see 19% growth between 2007 and 2012."

Food consumption with a conscience is also a trend to watch out for in 2010. "Consumers are paying more attention to the social, economic and environmental benefits of sustainable food manufacturing practices. Corporate social responsibility is an important future trend," says Weiler.

And while the economy has dampened spending habits, Mah says there's an opportunity to promote frozen foods, particularly vegetables. "Frozen vegetables can take centre stage as an economical and nutritious staple in every household," she says.

Gregoire adds that the grocery industry is well positioned, relative to other industries, with a comparatively low number of consumers indicating that they intend to spend less on groceries in the coming months with a higher percentage of consumers intending on cutting back when it comes to eating out and in other non-food retail and service sectors. But, he points out, this refers to consumers' intentions and not necessarily their behaviour; something only the tills and time will tell. **CG**



Age Matters

As Canada undergoes a demographic shift as the population ages, an emphasis on health is expected to be even more prevalent in the grocery aisles (see Demographic Trends story on page 34). In 2007, Canadians 50 and over represented 33% of the population; by 2017 that number is expected to reach nearly 40%; and surpass 40% by 2022, says Joel Gregoire, NPD Group analyst. "As the population ages, we expect health to continue to be important to the consumer," he says.

When it comes to salt intake, there's a move toward sodium slashing. Under the new Health Check program criteria set out by the Heart and Stroke Foundation, food manufacturers are challenged to reduce their sodium levels even more by November 2010. "Consumers are actively looking for more sodium-reduced products in the market, and they'll also resort to more home cooking using wholesome, unprocessed ingredients," says registered dietitian Sue Mah.