

Looking Ahead: Most-mentioned Food and Ingredient Trends for 2009



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The year 2009 will see the state of our world reflected in food trends as well as in the choices consumers make. Reported trends include everything from the rise in “fresh” labeling to purple tomatoes, nuts, and of course, super foods. The list below sums up the reported predictions and patterns for the year ahead from industry experts, market research groups, foodies, and journalists.

Value

The year ahead will be full of change, and although times may be uncertain with stock markets, fuel prices, and interest rates fluctuating daily, one certainty is that this year people will be looking for much-needed value. The Food Channel Editor Kay Logson noted that the majority of trends for 2009 have a “value” message (8). Moreover, people will also be buying less—consumers will look for ways to be more financially savvy, whether that means creating a budget, trimming expenses, or finding ways to do/make/cook it themselves.

As was reflected this past holiday season, consumers are holding on to their pennies and paying more attention to where their hard-earned dollars are going. For example, Information Resources, Inc. (IRI) recently reported that “financially-strapped consumers across all income levels, including those earning \$100,000 or more, are turning to private label as part of a money-saving strategy” (5). With private-label foods costing an average of 30% less than their brand-name counterparts, it isn’t surprising that shoppers will follow this, and other budget-friendly trends, in 2009.

Comfort Foods

Topping the list of trends for 2009 are comfort foods. Indeed, in times of turmoil, people often return to tradition as they attempt to rekindle a sense of childhood comfort. It makes sense then that, in order to escape the stress and uncertainty so many face, people will return to the flavors and recipes that remind them of happier times—warm and gooey brownies, homemade macaroni and cheese, or simple and healthy soups and stews. In fact, last year, the Food Marketing Institute reported that 71% of Americans were eating out less and staying home and cooking more often (13). According to Tanya Steel, editor-in-chief of

Epicurious.com, the most widely searched keywords are common ingredients such as “chicken” and “pasta” (15). Steel observed that “People are cooking at home. It’s the way to get the most value from your dollar” (15). Mintel reports that comfort food is often connected to times of economic recession and that “comfort food is what people crave when they’re feeling down” (17). Moreover, the number one trend on The Food Channel’s Top Trends for 2009 is “Home on the Range” (8). They noted that consumers will be learning more about cooking and flavors and incorporating that research into their home-cooked meals. Moreover, they foresee a rise in people going online for recipes, taking cooking classes, and sharing family recipes (8). At the end of December, the *Toledo Blade* reported that a whopping “53 percent of consumers said they are cooking more from scratch than they did just six months ago” (17).

One only needs to look at the latest cupcake fad of late to see this return to nostalgia as small cupcake shops, touting the bright, candy-colored treats, pop up across the United States, reporting booming sales (not to mention making the cover of our own publication this month). In the year ahead, there is no doubt that people will be looking to make life a little brighter, and what better way than with tasty, delicious foods from our past.

Green-colored Glasses

If 2008 saw the emergence of eco-awareness, then 2009 will certainly show that green trends are here to stay. People are changing the way they think about, eat, and consume food products. Value- and ecologically conscious consumers will hunt for bargains, yet desire quality, attracted to words like “natural” and “local.” More and more, consumers are concerned with the eco-friendliness of the products they buy, making smarter, more environmentally friendly purchases and choices, including carting groceries home in re-usable bags made of recycled plastic and make “greener purchases” by hunting for the words “free-range,” “biodegradable,” “100% organic,” and “made of recycled material.” In turn, manufacturers are reacting to the changing needs of consumers.

As *Modern Baking* reports, bakery packaging is next in the line of packaging manufacturers to hear the call. “One of the most common steps many packaging manufacturers are taking is using recycled plastic and switching from oriented polystyrene (OPS) to polyethylene terephthalate (PET) to make their plastic containers” (14). The Food Channel noted several companies who are doing their part to go green, citing Kraft turning waste into biofuel and Ben & Jerry’s bringing “the first climate-safe freezer to America” (8). More and more, companies are becoming aware of the urgent need to go green. For example, in a recent press release, Danisco, a world leader in food ingredients, enzymes, and bio-based solutions, noted that they plan to reduce their carbon dioxide emissions by 8–9% annually (12).

Sweetened with Stevia

As people look to more natural foods, they will also be looking for ways to sweeten foods without artificial ingredients. This natural, zero-calorie sweetener, derived from the South American stevia plant, containing no sucrose or fructose, has been recently declared GRAS by the FDA. This year, consumers may soon be seeing more and more products sweetened with stevia, including Coca-Cola's Zero Calorie Sprite Green. In fact, stevia made Datamonitor's list of Ten Trends to Watch in Packaged Goods. The stevia-based sweetener, Truvia rebiana (rebiana is the trade name for sweeteners containing steviol glycoside rebaudioside), marketed by Cargill and developed jointly with The Coca-Cola Company, has as much sweetness in one packet as in two teaspoons of sugar, reports Truvia.com. In the year ahead, we may see this new sweetener explode in popularity. Other stevia sweeteners to watch for include Whole Earth Sweetener Company's PureVia and Wisdom Natural Brand's SweetLeaf (19).

Flower Flavors in Bloom

Another frequently mentioned trend for 2009 is flower flavors, along with more natural, earthy scents. Datamonitor's list of top trends includes "Flower Power," noting that "subtle, non-fattening, and aromatic, floral flavors" are what to look for in 2009, including lavender, hibiscus, and jasmine (7). As reported on Foodprocessing.com, beverages are tending toward the natural and leaving fake flavors behind. They cite organic Ayala's flavored water as a marketer that is "right on trend" with flavors such as vanilla bean, lemongrass, clove and cardamom, lavender, ginger, and orange and lemon peel (10). Mintel advises that "nature inspired aromas will be a real hit" (3). Their Flavor Forecast for 2009 includes persimmon, star fruit, cactus, and lavender, among others. Mintel foresees lavender moving "beyond the home and personal care categories and into food and beverage next year. Already seen in products such as Lindt Chocolat Provence's Lemon-Lavender Dream chocolate (Germany), lavender can be paired with more familiar ingredients to bring a naturally soothing, aromatic quality to food and drink" (3).

Hot New Super Fruits: Wild Berries, Tart Cherries, and Baobab

Fruit lovers know that dark berries, such as blueberries, cranberries, and cherries are good for us. They are filled with vitamins and minerals and are known for their antioxidant health benefits. Blueberries are an excellent addition to baked goods, from muffins to breads to scones and cakes. However, wild blueberries have more health benefits than previously thought. Research published in the *Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry* "shows that these blueberries have the highest cellular antioxidant activity of the 25 fruits tested, as well as the highest total phenolic content and oxygen radical absorbance capacity" (9). Moreover, they "outperformed" two dozen other fruits, including apples, bananas, red grapes, and strawberries in a cellular antioxidant activity (CAA) assay (9).

In 2009, what other vitamin-packed fruits will be making the trend lists? Mintel's Lynn Dornblaser noted that "Baobab [derived from the fruits of *Adansonia digitata*] may well be the super fruit for 2009. Baobab's dried fruit pulp has been approved as a novel food ingredient by the European Union, opening the way for its use in cereal bars, smoothies, and similar food products. It seems that every year we have a hot new super fruit, and it's time for a new one" (4).

According to Datamonitor, the new berry on the block back in 2003 was pomegranate, with less than 50 new products reported (18). The berry then went mainstream, with more than 400 new

products reported in 2007 (18). Other super fruits to watch include acai, goji berries, and mangosteen. Datamonitor notes that the latest and greatest berry is the Maqui Superberry. The berry is claimed to have the highest anthocyanin, polyphenol, and oxygen radical absorbance capacity (ORAC) values—4 to 30 times higher than other berries (18). A new study conducted at the Jean Mayer USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University in Boston, MA, showed that a diet high in pterostilbene (found in berries and grapes) reversed measurable negative effects of aging on brain function and behavioral performance. Moreover, "results indicated pterostilbene was effective in reversing cognitive decline and that improved working memory was linked to pterostilbene levels in the brain's hippocampus region" (11).

A tried and true favorite is the cherry. In fact, McCormick's top 10 flavor pairings included the super-fruit-inspired duo tart cherry and cayenne (1). According to *U.S. News and World Report*, new research ties eating tart cherries to lowering cholesterol, reducing inflammation, and cutting weight and body fat (2). Datamonitor also reported that purple and black carrots are also on the list of new ingredients to watch for, noting that they are rich in antioxidants and that the carrot's pigmentation may help prevent heart disease and cancer, with the number of new products containing these dark-colored carrots five times as high as in 2003 (18). And what comes after purple carrots? Well, purple tomatoes, of course. A recent USDA Foreign Agriculture Service GAIN Report (UK8019) reported that scientists at the John Innes Centre in Norwich, England, developed purple tomatoes high in anthocyanins, known to fight heart disease and cancer (6). The release also noted that "the publicity surrounding their successful trial will be helpful in strengthening the more positive side of the biotech debate."

Gluten-free Fare

Gluten-free fare is finally gaining mainstream popularity. Datamonitor notes that between 2006 and 2007, the new, gluten-free product reports worldwide doubled from 2004 to 2005 (18). From cookies to pasta to ice-cream cones and cereal, consumers can now find traditionally grain-based products that taste good without the gluten!

Foodprocessing.com also reports that this is a trend to look for. "Gluten-free products have been set to evolve from niche to mainstream, but previous predictions for this category have fallen short ... That the gluten-free industry is still capable of significant growth is evident when General Mills replaced barley malt syrup in its Rice Chex cereal with molasses and adopted the necessary steps to prevent cross-contamination during production" (16). Furthermore, Ann Mack, trendspotter with the advertising agency JWT, notes that gluten-free fare is now considered "chic" and "healthy" (15).

Health Nuts

This last ingredient will gain even more popularity in the year ahead. Whether you prefer almonds, walnuts, peanuts, pecans, or cashews, nuts will be the new ingredient to look for in 2009. As consumers gradually shift their perception of nuts from a "fattening" ingredient to a healthy source of vitamins, fiber, protein, and omega-3s, we will see consumption and inclusion rise in a wide range of products. As more of nuts' numerous benefits gain attention, so will the products that contain them. Datamonitor's Product Launch Analytics notes they are showing up in more product launches (7). And why wouldn't they? They add so much flavor and texture, not to mention reducing cholesterol and fighting cancer.

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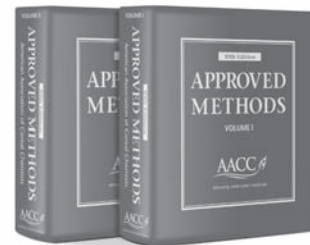
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