

## THE NATIONAL RESTAURANT SHOW *Chicago, May 2023*

**T**he National Restaurant Show opened with the news of new management with the Informa acquisition of Winsight. Speculation about the future dominated conversations among exhibitors and media companies. Restaurant operators, looking for what's new and what's next to delight their customers, were treated to many of the time honored tasting events and hospitality functions.

### VEGAN ENVY

Visitors often have to scour the lower levels and far corners of the show floor to find first time exhibitors. This year the show boasted 800 first time exhibitors and many were given prime locations that drew substantial crowds to sample new offerings.

It was interesting to note the near absence of whole plant products amidst the proliferation of plant based alternatives to favorite meat based comfort foods. It seemed products were developed to appeal to the omnivore desiring the perceived health benefits of plant based foods rather than devotees of strict vegetarian or vegan lifestyles.

Plant forward menus have become a mainstream trend, yet a recent Culinary Visions® study found only 19% of survey participants said they are committed to a vegan lifestyle. 60% said they admired the vegan lifestyle. 71% agreed with the characterization of themselves as a carnivore that loves vegetables.

### CULINARY ADVENTURE

While local foods have a powerful appeal, the intrigue of international foods and flavors is undeniable. This year's show attracted visitors from 107 countries, the largest international representation yet to be seen at this event.

Culinary diplomacy programs promoted the foods and cultures of countries around globe enticing consumers with exotic foods and flavors. 83% of adult consumers responding to a Culinary Visions survey said they enjoy exploring new cultures through food.

Culinary adventure is on the menu for American restaurant patrons with 76% saying they consider themselves adventurous eaters when dining out. 70% said they usually like to try new dishes and flavors when they dine out.

### EXPERIENTIAL CONVENIENCE

Convenience has become an experience for today's consumers. Exhibitors featured unique mobile venues that would be sure to attract crowds. In one mobile unit, touch screen orders were executed by a robotic "cook." Watching the preparation was captivating.

Corrugated shipping containers turned into mini cafes featured modern colors and appealing designs to appeal to a new generation that enjoys convenience yet appreciates shared dining experiences.

Y-Pulse (ypulse.org) found 81% of 18-24 year olds surveyed said they appreciate relaxing and enjoying their to-go meal with others. When queried about specific venue characteristics, 78% of Gen Z participants said they like convenience stores that have café seating.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR FOOD MARKETERS

#### Flavor Exploration

Modern consumers have a powerful sense of culinary adventure when it comes to exploring global foods. Classic comfort foods with a flavorful twist are widely appealing to consumers.

#### Enlightened Nutrition

Consumers have become adept at balancing healthful options and splurge worthy indulgence. Interest in zero proof spirits and functional foods are feeding the desire for wellbeing.

#### Light Footprint Living

Today's patrons are rethinking the environmental impact of their consumption and embracing options that they feel are more sustainable from minimal packaging to biodynamic farming that nourishes and replenishes the land.