

# Culinary Nutrition News: Balancing the Plate from the Less-is-More Perspective

Presented by ACF Chef & Child Foundation and Clemson University

**Most** magic is merely an illusion or distortion of reality. Within each illusion, there may be a series of simple tricks to create a grand spectacle. A well-executed dish is no exception to this idea. One can create a dish that appears to be something entirely different, whether it is a simple dish that actually consists of meticulous layers of textures, aromas and flavors, or perhaps a savory entrée that is created and plated to appear as a dessert. However, in this article we are not focused on constructing food that seems to be something it is not. Rather, we will discuss ways of making a dish that is substantially more filling and satisfying but possesses fewer calories. Though it may seem like a magical feat, creating a dish from the less-is-more perspective is far from an illusion.

## Simple tricks for a healthy fix

As always, the great debate between reductions in portions versus calories plays a major role in the less-is-more strategy. Chefs agree that portion sizes are a good place to start. We are not necessarily promoting the shrinking of portions to minuscule bites, but rather building a plate that contains less fat and calories in a satisfying manner. Therefore, we believe that merging both ideas creates the best and most flavorful results. Decrease the portions of some foods to help lower the calorie content while increasing other foods to heighten the level of satiety for customers. The general idea is to cut back on fat while increasing the fiber of dishes using plant foods as a vehicle for adding color, texture, flavor and volume. There are a variety of lower-fat ingredients

and calorie alternatives you can use, but many say that certain substitutions may be costly to the dish in terms of its flavor or texture. However, it is not necessary to make full ingredient substitutions. Try substituting half. You may be surprised at how little you notice the loss of fat and calories. For example, consider cutting the meat portion of a dish in half and filling the other half with various types of protein, such as beans, lentils, tofu, nuts, or vegetables.

Vegetables are the real trick to plating the less-is-more concept. Vegetables can be manipulated for a variety of useful, not to mention flavorful, and healthful purposes.

- Use vegetable purées as a thickening agent for depth in flavor, texture and color.
- Use vegetable stock as a base.
- Even if you do not use all vegetables as a substitute, start by using half of the vegetable base and half of the normal component. See if you can sense a difference.

## Big trends for a bigger plate

Fortunately, new industry predictions for food and flavor trends points to more healthy-inspired dishes. The trend experts at Mintel, a leading market research company, have identified the six key flavor trends that will be most distinct in 2010.

1. Cardamom
2. Sweet potato
3. Hibiscus
4. Cupuaçu
5. Rose water
6. Latin spices

The National Restaurant Association also conducted an online survey with ACF chefs for 150 of the hottest trends in restaurant menus for 2010. Thankfully, not only are these trends popular, but many are also high in fiber and will help bulk up dishes. Vegetables and produce made quite the presence on the survey, with the following being the most noteworthy:

- ✓ *Locally-grown produce*
- ✓ *Superfruits (such as açai, goji berry, mangosteen, purslane)*
- ✓ *Organic produce*
- ✓ *Exotic fruits (such as durian, passion fruit, dragon fruit, paw paw, guava)*
- ✓ *Micro-vegetable/greens*
- ✓ *Heirloom tomatoes*
- ✓ *Specialty potatoes (such as purple, fingerling, baby Dutch yellow)*
- ✓ *Fresh herbs*
- ✓ *Meatless/vegetarian entrées*
- ✓ *Fresh-fruit desserts*
- ✓ *Braised/steamed/grilled/roasted/puréed vegetables*
- ✓ *Pomegranates*
- ✓ *Figs*

Other fiber-rich ingredients that topped the list were:

- Quinoa
- Brown/wild rice
- Buckwheat
- Lentils
- Couscous
- Polenta
- Fresh beans/peas

## Selling less as more

Last year, Americans prepared and consumed nearly two-thirds (67 percent) of their meals at home, which is up five meals per person from the previous year. This may be due to the fact that 92 percent of grocery shoppers view home-prepared foods as much healthier. Regardless, this is not good news for the restaurant industry. A. Elizabeth Sloan in her latest report writes, “The economy, lack of healthful options, and a new sense of boredom, especially with quick service-restaurant menus, have caused 77 percent of Americans to eat out less often and to choose less expensive venues.” Since customer demand is the driving force behind the foods prepared and produced, the growing interest needed to create flavorful, healthier menu options is becoming more apparent. However, how to sell these dishes becomes as much of a focus as how to prepare them.

In *The Culinary Institute of America's Techniques of Healthy Cooking* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008), authors discuss the selling points of healthier menu options with the main focus on quality rather than quantity of foods served. They suggest:

- Highlight the increased use of healthy plant-based oils, eliminated trans fats and substantially reduced saturated fats.
- Emphasize healthy carbohydrates, especially “intact” whole grains.
- Add food and beverage options with little to no sugar added.
- Provide a wider range of calorie/portion options by considering menu concepts that change the value proposition for customers from quantity to a focus on quality and culinary differentiation.

## Cooking for kids

The NRA's What's Hot in 2010 survey also revealed a growing interest in children's menus, with the following making the list of hottest trends:

- Nutritionally-balanced children's dishes
- Fruit and veggie side items for kids
- Gourmet children's dishes
- Kids' entrée salads
- Ethnic-inspired children's dishes
- Fun-shaped kids' items

If you are looking for a way to educate the children and families in your community, ACF Chef & Child Foundation has downloadable handbooks for the following programs:

- “That's Fresh—Kids Cooking Teams” is an award-winning, hands-on, community based cooking and nutrition education curriculum. It is based on active learning strategies and guided practice designed to provide significant nutrition information, culinary skills, food safety, cultural diversity, team building and self-esteem as they learn about making wise food choices for a lifetime of good health.
- “Hit a Homerun for Nutrition” is an innovative and fun way to provide interactive nutrition awareness for children. During the activity, children will round the bases and “Hit a Homerun for Nutrition” as they sample healthy breakfast items using their scorecard. This 30-minute activity will provide a healthy breakfast, age appropriate nutrition information and prizes for children who complete all bases. Download a step-by-step instructional guide on how to host this event in your community.

To download the materials for these programs, visit: [www.acfchefs.org/Content/NavigationMenu2/Partnerships/CCF/Programs/default.htm](http://www.acfchefs.org/Content/NavigationMenu2/Partnerships/CCF/Programs/default.htm)



Commonly used in teas, Mintel predicts hibiscus will be a popular flavor in the beverage market this year.



Locally-grown produce ranked No. 1 among the 20 hottest trends for 2010, according to the National Restaurant Association.



Couscous is one of many high-fiber ingredients that made NRA's What's Hot in 2010 list.

### References:

1. NPD. 2009. 24th Annual Report on eating patterns in America. The NPD Group, Port Washington, NY. [www.npd.com](http://www.npd.com).
2. FMI. 2009. U.S. grocery shopper trends.
3. Technomic. 2009. Same store sales Q3 2009. American Express Mkt. Brief, Nov.

Dr. Margaret D. Condrasky, R.D., C.C.E., is an associate professor of Food Science and Human Nutrition at Clemson University. She leads the CU CHEFS® program for improving culinary nutrition skills.

Marie Hegler is a graduate of the Food Science and Human Nutrition department with a culinary science emphasis at Clemson University, which operates the CU CHEFS® program for improving culinary nutrition skills.



#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

The trend experts at **Mintel** have identified six key flavors and two scents trends that will be recognizable in 2010. Find out the trends on their Web site.

**Visit:** [www.mintel.com](http://www.mintel.com)

**The National Restaurant Association** recently conducted its annual "What's Hot in 2010" survey of 1,854 American Culinary Federation members. You can download complete results at their Web site.

**Visit:** [http://www.restaurant.org/pdfs/research/whats\\_hot\\_2010.pdf](http://www.restaurant.org/pdfs/research/whats_hot_2010.pdf)

**A. Elizabeth Sloan** is a contributing editor at *Food Technology* and is the President of Sloan Trends Inc., which provides its strategic partners—in the food, beverage and supplement industries—expert counsel and business-building ideas for transforming inevitable change into growth opportunities.

**Visit:** [http://members.ift.org/NR/rdonlyres/0F106002-F29F-42DD-ACC2-4D1EB4A7146C/0/0110feat\\_americaeats.pdf](http://members.ift.org/NR/rdonlyres/0F106002-F29F-42DD-ACC2-4D1EB4A7146C/0/0110feat_americaeats.pdf)

### About the American Culinary Federation and the Chef & Child Foundation



The American Culinary Federation, Inc., established in 1929, is the premier professional organization for culinarians in North America. With more than 22,000 members spanning 230 chapters nationwide, ACF is the culinary leader in offering educational resources, training, apprenticeship and accreditation. In addition, ACF operates the most comprehensive certification program for chefs in the United States. ACF is home to ACF Culinary Team USA, the official representative for the United States in major international culinary competitions, and to the Chef & Child Foundation, founded in 1989 to promote proper nutrition in children and to combat childhood obesity. For more information, visit [www.acfchefs.org](http://www.acfchefs.org).

### About Clemson University



CU CHEFS® (Clemson University's Cooking and Healthy Eating Food Specialists) instructional program, led by Dr. Marge Condrasky, Associate Professor in Food Science and Human Nutrition, is a registered trademark of Clemson University designed to promote changes in menu planning, food purchasing, food preparation and food consumption behaviors with a goal of fostering good health through healthy nutrition. 'Culinary nutrition' is the application of nutrition principles combined with food science knowledge displayed through a mastery of culinary skills. The results are healthy

eating behaviors grounded in culinary confidence and nutrition alertness. CU CHEFS® promotes an awareness of the latest trends in foods and nutrition through the demonstration of proficient culinary skills to produce flavorful, health-inspired menus for schools, churches, restaurants. Clemson University, located in Clemson, S.C., is ranked 22 among the nation's top public institutions. Since 2001, Clemson has doubled external research funding, raised the academic profile of the student body, increased retention and graduation rates, launched high-profile economic development and has earned national accolades, including being named *TIME* magazine's Public College of the Year.

