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Small Is Big On Restaurant Menus and Craft Beer Tops Beverage Trend, National Restaurant Association Research Finds

*Survey of more than 1,000 American Culinary Federation member chefs shows
small plates, bite-size desserts, microbrew beer as hottest trends*

(Washington, DC) A common thread within the world of celebrity chefs, culinary reality-TV shows and famous restaurants is the hottest food and drink trends, and new research by the National Restaurant Association highlights the most popular. A survey of more than 1,000 professional chefs, members of the American Culinary Federation, found that small is big on restaurant menus, as bite-size desserts and small plates/tapas/mezze top the list of hot trends when it comes to courses. Other items among the top trends in the second annual "What's Hot... What's Not" survey include alternative-source ingredients, ethnic flavors, and specialty alcohol.

"Restaurant menu trends are driven both by consumer demand and by the creativity of chefs," said Dawn Sweeney, President and CEO of the Association. "Our chef survey, which we conducted in cooperation with the American Culinary Federation, highlights flavors, ingredients and other menu components that are hot right now to help the nation's 935,000 restaurants continue serving great meals to their guests. Restaurant operators will have the best opportunity of the year to explore these trends at the 2008 National Restaurant Association Restaurant, Hotel-Motel Show and the new International Wine, Spirits & Beer Event, both to be held next May."

"I have seen these trends first-hand, so I know they are indeed the hottest right now," said Chef John Kinsella, CMC, CCE, AAC, President of the American Culinary Federation and senior chef instructor at Midwest Culinary Institute in Cincinnati. "The trend of small plates is definitely hot, including offering tasting menus of small portions of food, wine or other alcohol beverages. The trend I see as the fastest growing going into 2008 is the alternative-source ingredients – local produce, organics, sustainable seafood, grass-fed and free-range items."

In October 2007, the Association surveyed 1,282 chefs (members of the American Culinary Federation), asking them to rate 194 individual food/beverage items, cuisines and preparation methods as "hot," "cool/passé," or "perennial favorites." The survey reveals that the hottest menu trends include small plates, both as the main course and for dessert.

Another overall trend noted by the survey results is alternative-source ingredients, including locally grown produce, organics, sustainable seafood, grass-fed and free-range items, and alternative red meats (buffalo, ostrich, venison). In addition, incorporation of ethnic cuisines, flavors and ingredients into restaurant menus is also shown to be an overall trend, with fusion ethnic cuisine, flatbreads, Asian entrée salads, Asian appetizers, Latin American cuisine, ciabatta bread, and Mediterranean cuisine rated high on the list of hot items.

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Various types of alcohol are also hot on menus, according to the survey – both as an ingredient in cooking and on the drink menu. Craft beer, energy-drink cocktails, martinis/flavored martinis, mojitos, artisan liquors, organic wine and specialty beer (seasonal, spiced, fruit, etc.) are all among the top 20 hot items. Among non-alcohol beverages, flavored/enhanced water leads over espresso/specialty coffee. Among trends in preparation techniques, braised items is considered the most trendy over pan-seared/sautéed and grilled items.

In this second annual survey, some items rated high last year have dropped significantly when it comes to being considered a hot trend. Bottled water, fresh herbs, exotic mushrooms and whole grain items – while still popular – have dropped out of the top 20 hot items this year. Rated highest on the list of cool/passé items – items that used to be hot trends, but are not anymore – are fruit/flavored wine, star fruit, low-carb dough, and tofu.

Also included in the survey were questions about trends in kitchen equipment and culinary uses of alcohol. In equipment, the hottest trend is multi-purpose equipment, followed by environmentally friendly equipment, and equipment that speeds up cooking and preparation times. The top trend in alcohol is signature cocktails, closely followed by deglazing/reductions/sauces, food-beer pairings and beer sommeliers, as well as food-wine pairings and wine sommeliers.

The 2008 National Restaurant Association Restaurant, Hotel-Motel Show® will offer first-hand opportunities to experience and explore food and beverage trends. The Show's 2,100+ exhibiting companies will provide a window to the future of the restaurant industry, including food and beverage items, innovative equipment and technology. In addition, the Show will feature top culinary competitions, celebrity chefs, and culinary-focused educational opportunities unparalleled by any other industry event. The 2008 Show will be held May 17-20 at McCormick Place in Chicago. For more information, visit www.restaurant.org/show.

In addition, the new International Wine, Spirits & Beer Event – the industry's first and only professional event focused exclusively on beverage alcohol – will highlight vintners, distillers and brewers in exhibits, food-alcohol pairing demonstrations, and education programming focused on trends in alcohol. The event will be held May 19-20, 2008, in conjunction with the 2008 Show. For more information, visit www.winespiritsbeer.org.

For full 2007 "What's Hot... What's Not" survey results – and other consumer and menu trends – visit the Association's Web site at www.restaurant.org.

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The National Restaurant Association, founded in 1919, is the leading business association for the restaurant industry, which is comprised of 935,000 restaurant and foodservice outlets and a work force of 12.8 million employees - making it the cornerstone of the economy, career opportunities and community involvement. Along with the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation, the Association works to represent, educate and promote the rapidly growing industry. For more information, visit our Web site at www.restaurant.org.

The American Culinary Federation, Inc., established in 1929, is the premier professional organization for culinarians in North America. With nearly 20,000 members spanning more than 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 also holds the presidium for the World Association of Chefs Societies, the largest international network of chef associations with more than eight million members globally. For more information, please visit www.acfchefs.org.