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Hottest Restaurant Menus Trends in 2012 Include Healthful Kids' Meals and Locally Sourced Ingredients, According to National Restaurant Association

Washington, D.C., December 8, 2011— The [National Restaurant Association's "What's Hot in 2012"](#) survey of nearly 1,800 professional chefs—members of the [American Culinary Federation](#) (ACF)—reveals that children's nutrition and local sourcing will be the hottest trends on restaurant menus this coming year. The chefs also identified smartphone apps and tablet computers as the top technology trends. In addition, 6 out of 10 chefs said they would consider a food truck as an entrepreneurial business venture.

The top 10 menu trends for next year will be:

1. Locally sourced meats and seafood
2. Locally grown produce
3. Healthful kids' meals
4. Hyper-local items
5. Sustainability as a culinary theme
6. Children's nutrition as a culinary theme
7. Gluten-free/food allergy-conscious items
8. Locally produced wine and beer
9. Sustainable seafood
10. Whole grain items in kids' meals

"The top menu trends we're seeing in our What's Hot in 2012 survey reflect the macro-trends we have seen grow over the last several years," said Joy Dubost, Ph.D., R.D., director of Nutrition & Healthy Living for the National Restaurant Association. "Nutrition—especially when it comes to children—is becoming a major focus for the nation's nearly one million restaurants, in tune with consumers' increasing interest in healthful eating."

"Local sourcing of everything—from meat and fish, to produce, to alcoholic beverages—is another big trend for 2012. Local farms and food producers have become an important source of ingredients for chefs and restaurateurs wishing to support the members of their business community and highlight seasonal ingredients on menus," Dubost added.

"The American Culinary Federation has a long history of working with families to ensure that children receive adequate nutrition, so we are delighted that chefs have chosen to include healthful kids meals in the top 10 menu trends for 2012," said Michael Ty, CEC, AAC, ACF national president. "We are also pleased to see an emphasis on local sourcing across major ingredient categories, including produce, a vital component of children's diets."

—MORE—

Rounding out the top 20 hot menu trends are:

11. Newly fabricated cuts of meat
12. Farm/estate-branded items
13. Food trucks/street food
14. Artisan spirits
15. House-made/artisan ice cream
16. Health/nutrition as a culinary theme
17. Non-traditional fish
18. Fruit/vegetable kids' side items
19. Children's mini-meals (i.e. smaller versions of adult menu items)
20. Culinary cocktails

Also included in the survey were questions about technology trends, food trucks, fruit and vegetables on menus, and restaurant gardens.

About one-quarter of the chefs (26 percent) ranked smartphone apps as the hottest technology trend in restaurants in 2012, and another quarter (25 percent) said tablet computers (i.e. iPads for menus and wine lists) will be the top technology trend. Sixteen percent said social media would be the top trend, and the same percentage said mobile/wireless/pay-at-the-table payment options, while 4 percent said QR codes.

When asked how to best follow the USDA's latest dietary guidelines of increasing fruits and vegetables in Americans' diet, 55 percent said offering a wider variety of vegetable/fruit side dishes on menus, 19 percent said using more produce in existing recipes, and 16 percent said following MyPlate's visual guideline of making fruits and vegetables half the plate.

In addition, more than six out of 10 (61 percent) of the chefs said they would consider launching a food truck as an entrepreneurial business venture.

When asked whether the tableservice restaurant where they work has a garden, one-third said that it does, one in 5 said they don't have space for a garden, and nearly half said they don't have a garden and rely on suppliers for all their produce needs.

The Association surveyed 1,791 American Culinary Federation member chefs in October-November 2011, asking them to rate 223 individual food items, beverages, cuisines and culinary themes as a "hot trend," "yesterday's news," or "perennial favorite" on restaurant menus in 2012.

These and many other restaurant industry trends will be showcased at the [2012 National Restaurant Association Restaurant, Hotel-Motel Show](#), to be held at its new dates May 5-8 at Chicago's McCormick Place. Exhibiting companies from across the United States and around the world will cater to tens of thousands of industry professionals, and top chefs and trend-watchers will share their expertise in culinary demonstrations and education sessions. For more information, visit www.restaurant.org/show.

For complete What's Hot in 2012 survey results, video and downloadable images, visit www.restaurant.org/foodtrends.

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Founded in 1919, the National Restaurant Association is the leading business association for the restaurant industry, which comprises 960,000 restaurant and foodservice outlets and a workforce of nearly 13 million employees. We represent the industry in Washington, D.C., and advocate on its behalf. We operate the industry's largest trade show ([NRA Show](#) May 5-8, 2012, in Chicago); leading food safety training and certification program ([ServSafe](#)); unique career-building high school program (the NRAEF's [ProStart](#), including the National ProStart Invitational April 27-29, 2012, in Baltimore, Md.); as well as the [Kids LiveWell](#) program promoting healthful kids' menu options. For more information, visit www.restaurant.org and find us on Twitter [@WeRRestaurants](#), [Facebook](#) and [YouTube](#).

The American Culinary Federation, Inc., established in 1929, is the premier professional organization for culinarians in North America. With more than 20,000 members spanning 225 chapters nationwide, ACF is the culinary leader in offering [educational resources](#), training, [apprenticeship](#) and [programmatic accreditation](#). In addition, ACF operates the most comprehensive [certification](#) program for chefs in the United States, with the Certified Executive Chef® designation the only culinary credential accredited by the [National Commission for Certifying Agencies](#) (NCCA). 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.