



what's
hot

2020 CULINARY FORECAST

What's hot on menus in 2020

Plant-based proteins are the hot ticket this year, along with the need for eco-friendly packaging as the delivery boom continues.

Plant-based protein is top of mind for chefs in the U.S. in 2020, according to the National Restaurant Association's annual What's Hot trend report. More than 600 American Culinary Federation chefs completed the survey, ranking nearly 133 individual items in 12 different categories to identify emerging and ongoing trends for the year ahead.

Results indicate that Americans are still hungry for healthy food, but they're also interested in more options, new alternatives, and going beyond simply healthy into sustainable options that are good for everyone and the environment.

Alluring alternatives

Plant-based protein took high honors in both **new menu items** and **protein** categories. In recent years, a large number of quickservice restaurants adopted meat alternatives, adding them to menus and to the mainstream conscience.

Plant-based proteins and meat alternatives have been on chefs' radars for some time, but this year they'll take off in response to increased consumer demand.

Many major quickservice restaurant companies have added a plant-based protein or a meat alternative to the menu in 2019. Some started offering the option in test markets, quickly expanding the offering to all or nearly all locations nationwide. It's not unusual to find plant-based protein or meat alternatives on fine-dining, university and fast-casual menus, as well.

These menu debuts also were supported by creative advertising and marketing campaigns, heightening awareness of the option and creating brand-new menu items for people to get excited about.

Of course, clever marketing alone doesn't sustain a trend, but survey data supports consumers' excitement around meatless menu options. Mushrooms, vegetable noodles and rice, and new chili peppers all ranked in the top 15 food items.

According to research from the National Restaurant Association's [Restaurant Industry 2030 report](#), experts expect plant-based protein food products will continue to grow in popularity during the next decade.

Engaging and eco-friendly

Survey options that included the phrase “eco-friendly” scored highly, sidling up to other top-of-mind trends such as delivery. **Eco-friendly packaging** received the highest ranking of any of the 133 survey options, and for good reason. Off-premises dining — takeout, delivery, drive-thru, curbside, and even food trucks — makes up 60% of all restaurant traffic.

One reason for this could be the increased amount of time adults spend traveling to and from work. Forty-two percent of employed adults say they are spending more time commuting and working than they used to. Among millennials, this rises to 52 percent. ([State of the Restaurant Industry, 2019](#))

According to Hudson Riehle, senior vice president of research for the National Restaurant Association, a large portion of industry growth over the next decade will come from the off-premises market.

With increased restaurant meal consumption happening outside of the restaurant comes a need for packaging materials that hold food quality. Interestingly, interest in eco-friendly packaging may not be driven entirely by consumer demand; businesses are increasingly being guided by local legislation and regulations governing what materials can and can't be used in certain markets.

Plus, sustainability initiatives feel good, for both businesses and for consumers. Chefs again rated **zero-waste dishes** highly, which repurpose scraps, trim, and other food items that would normally go into the trash.

eco-friendly packaging



Sustainable choices:

More than half of consumers say they are likely to make a restaurant choice based on its **eco-friendly practices**, such as **water conservation and recycling**. (National Restaurant Association, State of Restaurant Sustainability, 2018)





Healthy is hot

The bowl trend has been around for a few years, but it's still hot, hot, hot. Chefs ranked **healthy bowls** tops in the **new menu items** category. **Healthy kids meals** continue to be top-of-mind, too.

"The increased emphasis on children's cuisine is reflective of the underlying consumer trend in which parents are looking for children's meal solutions that align with their current food and beverage preferences," the Association's Riehle says.

While healthful kids meals are catching on, the popularity of healthful fare is still dependent on geographical location and price point. Then, of course, there's the challenge that every parent faces: actually getting their kids to eat something new and different.

Other trends to tap

Is 2020 the year of the **mushroom**? Respondents ranked mushrooms the hottest produce item, above caulilini (baby cauliflower) and lesser-known raves (turnip, collard, arugula, and more).

Mushrooms crept into the protein category too, with **specialty burger blends** — mushroom-beef among them — ranking just below plant-based protein.

CBD, a 2019 **What's Hot highlight**, this year settled into the dessert category. **CBD snacks and sweets** ranked highest, just above their boozy dessert cousins.

What's *not* hot?

They protein, seaweed, and insect ingredients have decidedly cooled, landing at the bottom of this year's list.



TOP 10 OVERALL

1. Eco-friendly packaging

2. Plant-based proteins

3. Delivery-friendly menu items

4. Healthy bowls

5. Scratchmade

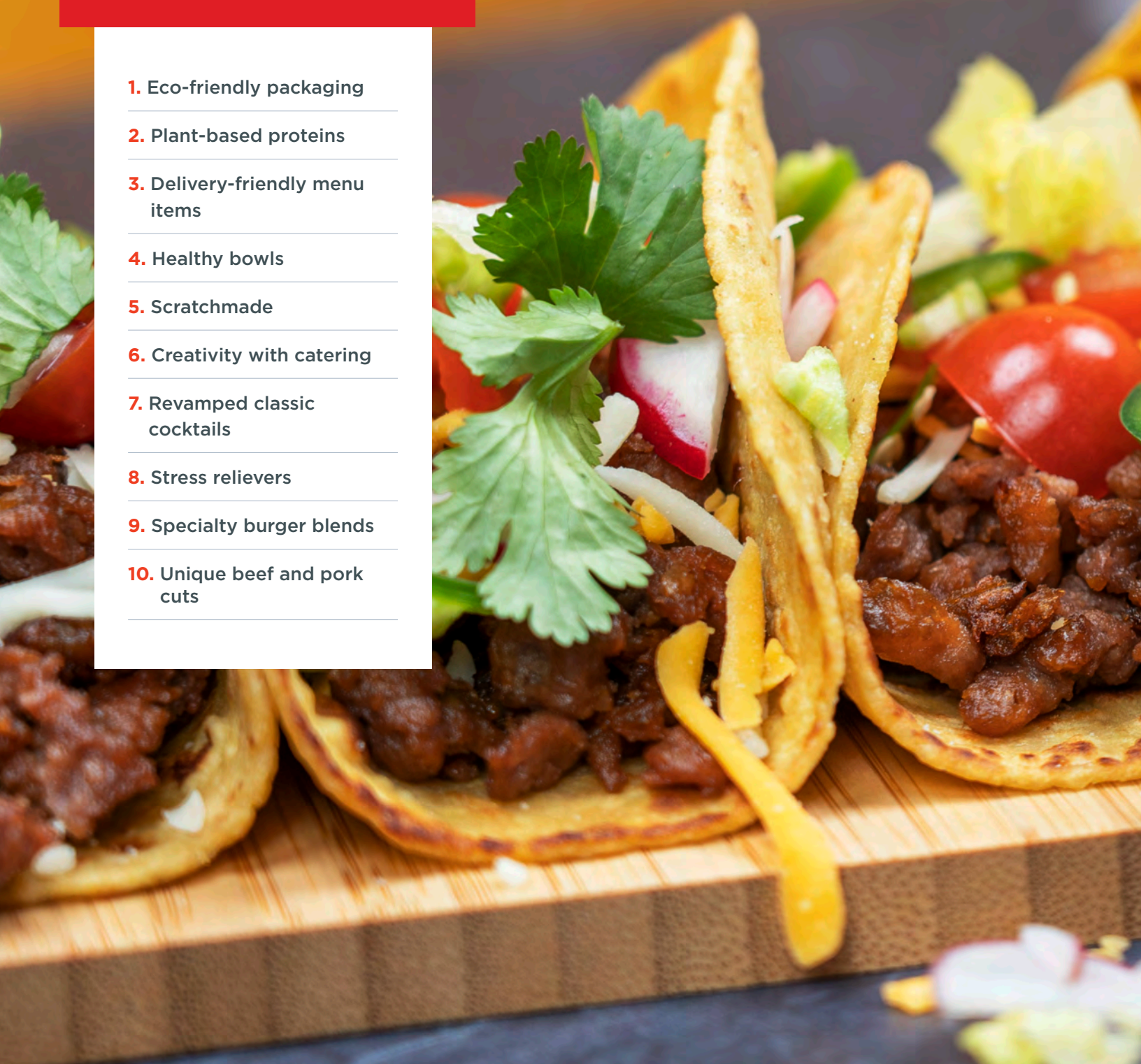
6. Creativity with catering

7. Revamped classic cocktails

8. Stress relievers

9. Specialty burger blends

10. Unique beef and pork cuts



Top Trends by Category



New Menu Items

Healthy bowls

Plant-based proteins (*burgers, chicken, seafood, eggs*)

Healthy kids meals

Zero-waste dishes (*repurposing scraps and trim*)

Ethnic breakfast dishes (*Turkish menemen, North African shakshuka, etc.*)

Flavors

Sweet heat

New chili peppers

Functional mushrooms

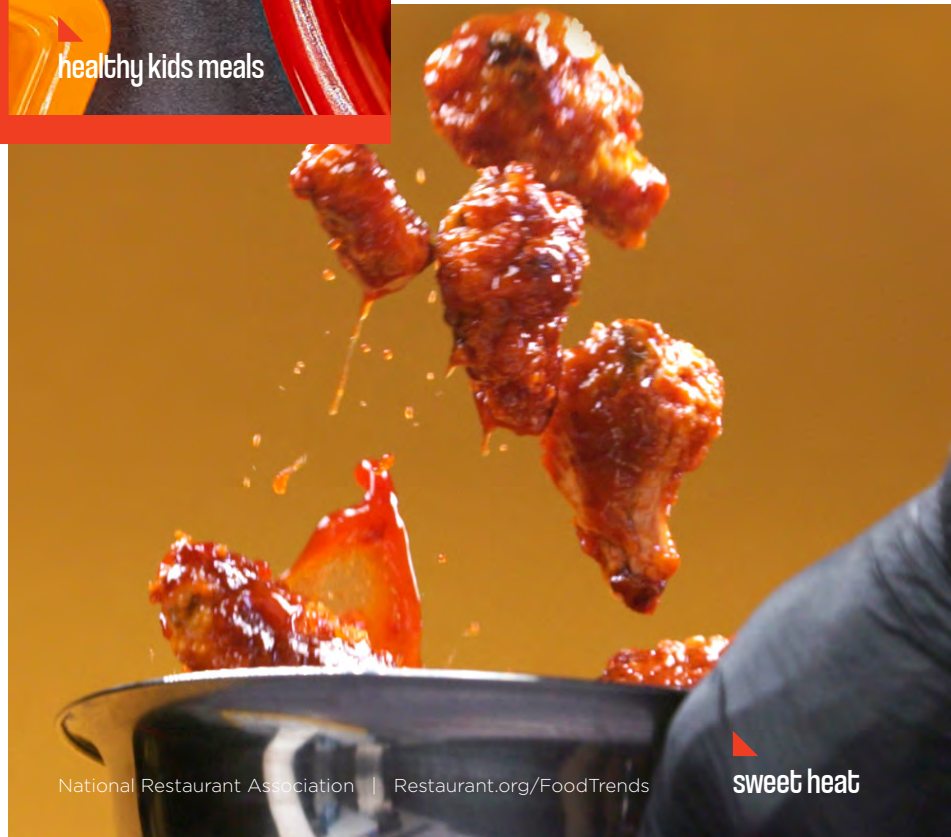
Japanese umami (*natto, tamari, tare, etc.*)

Pulses (*chickpeas, lentils, etc.*)



zero-waste

healthy kids meals



Grains/Pasta/ Substitutes

Vegetable noodles/rice

Edamame noodles

Lentils

Farro

Soba

Produce

Mushrooms

New raves beyond broccoli
rabe (*turnip rabe, collard rabe,
arugula rabe, etc.*)

Caulilini (*baby cauliflower*)

New shoots/sprouts (*hop
shoots, corn shoots, etc.*)

Kale hybrids (*kalettes, lollipop
kale, etc.*)





CBD snacks/sweets



Chinese chili crisp

Protein

Plant-based proteins

Specialty burger blends (mushroom-beef burgers, etc.)

Unique beef and pork cuts

Pan-Asian pork

Artisan hummus

Condiments

Japanese tamari

Harissa

Chinese chile crisp

Za'atar

Indian raita

Desserts/Sweets

CBD snacks/sweets

Boozy treats

Dairy-free ice cream

Drinkable desserts

Herb-based sweets



plant-based proteins



Revamped classic cocktails

Global Ethnic Cuisines

Asian islands (*Indonesian, Malaysian, Filipino, Singaporean, etc.*)

South American

Regional American (*including Native American*)

Regional Chinese

Indian

Alcoholic Beverages

Revamped classic cocktails

Alcoholic seltzers

Aperol spritz/other spritzes

Mezcal varieties (*sotol, raicilla, etc.*)

Asian spirits (*baijiu, soju, shochu, etc.*)



Asian islands cuisine (Filipino)





CBD-infused coffee



kombucha

Non-Alcoholic Beverages

Kombucha

Agua frescas

Fruit and vegetable milks

Oat milk

Boba and bubble teas

Culinary Innovations

Scratchmade

Stress relievers (*ingredients that promote relaxation/relieve stress*)

CBD-infused (*dishes, beverages*)

Lifestyle diets (*keto, paleo, flexitarian etc.*)

Instagrammable fare

Off-Premises

Eco-friendly packaging

Creativity with catering

Delivery-friendly menu items

Packaging upgrades

Restaurant meal plans/kits



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Methodology

The National Restaurant Association conducted an online survey of 602 members of the American Culinary Federation in November-December 2019. The chefs were given a list of 133 menu items — developed in partnership with Technomic — and were asked to rate how 'hot' each item and concept will be in 2020, using the following scale:

Sizzling hot: A 2020 top trend

Steaming: Popular on many menus

Simmering: Sitting on the back burner

Room temperature: Boxed up with the leftovers.

Contact information:

Helen Jane Hearn,
Senior Director, Content
hhearn@restaurant.org

Mollie O'Dell,
Vice President, Communications
modell@restaurant.org



#WhatsHot2020

Restaurant.org/FoodTrends

Lisa Cherkasky, food stylist

