



Food and Beverage Trends For 2021

Predicting what people will eat and want to find in local stores has become tougher and tougher on those who have to make the hard decisions on what to put into inventory from the local suppliers or import from far off places. This is especially true following our past pandemic year.

Food trends tend to start in one place and spread out around the world. Some of the trends start in Europe, others in the USA, while others may start somewhere in Asia or South America.

Technology allows people to know what is going on in nearly every corner of every country. This means that a food trend can start anywhere and spread around the world in minutes, or merely live a short life in the originating market.

But, here we will try to give some insight into what may be a growing trend that purchasing managers, wholesalers and distributors should closely watch so they do not fall behind their competitors. The thoughts here have come from exploring what people with more expertise are projecting for food trends in 2021.

As one reads through this list, it is apparent that full container loads of one SKU are probably not going to be the norm. LCL shipments or consolidated shipments of multiple products from multiple manufacturers is more likely to be the case, which is where our Company, The Esus Group, LLC will be a great source for bringing in many and unique products. Just a thought.

1. Plant-based foods continued growth.

As an avowed carnivore it is difficult for me to imagine the world population turning totally to plants for food, but the trend does show that more and more people are moving away from flesh foods on a regular basis. Some are turning to a more mixed diet that consists of more plant based food, or going entirely to things that grow in the dirt, on bushes and on trees.

Don't get me wrong, I do enjoy a good salad and pasta dish (has to have meat in the sauce, however), so I am not totally against plants.

I just don't see them as the mainstay in my diet or much of the world's diet in the foreseeable future.

I do, however, agree that the trend is for more plant-based foods. So, be on the lookout for unique plant foods for the more upscale market segments. The foods are usually more expensive, I have found, so I still believe the more common meat driven diet will continue to dominate for some time to come.



For Food Service providers I would expect demand for more plant-based foods will likely grow faster in this segment than in the regular retail food store segment, especially in more upscale restaurants once people return to dining out.

But, we do see even the major fast-food outlets offering plant-based alternatives to the regular burger-driven menu.

2. Foods that fit "Gut Health" diets



Part of the force behind many of the diet trends is the population's awareness of eating healthier diets. This is especially true knowing what we now know from the pandemic; underlying health conditions have effected how Covid-19 impacted the population.

While underlying health conditions may be brought on by genetics, diet appears to have been the major culprit in who was or was not severely impacted by the virus.

Older adults, in particular, have been most susceptible to harsher outcomes following contracting Covid-19, and those

most impacted are those whose diets may have put them in harms way. This older population is now turning to more healthy eating.

As we age, our digestive system doesn't always seem to function the same as it did 10 years or even 5 years ago. Probiotic supplements and other "gut foods" are gaining a spot in the market in many developed countries. While this market segment has been steadily growing, the segment has remained small, but there are many who think this segment is going to take off in 2021.

If your customer base is aging, or if it is more towards the middle-aged, upper middle class income, then you may want to closely watch this segment.

3. Organics continue their rise

Organics and "Natural" foods will also continue to trend upwards. These products are trending upwards for many of the same reason probiotics are trending - a fast growing older population in many countries and people more closely leaning towards, what may or may not be classified as healthier foods. Unfortunately, though, these products also continue to be more expensive and out of reach for many households.

Part of the reason for the higher costs is, of course, smaller production runs, but I also suspect it has something to do with supply and demand. As the demand for these products increases, and as the supply lags behind the demand, then prices will remain higher than "ordinary" foods.

I also suspect it has something to do with the economic situation of those who have picked up on these trends - they are richer than the average person. I could be wrong, but I have to believe suppliers are pricing the products higher just because they can.

So, if you serve a higher economic clientele, you may want to increase your inventory and selection of these products.

4. Newer spices and flavorings

Spices have taken off as more and more people cooked at home over the past year. They became creative with meal making in order to make meals more exciting.

I read an article about a year ago about the spice called sumac. It is supposedly an up and coming spice. When I first read about it, I was confused because sumac used to grow in our backyard and was treated like poison ivy - one stayed as far away as possible.

But, it turns out this is a spice that comes from berries common to the Mediterranean region, especially southern Italy, and the Middle East. Who knew?

The reddish colored berries are dried and crushed into a powder that is used much like many countries use lemon; it adds a sour, citrusy note to foods, and is used much like lemon would be, as well as rubbed on foods like kabobs.

Other spices that have already gained growth in many markets are tahini and za'atar, which is actually a mixture of spices.



While the spice segment may be small, as more home cooks, restaurants (when they regain full functionality), and foodies look for new and exciting flavors, it may be prudent to be ahead of the crowd and have these newer spices available while you are still able to place a nice margin on them.

6. Other Nut Products

The market for alternative nut products, such as almond and cashew butters, almond milk, and other nut products seems to be gaining a foothold or foodhold outside of Northern European and the US marketplace.

We are getting more inquiries about these products from countries in the Middle East, parts of Asia where they had not been great selling items, and other similarly, and formerly, less interested markets.



7. Cannabidiol Foods (CBD)

CBD foods gained traction in 2019 and were expected to really take off in 2020. But the pandemic caused the market to not develop as many thought.

Based on what I have been reading, the growth that was expected last year, is now seen as something that will take place this year.

The compound found in cannabis has been used in medicine for thousands of years, I am told, and has been used to help relieve symptoms of chronic back pain, anxiety, inflammation and many other medical conditions.

9. New Hydration Products

Low alcohol beverages showed good growth in 2019 and really took off in 2020 (Covid-19 seemed to have more people drinking alcohol).

This upward trend shows no stopping in 2021 as hard seltzers and hard sodas/soft drinks have been in great demand.

Consumers, especially younger adults, started moving to the lower alcohol products so they could enjoy a drink in the evening with friends, while not feeling terrible the next morning at work.



The group of products also includes lower sugar content drinks and alcohol infused still water, if you can believe it. Major beverage houses, including companies like Anheuser-Busch have pushed much of this market growth because they have the advertising funds to mass market these products. This has drawn a lot of smaller breweries into the market, and these products are as good or better than the major brands.

Major brands tend to have exclusive distribution arrangements in nearly every country, making it difficult for other wholesales and distributors to get these products. The smaller brands do not have these same exclusive arrangements, which means they are available and eager to sell.

10. Healthy Snacks



Health consciousness isn't reserved for main courses. The healthy snack segment has been growing for years and, with more people staying home during 2020, this category really took off.

The trend should continue throughout this year.

Part of this trend includes getting away from fried foods like chips, and moving to products that have been produced through a process where the snack is "puffed" or popped.

Not only is the production process different, but so are the ingredients and flavors. Products are made from whey protein, vegetables, yuca root, and alternative grains, while flavors have taken on a broader range with the addition of different spices than were the norm.

Microwave popcorn became almost impossible to find for exporting as US producers scrambled to keep up with the increased demand in America. The US pipeline has been filled as manufacturers added production lines that came on board in late 2020. So, microwave popcorn is slowly becoming more accessible.