



# The Defining Foods, Flavors and Trends of 2022

# Overview

The top 10 food, flavor and dining trends that will define this year.

1. Chefs As Advocates
2. Climatarian Cuisine
3. Health on the Menu
4. Modern Comfort
5. Heritage Cooking
6. American Regional & Indigenous Foods
7. Fiery Flavors
8. Foodtainment
9. Rethinking Drinking
10. Restaurant Models Reinvented



# Cultural Shifts Behind The Trends



## **Self-care is being prioritized more now than ever.**

There's a growing commitment to wellness, including both physical and emotional wellbeing. Consumers are being more proactive about their health, even viewing food as medicine.



## **Planetary and societal health is at the forefront.**

Environmental sustainability remains important to many consumers. There's a greater recognition of the role food plays in that, including accessibility and food insecurity.



## **People are interested in new flavors and tastes.**

With international travel on hold for a while, diners are on an ongoing quest for new culinary experiences. They're wanting to learn about different cultures through food and experience global cuisines locally.



# Chefs As Advocates

Chefs truly stepped up to the plate. They emerged as pandemic heroes and high-profile advocates on multiple issues.



*Macro  
Food  
Trend 1*



# \$25 million

**Was raised for struggling restaurant workers through the Restaurant Employee Relief Fund**

The problem of food insecurity in this country was amplified even more in 2021 and will continue to be at the forefront in 2022. While chefs have been long supporters of programs addressing hunger, many chefs stepped up to the plate in creative ways with innovative ideas.

One initiative that stood out was led by Guy Fieri, who created the Restaurant Employee Relief Fund with the National Restaurant Association. Through this effort, \$25 million was raised for struggling restaurant workers. This assisted the entire industry and chefs across the country.





# Climatarian Cuisine

Greater awareness of the link between food and climate change. Growing concerns about planetary health is shaping menus.

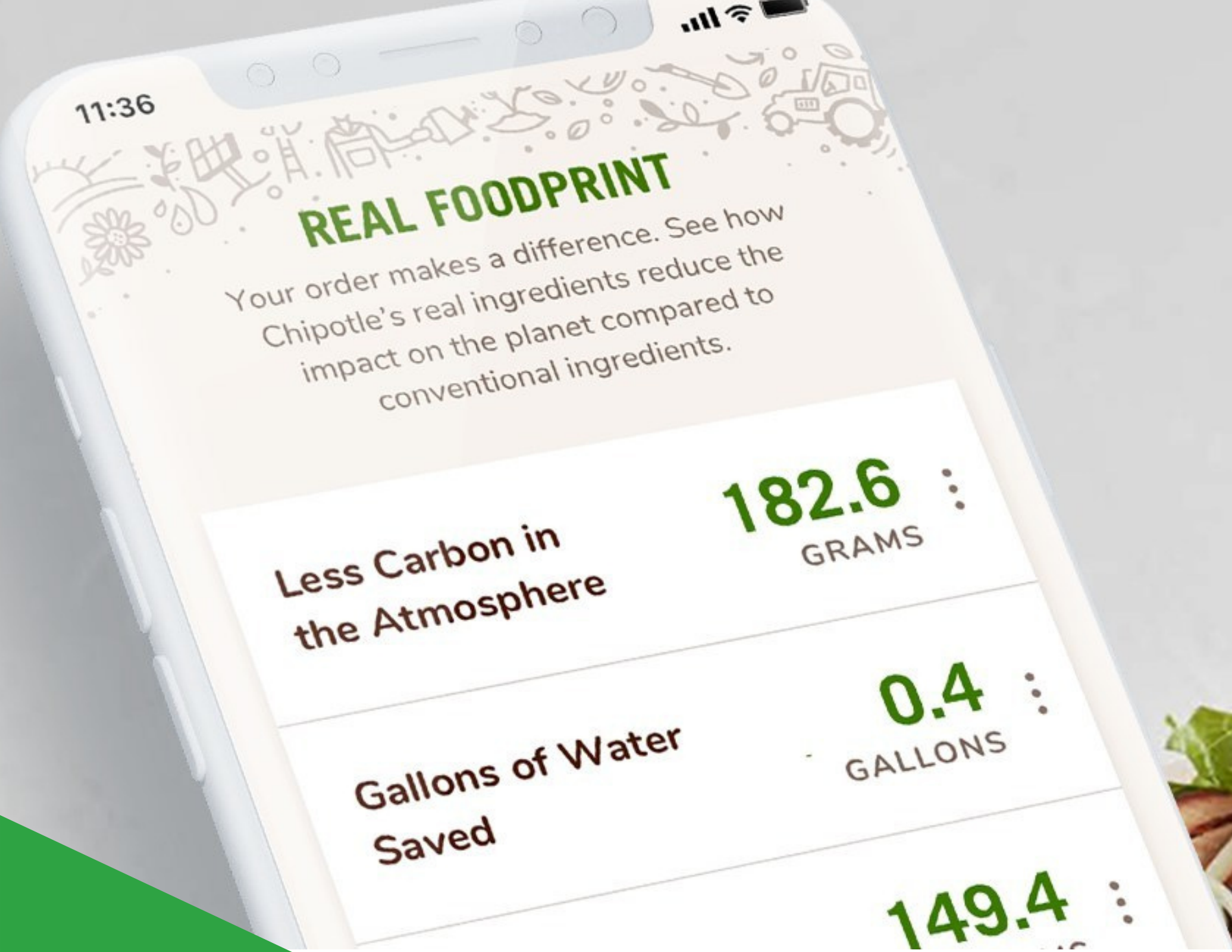


*Macro  
Food  
Trend 2*





# Real FOODPRINT



of people want to know what impact the food they are eating has on the environment, and support carbon labeling initiatives.

51%



# A Nutrition Label for the Planet The Brands Following the Trend

## Just Salad



**Just Salad's Latest Menu Innovation: Adding Your Carbon Footprint to Your Meal**



## Chipotle

**CHIPOTLE**

### Real FOODPRINT

OUR REAL FOODPRINT MEASURES YOUR IMPACT ON THE PLANET

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ONE INGREDIENT AT A TIME

Our new Real Foodprint is the first, radically transparent sustainability tracker of its kind, showing the positive impact you're helping make on the planet by choosing Chipotle's real, responsibly sourced ingredients versus conventional ones.

## Panera

**Thrillist**

NEWS

### Panera's 'Cool Food Meals' Come With a Lower Carbon Footprint

More than half of its menu boasts an eco-friendly badge.

By Thrillist News Published on 10/14/2020 at 5:48 PM

A circular logo with the text "COOL FOOD MEAL" around the perimeter and a stylized leaf or flower symbol in the center.



# Animal vs Plant

**Consumers opt for less meat, but not meatless.**

While some restaurants have taken a firm stance against beef for environmental reasons, such as **Eleven Madison** switching to a meatless menu or **Epicurious** no longer publishing new beef recipes, most consumers and restaurants are more interested in reducing meat consumption over completely eliminating it.

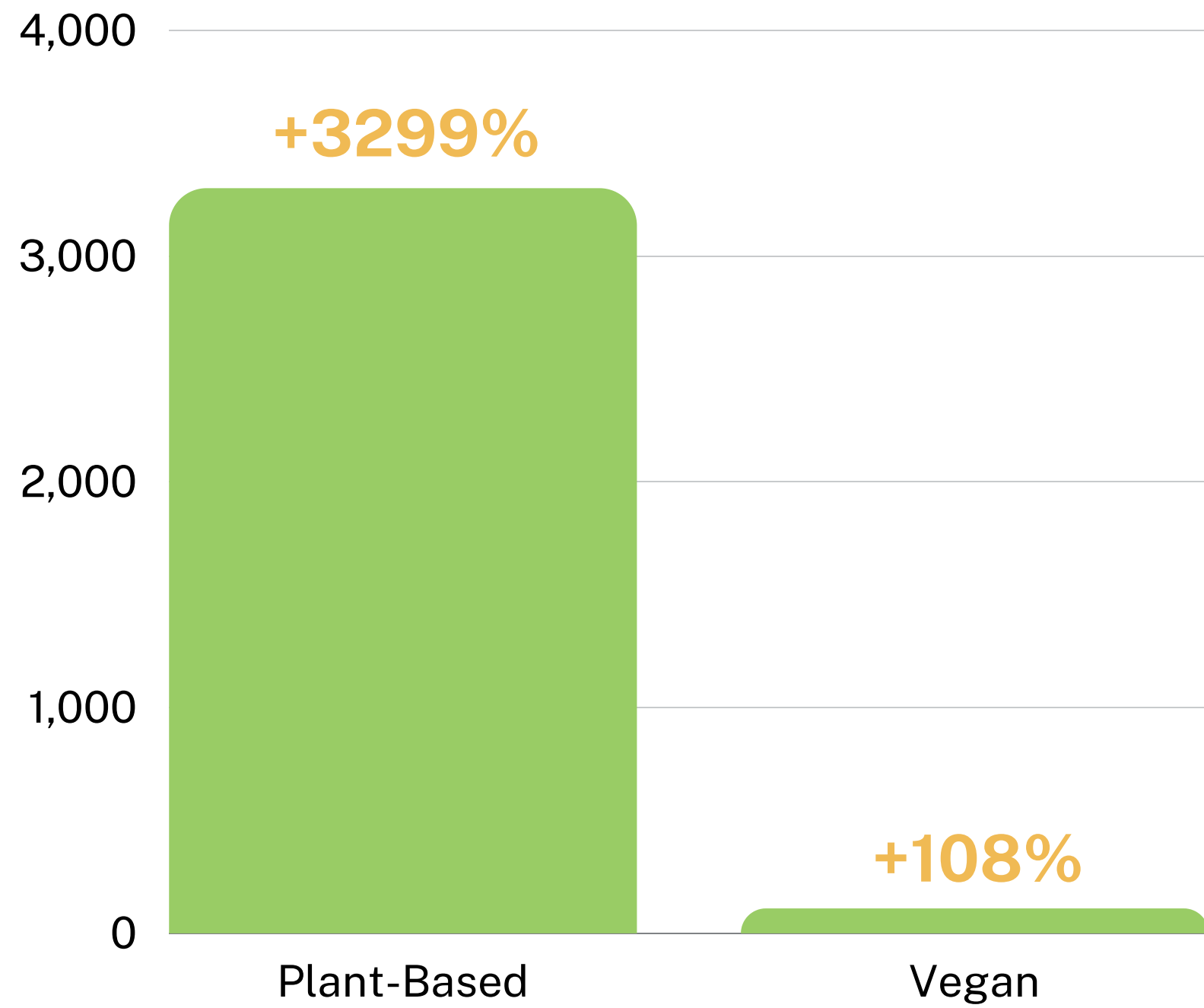
This **Reducetarian Solution** is a hybrid food trend focusing on responsible, ethical and climate-positive meat products. It's what is driving the growing popularity of hybrid meats or blended meats (half meat/half vegetables), also known as flexitarian foods. As diners cut down on meat, the quality of the meat they do consume becomes even more important.

Another concept that follows this trend is the idea of **plant-forward**, which emphasizes and celebrates, but is not limited to, plant-based foods. It's a philosophy of the Culinary Institute of America's Plant-Forward Kitchen, which they describe is the pursuit of deliciousness at the intersection of health, sustainability and cultural discovery.

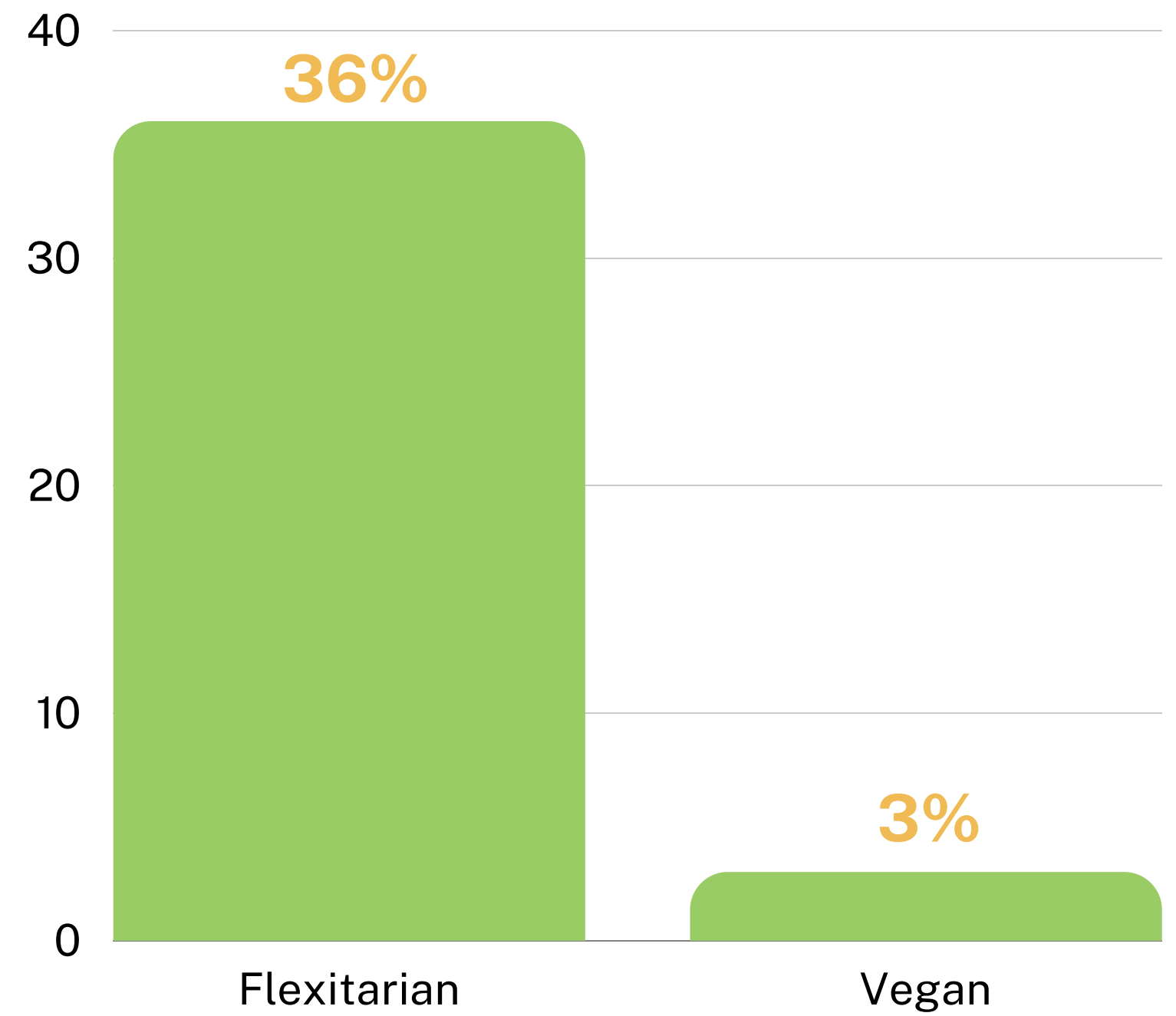




## What's Trending on Menus



## How Americans Identify





# Accelerated War on Food Waste

One-third of all food is wasted globally.

1.3 billion tons of waste is produced per year.

Four main trends are emerging to combat this enormous amount of annual food waste. These trends are:

- **Upcycled Foods.** To reduce waste, there is a growing category of foods made from “wasted” ingredients,” such as Pulp Chips made from upcycled vegetable fiber left over from fresh cold-pressed juices. The trend has gotten so big that there’s a new Upcycled Food Association.
- **Food Rescue Programs.** These programs help recapture food that might otherwise be discarded and offer it to food banks and families in need. Many restaurants now participate in programs like this.
- **Tech-Driven Solutions.** New technology solutions are being developed, such as Too Good To Go, the #1 app for fighting food waste that connects consumers with surplus food from restaurants and grocery stores.
- **Sustainable Packaging.** "Does it travel well?" This question is now a big factor to consider for takeout and delivery packaging. The use of reusable containers, reusable cups, even edible containers, is growing as eco-friendly packaging takes higher priority to reduce waste.





# Health On The Menu

With a renewed commitment to healthy living, diners are demanding nutritious options when eating out.

*Macro  
Food  
Trend 3*





# Immune Support Is Top of the Priority List

As the pandemic put a harsh spotlight on our health, it's no surprise that diners are placing a strong focus on immunity and immunity support. More and more restaurants are now featuring menu items positioned to support immunity health. From **True Food's Winter Immunity Bowl** to **immunity smoothies from Juice It Up**, fruits and veggies are becoming more prevalent in menus across the board.

**High in vitamin C, pitaya (or dragonfruit) has experienced a 113% increase on restaurant menus.**

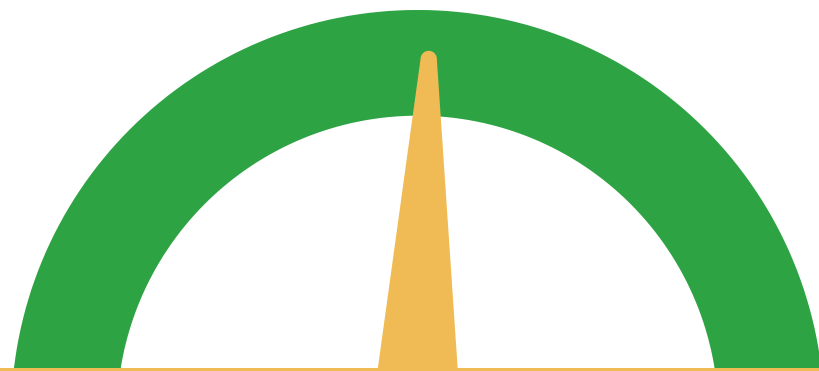




# Here's What Diners Are Saying

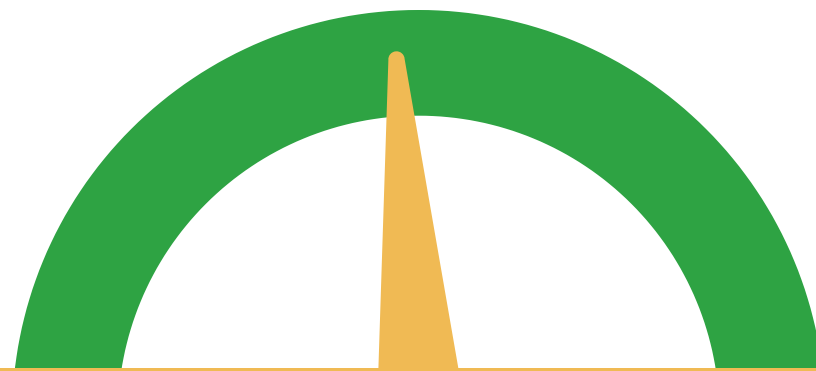
*Do you agree with the following statements about immunity-boosting elements in your foods?*

51%



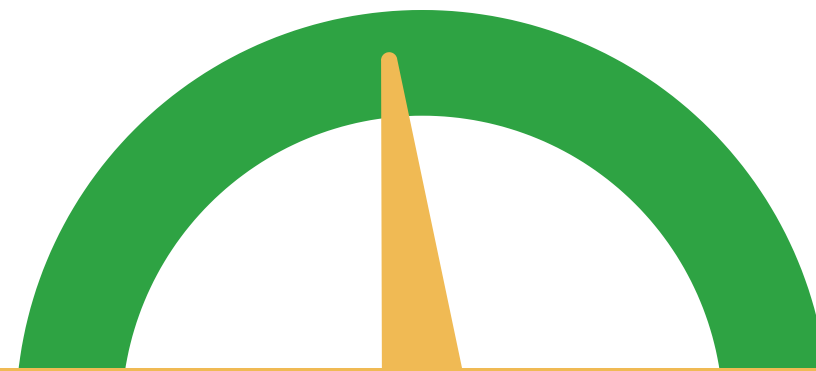
*wish immunity boosting foods were on the menu at already frequented places*

48%



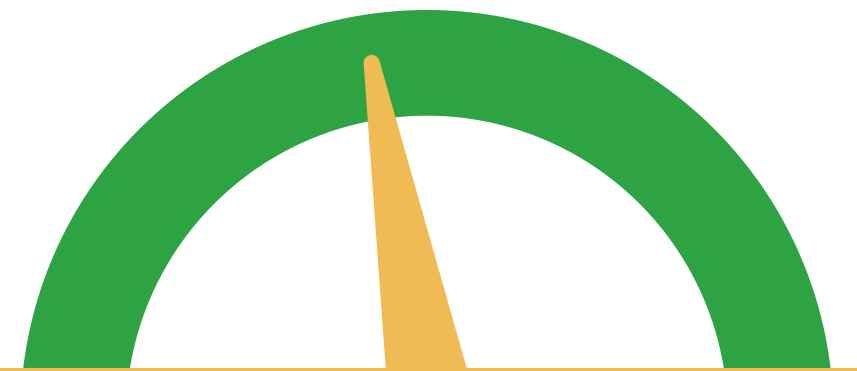
*want immunity boosting ingredients in everything they eat*

47%



*wish there was an additive option for immunity boosters to food already on the menu*

45%



*wish there was an option to add immunity boosters to beverages.*



# Vegetables: Stars of the Plate



**Delicata Squash**  
**+136%**

As vegetables becomes a higher priority for diners, the industry has seen a significant increase in delicata squash featured on menus. Not surprising as it is a great source of potassium, fiber, magnesium, manganese and vitamins C and B.



**Microgreens**  
**+106%**

Small but mighty, microgreens are an easy way to pack lots of nutrients into a meal without taking up too much real estate on your plate. High in vitamins, minerals and antioxidants, microgreens are also fairly easy to grow at home.



**Heirloom Carrots**  
**+92%**

While rich in many vitamins and minerals, carrots are known for powerful antioxidants called anthocyanins. These are polyphenol antioxidants that help reduce inflammation in the body and have even been found to reduce heart disease and increase blood flow.



# Weight Management

**Pandemic weight gain was a reality for many.**

As consumers have begun to place more emphasis on feeling good and overall health, diet culture or "dieting" has become less prevalent and no longer falls into the Health & Wellness category. That being said, around 83% of people still feel their **weight needs improvement**.

As a result, **low-carb regimens like Keto** are growing in popularity (adopted by roughly 10% of consumers), both on restaurant menus and at home. These low-carb trends include bunless burgers, cauliflower crust pizza, and zucchini noodles instead of traditional pasta.

**Source: The Hartman Group, Health & Wellness: Reimagining Wellbeing Amid COVID-19, 2021.**





# Modern Comfort

Classic and nostalgic flavors are increasingly in demand, but with a contemporary and upscale twist. Many of these popular cozy and homey foods are loved for their quirky and whimsical qualities.



*Macro  
Food  
Trend 4*



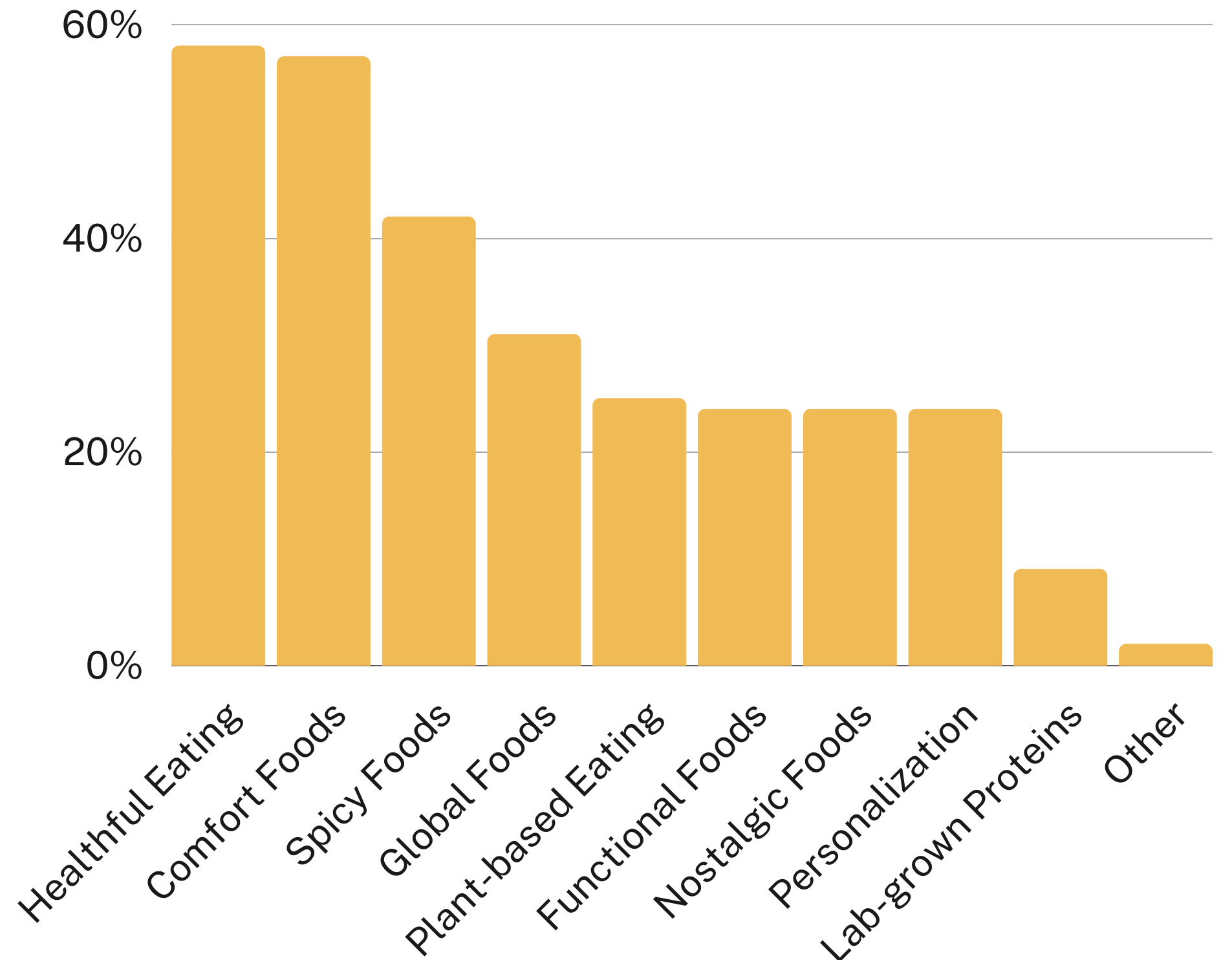
# Competing Desires

## Health vs. Comfort

Nowadays, guests crave classic and nostalgic flavors with a contemporary and upscale twist. With 58% caring about healthful eating, but 57% looking forward to seeing more comfort food on menus, there are competing desires. Getting creative with your menu to fulfill both wants will set your restaurant apart in 2022.

**Source: Datassential**

## What new food and beverage trends are you looking forward to seeing more of?





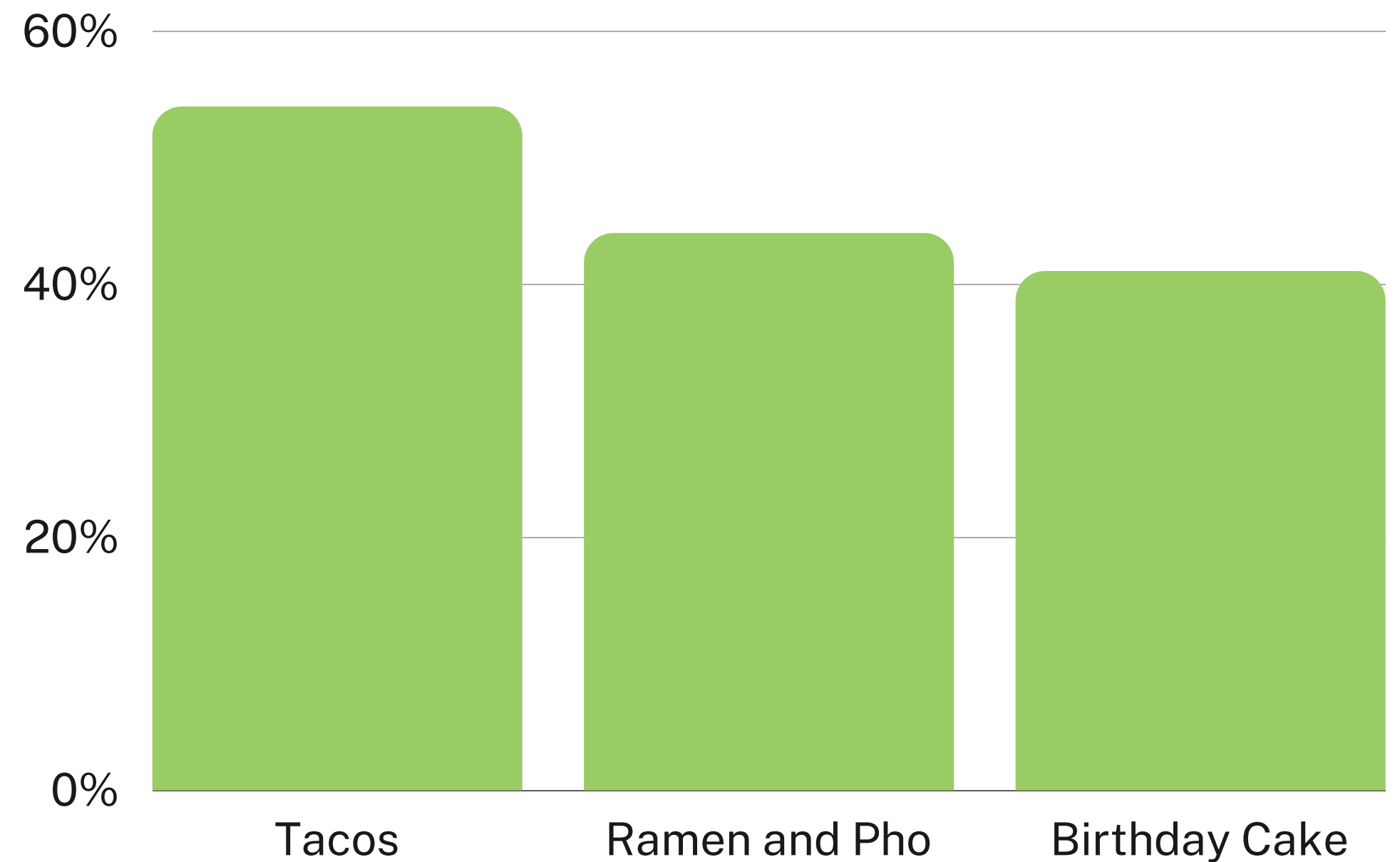
# Generational Differences

While macaroni and cheese is the top comfort food for a majority of consumers, younger generations have different ideas.

Gen Z is more likely to define tacos, ramen (the new chicken and noodle soup) and birthday cake flavor as comfort foods. Childhood-inspired birthday cake is a huge trending flavor that we see in so many foods and beverages.

**Source: Datassential**

## Top Gen Z Comfort Foods





# Top Comfort Performers



## S'mores

The nostalgic flavor of s'mores is trending on restaurant menus, up 40%. Restaurants are serving s'mores sundaes, cookies, cheesecakes, shakes and even cocktails!



## Sea Salt Caramel

Move over pumpkin spice? As an even more popular menu item, up 74%, sea salt caramel has been brewing as a trend for several years. The sweet and salty flavor has been taking creative turns on many dessert menu items!



## Buffalo Cauliflower

Increasing by an explosive 1600% on menus, buffalo cauliflower has seen one of the largest leaps on menus. This appetizer is a better-for-you, plant-based alternative and continues the trend of cauliflower adapting to all sorts of new uses.



# Heritage Cooking

Embracing and celebrating a culture through food. Growing interest in exploring global flavors, especially global comfort and street foods.



*Macro  
Food  
Trend 5*



# The Globalization of Cuisine

In the past couple of years, many consumers have been deprived of international travel. And what is one of the best parts of traveling? Discovering new cuisines and exploring a culture through food. As a result of this deprivation, we see many people seeking out global experiences by bringing international foods to their home (or regular neighborhood haunt).

Since the release of Stanley Tucci's Netflix series, Searching for Italy, the popular 3-ingredient Italian dish, cacio e pepe, saw a 126% increase in popularity on restaurant menus, according to Dataessential.

Elote, a Mexican street food, has seen a 127% increase on restaurant menus. It has been transformed into elote pizza, layered on sandwiches, mac & cheese, tacos, fries and even ice cream.

**Global flavors are especially popular with sauces or condiments, which is an easy and accessible way to explore new cuisines.**



**Furikake**  
**+145%**

*Dried Japanese condiment made from nori, black and white sesame seeds and salt.*



**Agrodolce**  
**+79%**

*Sweet and sour Italian condiment that combines vinegar and sugar.*



**Labneh**  
**+71%**

*Middle Eastern yogurt cheese used for dips and spreads.*



# American Regional and Indigenous Foods

With international travel limited, the new domestic focus has fed an interest in hyper-regional American food – from state-specific barbecue styles to regional specialties. Indigenous or Native American cuisine is also enjoying the spotlight.



*Macro  
Food  
Trend 6*



# Appreciating Regional Cuisine

**Limited international travel caused domestic focus on hyper-regional American food.**

If people did travel during the pandemic, it was likely a road trip to neighboring states. From this, we saw a greater appreciation for regional American food.

One of the key takeaways from this trend and renewed interest in American cuisine is the important influence African-American cuisine has had on the broader American cuisine. This influence is prevalent in many of the popular regional cuisines that garner a lot of attention, such as:

- Lowcountry
- Gullah
- Sonoran Cuisine
- Cal-Mex
- Appalachian
- Nashville Cuisine
- Alabama Cuisine





# The Rise of Regional

**Lowcountry** is a region of low-elevation land from South Carolina to Georgia Coast, which is known for Lowcountry Seafood Boils. The popularity of Seafood Boils is no longer just in the South. **Reviews of Seafood Boils in restaurants are up +65% on Yelp.**

Cuisine of the **Gullah** people, descendants of West African slaves, is getting more recognition. The cuisine features red rice, okra stew, and seafood, and is dominant in South Carolina, **especially Charleston where you'll find multiple Gullah restaurants.**

More chefs and food manufacturers have been experimenting with **Sonoran Cuisine**, which includes **cactus, corn, beans and squash** and features popular dishes like chimichangas. **Cal-Mex** is a more **plant-forward** and “lighter” version of Tex-Mex from California.

**Appalachian food** is in the spotlight – **from traditional pepperoni rolls, chow, beans and cornbread to modern Appalachian chic** that's being embraced by Southern chefs.

**Can you guess what the most popular regional cuisine of the year was?**





# Nashville Cuisine

**Nashville is the #1 location identified on restaurant menus.**

This is likely due to the popularity of Nashville Hot Chicken, which is **up 727%** on restaurant menus. Nashville Hot Chicken has created an entire movement across social media.

**#NashvilleHotChicken**

KFC's Nashville Hot Chicken sales surged after it went viral on TikTok — some locations even had shortages. Not surprising, considering #NashvilleHotChicken currently has 146 million views on TikTok. The flavor trend is also showing up in potato chips, dips and even cocktails.



A close-up photograph of Alabama cuisine. On the left, a wooden bowl contains a thick, white, creamy sauce with small dark specks, likely white barbecue sauce. On the right, several pieces of golden-brown, fried chicken are stacked, showing a crispy, slightly charred exterior. A bright green triangle is in the top right corner.

# Alabama Cuisine

Another honorable mention within this regional appreciation is Alabama Cuisine.

**Alabama mentions on restaurant menus are up 44%.**

That is primarily due to Alabama white sauce, one of the regional barbecue styles that are trending. This white sauce can be served on chicken, sandwiches and ribs.

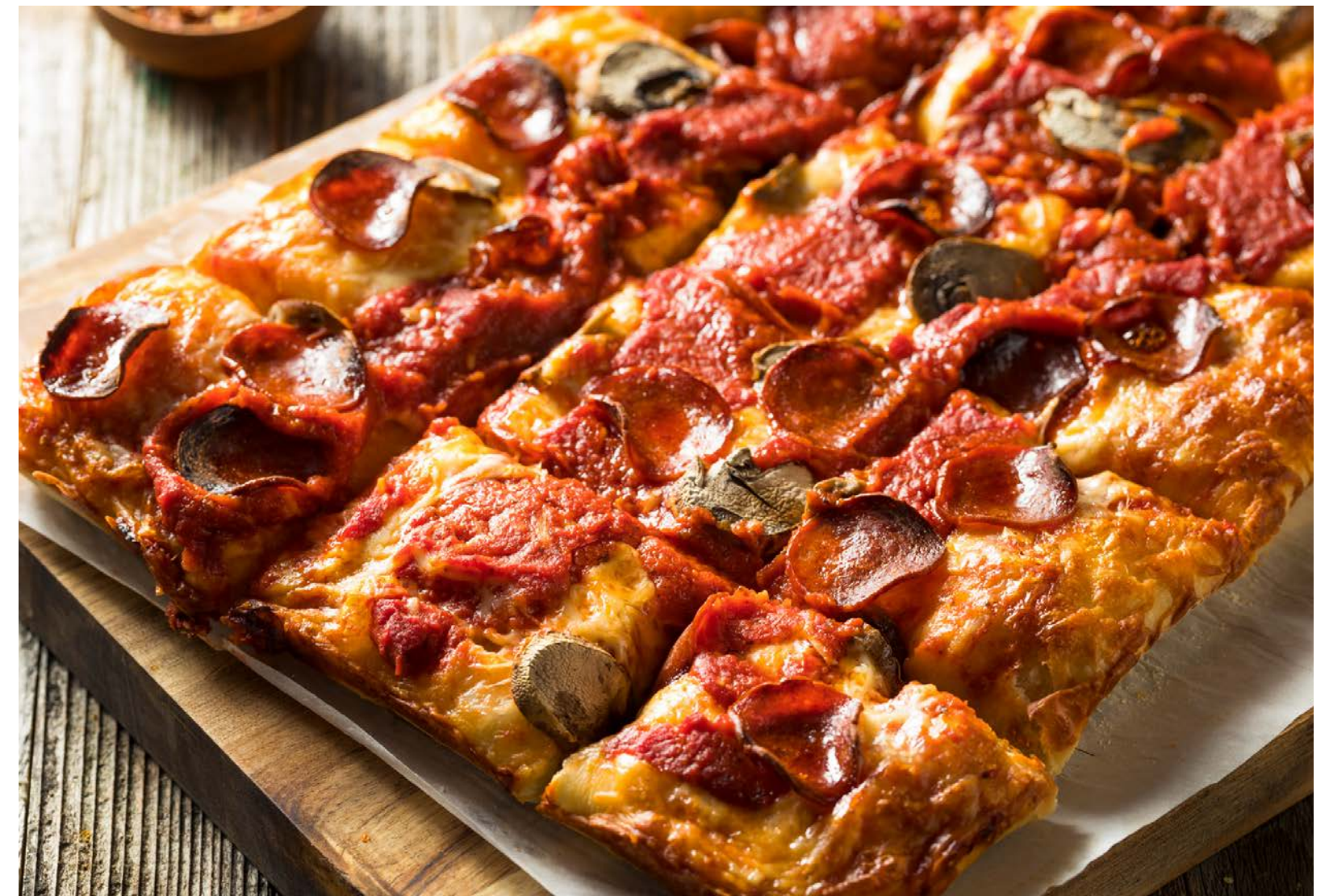


# Other Regional Foods That Have Expanded Nationally



**Pimento Cheese**  
**+32%**

Known as the “caviar” of the South, pimento cheese has seen a popularity increase of 32%, showing up in sandwiches and burgers, mac & cheese, French fries, appetizers, and more.



**Detroit Style Pizza**  
**+52%**

Sicilian pizza with a Motor City twist has been expanded upon nationally, with a 52% increase in Yelp reviews.





# Appreciation for Indigenous Foods

**Taking the American dining scene back to its roots.**

The Indigenous food movement is rapidly gaining momentum as Native American foods are showing up more in restaurants and grocery stores. Native American food producers and chefs are taking center stage as appreciation for original American food unites cuisine and culture.



# Food Origins Are More Important Than Ever

Where and how food makes it to diners' tables is an important focus now, especially after the pandemic.

Top priorities for consumers:

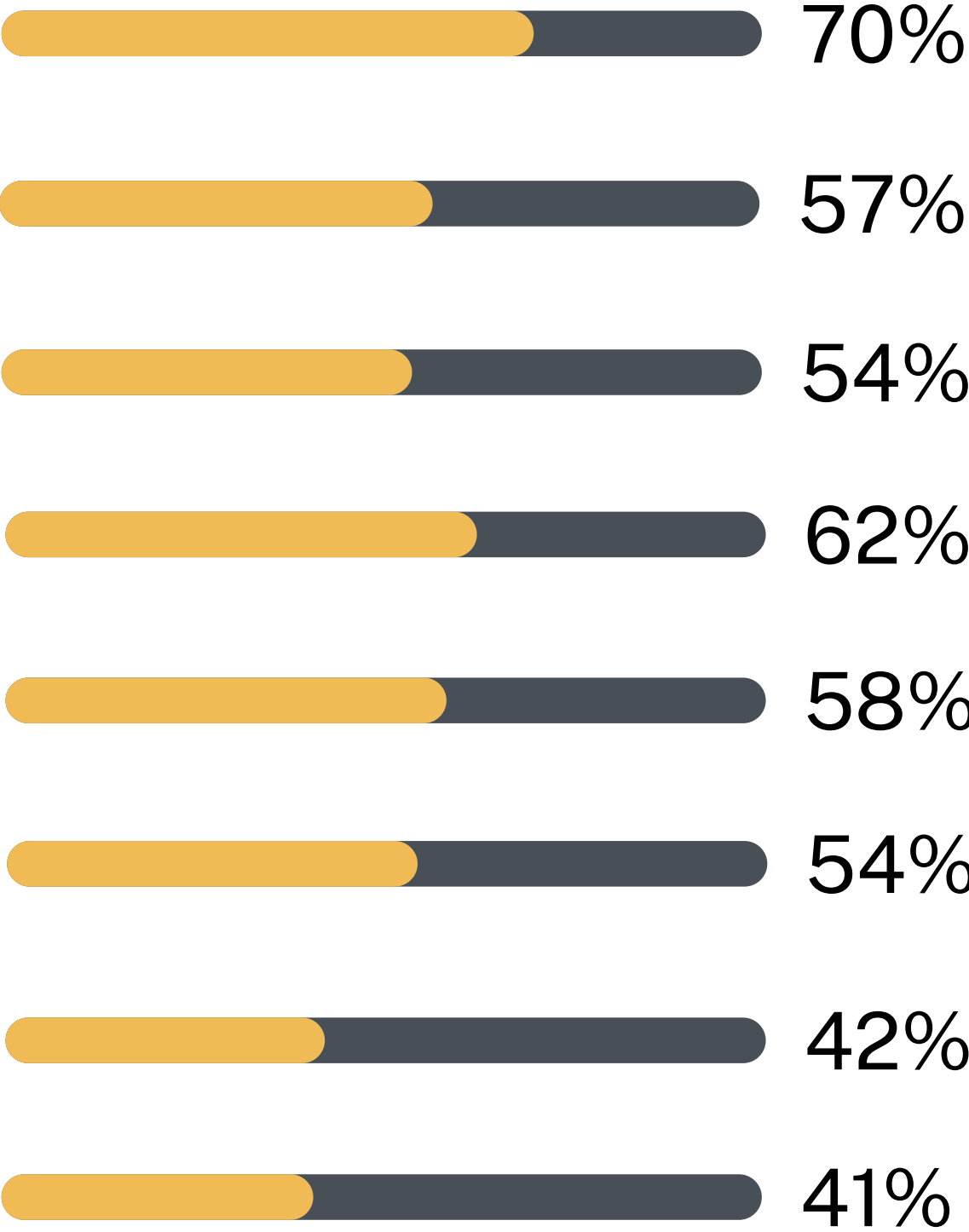
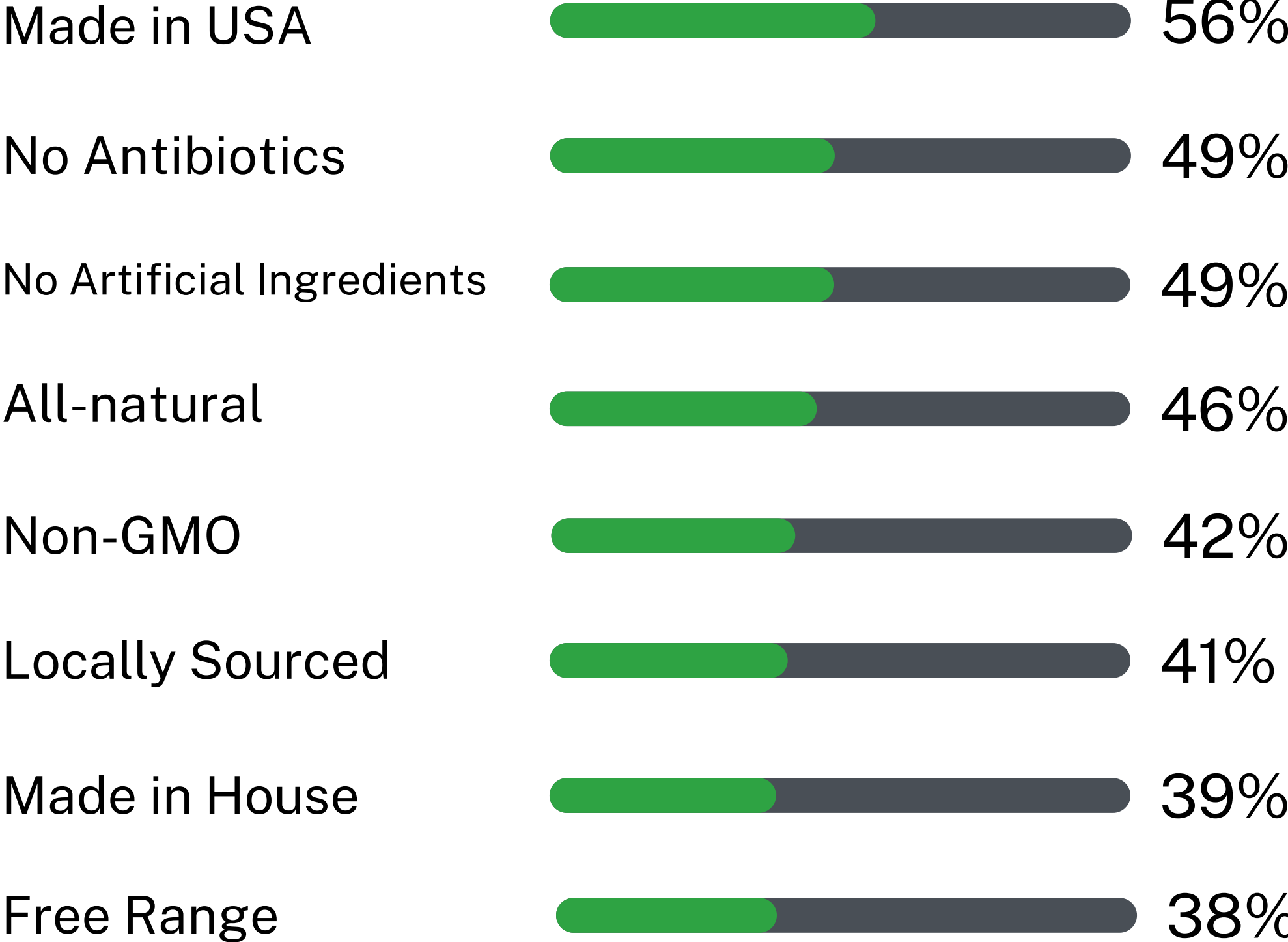
- Made in the USA
- Locally sourced
- All-natural





# Important Before Pandemic

# Still Important



Source: Datassential; IRI



# Fiery Flavors

The trend toward hot and spicy has been heating up for some time now, with consumers eating – and seeking out wherever they go – fiery foods and beverages.

*Macro  
Food  
Trend 7*

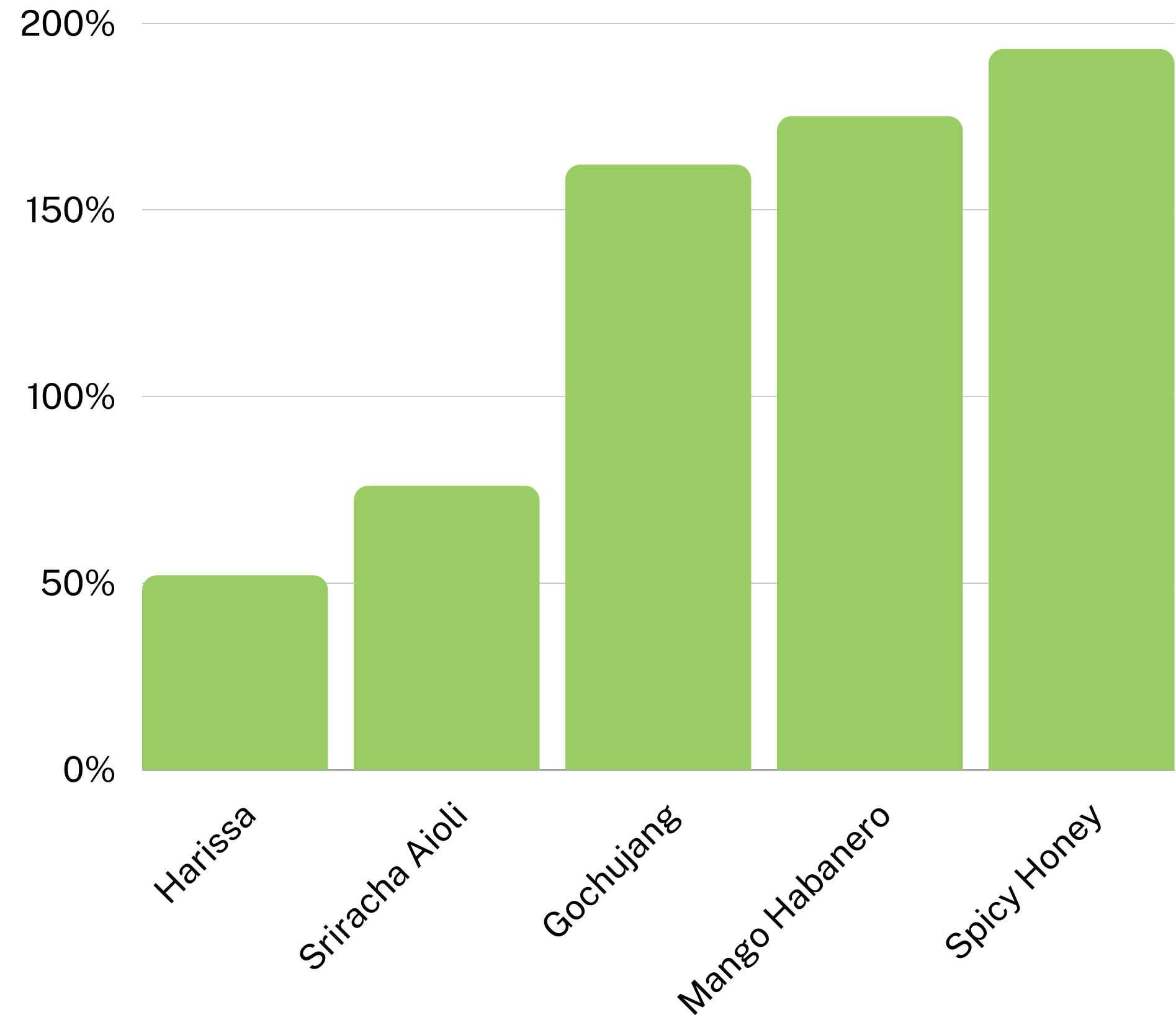




# Things Are Heating Up

Hot and spicy foods are on the rise.

This spicy revolution can be seen as major mainstream chains introduce hotter foods to their menus.





# 2021's Food of the Year: Birria Tacos

**Also known as queesebirria.**

One of the hottest foods, birria tacos have gained popularity this past year. The fire behind these fiery tacos was fueled by food trucks and social media, with Yelp review mentions up 235%.





# Foodtainment

Eating out has become more immersive – offering diners a multi-sensory culinary experience. This includes more open-kitchen eateries and the resurrection of live-fire cooking.

*Macro  
Food  
Trend 8*





# A Meal & A Show

While dining out has long been a source of entertainment in itself, it is now becoming an even more immersive, interactive and multi-sensory experience.



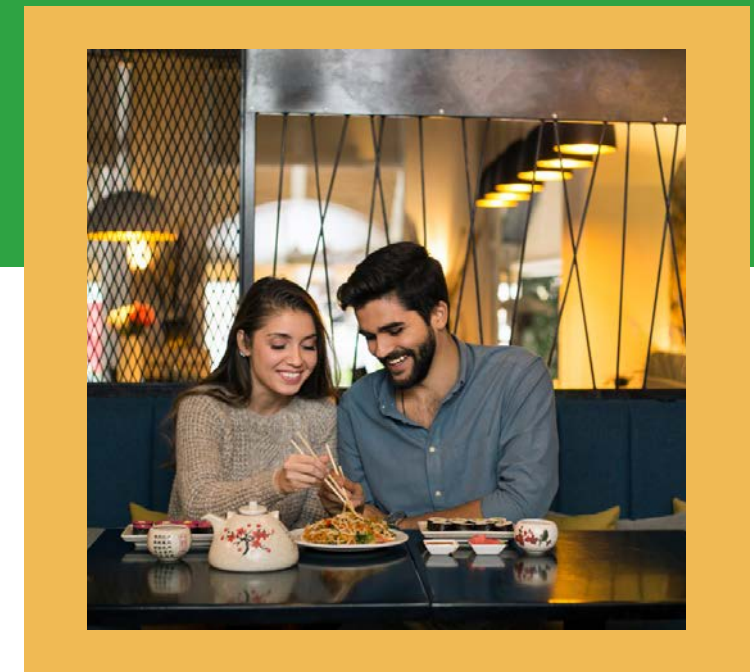
## Tableside Service

Going way beyond tableside guacamole or Caesar salad, servers are now carving meats, serving molecular cocktails and adding final touches to dessert in front of diners.



## Buffets

Believe it or not, buffets are making a comeback in many places with interactive kitchens and wood-fired grills are offering more unique experiences for diners.



## Novelty

Give them something to talk about. Providing diners with an immersive or Instagrammable moment provides opportunities for connection and a shareable experience to promote the meal and the restaurant.



# Rethinking Drinking

Early in the pandemic, alcohol sales spiked. Yet now people are exploring new options to rein in their drinking. Beverages also became an entry into new flavors and functional benefits.



*Macro  
Food  
Trend 9*



# More Mindful Drinking

Booze-free bars and zero-proof cocktails are growing in popularity as the "sober-curious" movement continues to grow.

- More brands are promoting **mindful drinking**. As consumers become increasingly aware of their health, so there is a new need for quality, adult non-alcoholic options.
- Bars are now serving more options for **alcohol-free craft cocktails** with zero-proof spirits.
- Viewed as a relaxing beverage, teas of all kinds are trending. **Blooming or flowering tea options** offer an entertaining tea-drinking experience.





# Trending Alcoholic Beverages

For those who do partake.



Multi-Function,  
Health Conscious Cocktails



Cocktails in a Can



**+1313%**  
on menus



# The Three F's

## Functional, Fermented, Fun



### Functional

People are looking for beverages with health benefits, like matcha lattes, which are **up 250%** on restaurant menus.



### Fermented

Gut-friendly beverages, like kombucha, are in high demand, **up 317%** on menus. There is also increased attention on Tepache, a fermented beverage made from pineapple peels originating from Mexico.



### Fun

What's more fun than boba? Boba, or bubble tea, is **up 69%** on restaurant menus.



# Restaurant Models Reinvented

The great pandemic pivot has meant multiple changes for restaurants – from delivery and takeout to outdoor dining and streamlined menus. More than 10% of U.S. restaurants closed permanently.



*Macro  
Food  
Trend 10*



# Back to Basics With Burgers

While always popular, burgers were placed in the spotlight again during the pandemic.

In fact, many Michelin-starred restaurants pivoted to serving burgers during the lockdown.



# Here to Stay

01

Many restaurants introduced new offerings during the pandemic. According to research from Datassential, it looks like family size or bulk meals and meal kits will stick around.

02

Restaurants' use of influencers and culture are on the rise.

03

Rise of delivery-only restaurants, called ghost or dark kitchens.

04

Contactless food service will continue to be in demand, including robotics that offer no-touch ordering, accessibility and customization.



# Key Takeaways



Find ways to balance the health, comfort, nutrition and indulgence that consumers want.



Be a powerful food storyteller to reinforce authenticity, transparency and novelty.



Celebrate the people behind your food by embracing the entire farm to table journey.



Introduce trending foods and flavors, including items that drive coverage and conversation.



Continue to explore new solutions for the changing environment, from products and recipes to labor savers.