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[Home](#) / [Articles](#) / **2019** / 2019 Formulation Trends: Bold, Adventurous, Cause-Driven

2019 Formulation Trends: Bold, Adventurous, Cause-Driven

Strong flavor fusions, responsibly sourced ingredients and plant-based foods are among 2019 trend predictions.

By Carolyn Schierhorn, Contributing Editor

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Throughout 2019, one overarching trend will influence not just food and beverage formulations, but also ingredient sourcing, packaging, marketing strategies and commitment to corporate social responsibility. “There continues to be a rise in conscious consumption; this is something we see as being a very lasting trend,” observes Melissa Abbott of The Hartman Group.

Conscious consumption extends far beyond health to sustainability and farm-level distinctions, and it spans all generations, says Abbott, who is vice president of culinary insights for the Bellevue, Wash., market research firm (www.hartman-group.com).

“Consumers expect food manufacturers to do good and be good, and there has to be ultimate transparency,” she emphasizes.



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Similarly, Austin, Texas-based Whole Foods Market pegs “Purchases that Empower” among leading food trends for 2019, noting that social justice issues are growing in importance. In its latest “top 10 food trends” list, the Amazon-owned retailer singled out two companies for commendation. Greyston Bakery, Yonkers, N.Y. was cited for practicing an “open hiring model – no questions asked,” thereby providing employment opportunities for former prisoners who’ve served their time and other disenfranchised people. Oakland, Calif.-headquartered Kuli Kuli produces moringa nutrient powder sourced from moringa oleifera trees organically grown by women’s farming cooperatives in South Asia and Africa.

But helping to right the world’s wrongs certainly isn’t the only driver of consumption; contemporary consumers of all ages increasingly love to try something new and different. That’s why Innova Market Insights has named “Discovery: The Adventurous Consumer” as its No. 1 global food and beverage trend for the new year.

Innova (www.innovamarketinsights.com) noted a 35 percent increase in food and beverage launches with a “discover,” “explore” or similar claim in 2017 versus 2016 and predicts significant gains in such claims for 2018 (when the data are analyzed) and 2019. What’s more, two-thirds of consumers in the U.S., the United Kingdom and China recently surveyed by Innova agree with statement: “I love to discover new flavors.”

“This is a big, broad trend, and it manifests itself in many different ways,” says LuAnn Williams, Innova’s director of innovation. Manufacturers are responding to the discovery trend with innovative and quirky new flavor combinations that often borrow from other food & beverage categories and are influenced by ever-more exotic frontiers in international cuisine.

Williams highlighted a few examples, such as Unilver’s recently introduced Culture Republick brand, which includes several flavors of light probiotic ice cream: Turmeric Chai & Cinnamon, Cold Brew & Chocolate Chai, Pistachio & Caramel, Lemon & Graham, Chocolate & Cherry, and Matcha & Fudge. Another interesting example, according to Williams, is Mars Inc.’s Skittle Sweet Heat line, which encompasses the candy flavors Fiery Watermelon, Sizzlin’ Strawberry, Flamin’ Orange, Blazin’ Mango and Lemon Spark.

Likewise acknowledging that consumers want “to explore more of the world through their palates,” Whole Foods recognizes “Pacific Rim Flavors” as the topmost food trend for 2019. “Ingredients like longganisa (a Filipino pork sausage), dried shrimp, cuttlefish and shrimp paste are on restaurant and home menus that span from breakfast to dinner, while vibrant tropical fruits such as guava, dragon fruit and passionfruit are making their way into colorful smoothie bowls and cocktails,” the retailer states.

While some of the more common ethnic cuisines in the U.S. are declining somewhat in popularity, “they’re being replaced by hyper-regional versions,” observes Roger Lane, marketing manager-savory for Sensient Flavors (www.sensientflavorsandfragrances.com), Hoffman Estates, Ill. “For example, Asian flavors have been around for ages, but we’re seeing interest in Macanese cuisine surge. It’s the perfect fusion food as it combines influences from South America, Europe and Asia.”

Besides lesser-known Asian foods and ingredients, Middle Eastern cuisine “is going to hit its stride in 2019,” adds food industry consultant Maeve Webster, the president of Arlington, Vt.-based Menu Matters. “As part of that, modern Israeli [cuisine] will grow as an influence.”

Webster notes that beverages will remain a fertile realm for research & development in the coming year. “Beverages are really exciting because the level of experimentation tends to be greater, as the investment from the consumer’s point of view is a lot more limited,” she explains. “For example, you’ll see a consumer trying a balsamic strawberry basil craft soda who likely would not try the same flavor combination in a dessert or in a main course. Beverages are more approachable with less potential for disappointment or extreme concern about a wasted experience or money spent.”

David Marcotte, senior vice president of operations for Kantar Consulting’s Strategic Advisory Services (consulting.kantar.com), agrees that beverages offer a fun, cost-effective and less-risky space for exploring new flavors and ingredients. Beverages also provide an ideal way to deliver vitamins, minerals and other healthful substances.

In 2019, Marcotte expects to see continuing proliferation of “every imaginable flavor of seltzer” and more and more iterations of distilled and nutrient-infused bottled water, following the lead of Glacéau Smartwater, now owned by Coca-Cola Co. “Cold-brew ‘anything’ will also remain a huge hit,” he adds.

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