

# HOUSTON CHRONICLE



## Gourmet marketplace sets food, restaurant trends

**Grocers, tastemakers savor search for next big flavor at annual Fancy Food Show**

By Greg Morago | July 11, 2016

NEW YORK - Ever wonder how food trends such as quinoa, matcha, cookie butters and beets start to infiltrate the supermarket aisles and eventually show up on our breakfast/lunch/dinner plates?

One driving factor is the gourmet food business.

The industry that represents 14 percent of all retail food sales in the United States helps set and define trends that eventually go mainstream by blossoming in grocery stores and on restaurant menus. And the breeding ground for these emerging trends is the Specialty Food Association's Fancy Food Shows. The most recent gourmet food extravaganza, held recently in New York, attracted more than 2,670 exhibitors from 55 countries and more than 47,000 food professionals. It's a powerful contingent: Last year the specialty food and beverage industry posted a record \$120.5 billion in sales.

The Fancy Food Show is where you can see the first trickles of the trends that eventually seep into our collective consumption. Example: the nation's current passion for smoked flavors. At the 2014 show, new foods such as smoked chocolate chips and smoked cola gumdrops sent up smoke signals. Two years later we see smoked pickles, smoked maple syrups, smoked cocktail bitters, smoked butter, smoky mayonnaise, smoky salsa, charred fruits and vegetables, burnt-sugar toppings and fire-roasted everything.

Teams of buyers from your favorite grocery stores such as H-E-B, Central Market, and Kroger staff the show and study emerging trends. "We find the food show inspirational. Our team focuses on trends, emerging brands and ingredients to lead product innovation and selection," said Tom Niedzwicki, grocery merchandising manager for the Kroger Houston division. "Our Houston market is often the first to try new products. Our local food scene reflects many cultures and palates. Many customers here are willing to experiment and explore new tastes."

This year's trends were both blatant - the continued popularity of pumpkin pie flavors and a flood of coconut products - and subtle (maca root powder as the next great superfood). And in between? Tons of room for potential in everyday foods like crackers, popcorn, chips, ice cream, yogurt, soups and spreads.

The coconut trend is an example of how products like coconut water and coconut chips can spiral into myriad specialty foods.

"Once the door opened, more products just keep coming in meeting different needs - flavor, good fats, healthful snacking, flavor adventure," said independent trend analyst Kara Nielsen.

Denise Purcell, editor of Specialty Food magazine, said she was especially excited about new savory and spicy yogurts like the ones from New York-based Chaat Co. that include flavors such as mango chili, tamarind date and cucumber mint that come with a separate container of puffed lentils for a crunchy topping.

Nielsen was impressed by the emergence of coffee flour - expect to see more of that byproduct food made from dried coffee cherry husks - and was not at all surprised by the pumpkin pie spice juggernaut. "Maybe next fall we'll see ready-to drink pumpkin spice bottled soups!"

If not sooner.

These are some of the hot food trends identified by trend-watchers at the Summer Fancy Food Show.

## ***Anything and everything***

The gourmet bagel trend that started a few years ago in New York may have tipped to the dark side with the arrival of such nonsense as Oreo bagels and brightly hued rainbow bagels. But the idea of an "everything" bagel - that topping that gives you the best of everything: poppy, sesame and caraway seeds, dried onion, garlic, salt - has spawned a separate trend.

Backyard Brine, a pickle company from Long Island, N.Y., showed an "everything" pickle while the Perfect Bite Co. offered "everything" pigs in a blanket (hot dogs wrapped in puffy pastry topped with poppy, sesame and caraway seeds).

The Lance cracker company now has Everything Bagel Breakfast Biscuit Sandwiches in its portfolio and Sohha Savory Yogurt company is making an everything-bagel yogurt dip. The marketplace also is ready for everything bagel mustard and hummus.

Philadelphia-based Little Baby's Ice Cream, meanwhile, has savory flavors in its portfolio including cucumber dill, jerk spice, tomato soup and grilled cheese, ramen and - you guessed it - Everything Bagel.

## ***This bud's for you***

The popularity of St-Germain elderflower liqueur is considerable these days. It seems like every bar has that fancy bottle of floral, French liquid made from the wild blossoms of the elder tree. And now elderflower (and elderberry) products are gaining steam. There are elderflower sodas, syrups and cocktail mixers, as well as a new elderflower tonic from the British Fever-Tree brand that makes our gin and tonics so delightful.

Two products picked as finalists for the Specialty Food Association's Sofi awards (the Oscars of the gourmet food world) included American Spoon's new Wild Elderberry Jelly and No. 2 Tom Collins with Elderflower & Hops cocktail mixer from the inventive Bittermilk Company of Charleston, S.C. Could elderflower popsicles or elderflower sorbet be far behind?

## ***Joltin' Joe***

Coffee drinks aren't a new trend, though ready-to-drink coffee is the fastest-growing beverage category in the U.S. But coffee continues to perk up the gourmet market in fresh ways: organic dairy-free coffee desserts, coffee mints, coffee bean granola and foods made with coffee flour (ground green coffee beans that retain the bean's antioxidant content). Coffee in your breakfast Danish?

Yes, the Invisible Chef showed salted caramel macchiato doughnut muffin mix. There also was coffee brownies from Savvy Girl Baking Co. And what's with butter coffee? The trend of putting unsalted, grass-fed butter in coffee (see the Bulletproof Diet) has led to single-serve butter coffee packets from Coffee Blocks. Our favorite bit of new java enjoyment came from a company called Karmalize.me: a gourmet almond butter spread infused with coffee called Morning Joe Spread.

## ***Yogurt and hummus redux***

Some of our beloved creamy and pureed foods are getting some delicious do-overs. For many, yogurt is a sweet snack with its multitude of fruit and dessert flavors. But savory yogurts are coming on strong.

Two big yogurt companies, Chobani and Fage, are adding spicy and savory options. From Chobani: a new Meze Dip line that includes yogurt dips in flavors such as roasted red pepper, three-pepper salsa, chili lime and smoked onion with parmesan. From Fage: a new Fage Crossovers line with yogurt flavors including carrot ginger with pistachio, coconut curry with cashew, tomato basil with almonds and olive thyme with almonds.

Hummus also is showing its sweet side. Boston-based Delighted By is a pioneer in dessert hummus with flavors such as brown batter, Snickerdoodle, orange-ginger and chocolate chip. S'mores, tiramisu and banana split hummus could be on their way.

## ***Mind the sap***

It's not just for pancakes anymore. No, maple syrup has grown up and become haute stuff. Sure, you can still pour it over your waffles, but you might be more sparing knowing that something like BLiS Bourbon Matured Maple Syrup has been matured in single barrel Kentucky bourbon casks. Or that it has been hardwood smoked (Sugar Bob's Smoked Maple Syrup). Or that it's found its way into spreads (maple butter, maple peanut butter) and even beverages - maple-flavored water (from Happy Tree), beer and cocktail ingredients (Barrel Smoked Maple Syrup by Tippleman's, Maple Whiskey Sour mix from Cocktail Crate).

## ***Puttin' on the spritz***

Pump spray or aerosol delivery of something like corn or olive oil has been around for decades. But the food world has found new things to pump up. Simply Beyond has created a new line of essential herb oils mixed with canola oil for everyday cooking. Need a hint of basil, cilantro, lemongrass, thyme or oregano? Simply spray it on food.

The new sprays from Alice & the Magician operate on the concept that 90 percent of flavor is aroma. So the company has taken natural and organic materials and concentrated them in a line of intensely aromatic atomizers that can be misted atop cocktails. The perfumed flavors: London Dry, Citrus Blossom Harvest, Andalucia's Garden and Autumn Bonfire.

## ***Drink up***

Water can't simply be pure and refreshing anymore. It has to be infused with vitamins or electrolytes or claims of energy.

Now other bottled drinks want to promote a better you from the inside out, too. The Teaonic brand of herbal teas purport to be kind to your liver, skin, hair and nails, and even adrenal glands. Arteasan teas asks "what if you drank in a world of good?" and delivers tea infusions the brand says replenish the mind and body.

Sparkling Bitters may look like yummy cocktail mixers but they also claim to balance appetite and aid in digestion. And those drinking vinegars? They're not going away. Neither are kombucha products like Health-Ade Kombucha, a "bubbly probiotic" that is packaged like a smart, hip tonic.

Whole grain smoothies, too, such as those from Uji Smoothies, are nutritious drinks made with oats, millet, quinoa and chia.