

Eating with a conscience

'In 2006, food became political,' trend spotter tells conference

By Lisa Grace Marr

The Hamilton SpectatorBrampton (Jan 31, 2007)

The menu of your favourite restaurant will boast large print and offer everything from organic salad greens to line-caught fish on its recycled paper in a few years.

At least that's what should happen, according to some futuristic predictions at yesterday's Foodservice Interchange conference.

The large print is in deference of the boomers' aging eyes but the recycled paper and organics are for their conscience.

"In 2006, food became political," Rosanna Caira, editor of Foodservice and Hospitality magazine, told conference attendees.

"(Social responsibility) has really hit the industry. It's not just about the environment, it's about fair trade as well."

Already, high-profile chefs have stopped offering certain kinds of fish due to concern about fishing methods. New York City has banned trans fats. Chicago has banned foie gras due to animal welfare concerns.

Health-savvy boomers with deep pockets and deeper concerns about climate change, along with tech-savvy 20-somethings, are behind other changes.

University of Toronto economist and demographer David Foot urged restaurateurs to develop customized menus to appeal to the various dietary demands of the 10 million boomers in the market whom he predicts will be looking for comfortable, casual dining experiences. The 20-somethings' lack of concern for quality and service plus their demand for convenience will also drive businesses to appeal to those tastes, he said.

Other forecasted trends:

* Expect more meals to go but we're not just talking takeout. More restaurants are expected to offer branded sauces or ready-to-cook meals.

A trend in the U.S. slowly catching on here is the "we'll-assemble-you-cook" option served up with a glass of wine. Show up, cook maybe a dozen meals then go home and pop the food in the oven or freezer.

- * Breakfast is the most important meal of the day -- that holds true for Canada's restaurants, which saw 10 per cent growth in breakfast servings. McDonald's executives even recently floated the idea of serving breakfast all day.
- * Increased demand for specific ethnic cuisines as Canada's immigration rate soars. Think Tuscan sauces, Korean sochu (sweet potato vodka) and masala dosa (a kind of Indian perogy).
- * Fewer diets, more moderation and exercise.
- * Small portions, big indulgences. Witness the 100-calorie packs of cookies, chocolate and everything else that tastes great but is bad for you.

Food facts

- * 18: per cent of meals eaten in the car in Canada
- * \$5,884: Average amount Canadians spend on alcohol and food from stores. That's 9 per cent of household spending
- * \$1,777: Amount the average Canadian spends on food and alcohol from restaurants. That's 3 per cent of household spending
- * 121: Percentage increase in orders for vegetarian burgers from 2000 to 2004. Orders for water bottles increased by 55 per cent and main-dish salads increased by 32 per cent.
- * 12.3: Percentage increase in drive-through traffic from 1996 to 2005 while on-premise eating accounted for less than 40 per cent of all restaurant meals in 2005. That's down from 47 per cent in 1996.
- * \$50.6 billion: Total sales of Canada's foodservice industry in 2006, up 1.3 per cent from 2005.

lmarr@thespec.com

905-526-3992