



# TASTY TRENDS

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Fun and exciting trends in foodservice

Trends in foodservice don't come and go as quickly as the latest hashtags trending on social media. But there is a constant ebb and flow when it comes to new and popular flavor profiles, helpful tools, the latest diet trends and time- and cost-efficient tips for the kitchen.

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We spoke with CCCA members and experts in the food and hospitality industry to find out what is trending in foodservice in Christian camping and beyond. ►





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## **Foods and Flavors**

There will always be classic meals and ingredients people expect to find at camp or a conference center, but trends across the country point to people exploring more adventurous tastes. Here are a few trends you may want to welcome into your kitchen.

### ***Nondairy milks***

In March 2023, *Better Homes & Gardens* shared an article featuring 12 popular dairy-free and plant-based alternatives. It's possible your kitchen may get requests from guests for beverages made from avocado, chia, pea protein, tiger nuts, potatoes or macadamia nuts.

### ***Mushrooms***

With more than 10,000 known varieties of mushrooms around the world, the potential of this food is limitless! Mushrooms are finding their way into main dishes as meat alternatives and flavor enhancers in recipes. According to a top chef in Canada who goes by Ricardo, more restaurants are incorporating mushrooms into their menus because of "the rich umami flavor, low environmental impact and low cost."

### ***Swicy foods***

A mashup of sweet and spicy foods leads you to something "swicy." This could be a main course, a side dish or a dessert. In her blog post about food trends in 2023, cookbook author Kristy Bernardo said, "Swicy food includes hot honey, chili and dark chocolate candy bars and even some types of hot chicken." These flavor combinations are popular in South Korean dishes and are finding their way into a variety of non-Korean recipes as well.

### ***Ethnic foods***

Global dishes are on the rise, according to Bernardo, "but perhaps none more than food from the Philippines." She also mentioned a trend in BBQ dishes from the Middle East, Mediterranean, South American and Asian regions. Hummus is a classic dip that can be added to the salad bar to provide another protein option for your vegetarian guests. The chef also notes that curries are gaining popularity in the U.S., including Indian, Thai, Japanese and Indonesian curry dishes. Curries can provide a new option for your buffet, and they don't always have to be spicy.

### ***Meat alternatives***

Soy and lentils are no longer the primary go-to alternatives to meat products. The growing trend of plant-based diets is causing the meat-substitutes industry to explode.

According to the Datassential 2023 Food Trends report, "a healthy portion of consumers — 40% — say they plan to purchase plant-based meat substitutes in 2023, with millennials being the most likely (48%)."

Gilles Stassart, corporate chef at General Mills, suggests roasting a meat alternative, such as eggplant. In addition, look for products made with mushrooms, jackfruit, potatoes, beets or nuts. ►



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# Becoming a foodservice team that produces zero waste is a lofty goal, but there are several steps you can take in that direction.

## **Tools and Equipment**

Chefs are always on the lookout for tools or equipment that will make processes smoother and food tastier. Watch for these rising trends and how they can be incorporated into your kitchen.

### ***Air fryers***

Who doesn't love fried chicken nuggets or roasted veggies? Commercial-size air fryers can give you amazing flavors without all the grease. Not only do you end up with a healthier meal, but also you can save time and money since most foods cook faster in an air fryer than traditional frying methods and use less oil. You can also maintain a safer and cleaner kitchen without hot oil splattering around.

### ***Immersion blenders***

A more compact (and sometimes less expensive) option than a traditional blender, immersion blenders are effective and easy to clean. Steve Hinkle, head chef at Warm Beach Camp and Conference Center (Stanwood, Washington) and Ryan Hernandez, executive chef at Laity Lodge (Leakey, Texas) rely on their immersion blenders to make soups and gravy from scratch.

## **Artificial intelligence**

By now you've probably heard about ChatGPT, an OpenAI chatbot platform that can answer any question and help you do anything from write a poem to a loved one or write an essay on any topic. But this tool can also be used in your kitchen. If you're looking for inspiration for a new recipe, or you're looking for a way to use up a wide variety of leftovers, ChatGPT can help.

In preparation for this article, we asked the site to give us a recipe to feed 200 teenagers using chicken while also providing a plant-based alternative. We were pleased to get a recipe (including ingredients and steps) to make a lemon-herb roasted chicken with garlic mashed potatoes and roasted vegetables. The response initially included tofu as the meat alternative, but we asked for other options and were offered the idea of portobello mushrooms to replace the chicken.

## **Social media**

We all know that social media has given a bullhorn to anyone with a smartphone, and while there's a lot of noise out there, you can sometimes find a hidden gem in a TikTok video or Reddit thread. Whether you're looking for a recipe, new kitchen gadgets or hacks to make your life easier, you can probably find something useful on social media. Just remember, not everyone on social media is an expert, and not everything you read or watch is true, so do your research to back up ideas you find on your go-to platform. ►







## Specialties

*Food items members are known for*

■ by Sarah Tait

Many camps have a special treat or meal that has become a tradition and even an “institution,” says Ryan Hernandez, executive chef at Laity Lodge (Leakey, Texas). He cites the camp’s Almond Graham Cracker Cookies, which have been a tradition for over 30 years.

Our friends at Indian Creek Baptist Camp (Mauckport, Indiana) offer a simple meal that is called the Golden Meal (because everything is gold in color). The meal includes macaroni and cheese, nuggets and mandarin oranges. “Once we named it, the passion for it took off,” said Jordan Morris, executive director at ICBC. “We even made a sticker about it that is a big seller.” The camp has expanded the meal for the older campers to feature a macaroni and cheese buffet.

Zephyr Point (Lake Tahoe, Nevada) makes chocolate macaroons from scratch; they are legendary. Miracle Ranch (Port Orchard, Washington) loves to serve its famous stuffed hashbrowns and Warm Beach Camp (Stanwood, Washington) is known for its delicious cinnamon rolls. Camp Gilead’s (Carnation, Washington) foodservice director, Stephanie Bird, says they’re “known for our biscuits and gravy (and we even have a dance for it!).” Other camps offer homemade granola, a made-from-scratch salsa bar and carved watermelons.

What special dish are you known for? Share it with everyone in the Camp Forums on the CCCA website. Your idea might just inspire a camp looking to create its own culinary tradition.



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### **Philosophies and Practices**

The more things change the more they stay the same, as the old saying goes. When it comes to foodservice, hospitality and eating, the trends show some newer ideas mixed in with your current philosophies or practices. Here are some things you may want to learn more about.

#### ***Zero-waste kitchens***

According to several leaders in the foodservice industry, more kitchens are making efforts to minimize the environmental impact of food production. You may have heard of a zero-waste kitchen along with other phrases like nose-to-tail and leaf-to-root cooking. Becoming a foodservice team that produces zero waste is a lofty goal, but there are several steps you can take in that direction.

1. Reconsider portion sizes. If plates are coming back with a lot of food left on them, you may be giving guests more than needed.
2. Plan to use all the parts of a food item. For example, Lighthouse Restaurant in Brooklyn, New York, gives its empty oyster shells to a project that uses them to rebuild reef sites, and some vegetable scraps are used by local artists to dye textiles.

#### ***Farm-to-table***

It's been years since the phrase "farm-to-table" entered the scene, and it's safe to say that this is not a passing fad. The trend of eating fresher foods, minimizing the impact on the environment and benefitting local farms has caught on across the country as people see the benefits in the approach. If you're growing some of your own produce, great! If not, consider looking for local farmers who you could partner with to get the freshest fruits and vegetables.

#### ***Plant-based diets***

As we mentioned earlier in this article, plant-based eating is not going anywhere. Not too long ago, people chose to avoid meat products primarily out of concern for the treatment of animals. Today, there are several reasons that people are leaning into a vegetarian, vegan or flexitarian (only occasionally eating meat) lifestyle, many of which involve health.

There are several studies that plant-based diets can lower a person's risk for heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, kidney disease and more. Others choose this lifestyle because they believe it's good for the planet, according to Nutrition Strategy Director at Unilever, Maxim Yermolayev. "Almost 15% of all greenhouse gas emissions derive from the meat and dairy industries," he says.

The plant-based food industry is booming. Hans van der Reijden of the Horst Schulze School of Hospitality Management at Auburn University said, "The evolution of plant-based food is going so fast and it's starting to taste better."

### Food allergies and sensitivities

While not a new trend, camps and conference centers have found practical and helpful ways to address food allergies and sensitivities in their kitchens. These issues aren't going away, so we thought it would be helpful to provide some trending ideas to streamline your processes and menu when it comes to food allergies.

One simple approach is to avoid a lot of dishes that include gluten (perhaps the most common allergen/sensitivity). Hernandez, at Laity Lodge, serves very few dishes with gluten to reduce his workload and make it easier for guests with gluten intolerance. He serves rice and potatoes and almost no pasta. "People like real food, and it's worth the effort," Hernandez explained, "Rather than serving several options, we serve one thing well." If he does serve a pasta dish, he offers a gluten-free starch as well.

Coming up with a dish that is gluten-free, dairy-free, vegetarian and doesn't contain herbs like onion or garlic is a big task, but the food service industry is coming up with new foods designed to meet those needs.

Black bean burgers, for example, are a great way to feed guests with special diets without breaking the bank or making them miss out on burger night. Hans van der Reijden makes a black bean burger from scratch that avoids all the most common allergens, even garlic and onions, and it still tastes great.

Create "build-your-own" meal options for meals like soups or "power bowls." By offering a delicious, allergen-free broth base along with protein, veggie and grain options to add in, guests can create their own soup that they know is safe and will be delicious.

A power bowl bar could include a variety of grains to use as a base, including rice, lentils or beans, along with proteins, veggies, fruits and sauces. Breakfasts can include yogurt parfait bars that present dairy and nondairy yogurt options, GF granola, fruits and nuts.

Another tip when planning a dish that will also be accompanied by a gluten-free version is to consider making your GF version free from other common allergens as well, such as dairy, soy or nuts.

Gilles Stassart, corporate chef at General Mills, suggests talking with your distributor to find great menu items that can serve a wide variety of needs in one shot.

Another tip that can save time in food lines is to include graphics or ingredient lists by each food item so people with allergies or sensitivities can easily identify the things that are safe for them to eat.

If you're offering separate meals for those with allergies, designate a specific line or pickup window explicitly for allergen-friendly foods so it's easier for those guests to find what they can safely eat.

### Scratch cooking

Many kitchens are digging into a scratch-cooking approach. This means preparing meals from basic, unprocessed ingredients rather than relying on pre-packaged or processed foods. Although it requires more preparation and planning, scratch cooking can be more cost-effective and add variety to your menu. One way to make scratch cooking a little easier is to take advantage of pre-cut veggies or meats and put those leftovers to good use.

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We know there are plenty of other fresh ideas out there. Share any new foods, recipes, equipment or processes that you're implementing in your kitchen with the rest of our CCCA members in the Camp Forums. ■



*Jen Howver was once a camp kid who later spent two summers working at a camp in Michigan, where she met and later married her husband, Jay. Fast forward more than 25 years and now Jen works as a marketing consultant and editor of InSite magazine. She and Jay live in Monument, Colorado, with their daughters, Noelle and Chloe, and way too many pets.*



*Sarah Tait is on the program and development team at Royal Ridges Retreat (Yacolt, Washington). She has been attending Royal Ridges for 25 years. Her passion for the camp began at age nine, when she was a camper. Sarah returned as a teenager and spent three years as summer staff. She now works year-round with her husband and three girls.*