

GEN FOOD AND THE RISE OF THE NEW FOODIE



May 2021

Food has been part of our collective pandemic experiences. From empty shelves and shuttered restaurants to sourdough starters and virtual happy hours, food has been fuel, education, escape and connection. But as we move closer to what's next, what will happen to our relationship with food? And does that vary by where you are or have been on the "foodie" scale?

The three C's of food marketing reset with the pandemic:

Covid

Not only did our lives change, but so did our kitchens. No longer just a place to gather and eat, it was now often also a classroom and/or an office. And our pantries became not just where the staples lived, but inspiration as well.

Companies

Grocery retailers worked to keep foods on shelves, indoor dining became a faint memory, brands reframed their products to be relevant in pantry cooking, and technology changed how we learn about and purchase food.

Consumer

As we've all been home more, we're cooking more, baking more, trying new recipes, experimenting with cocktails, eating at different times of day, and developing new food-related habits. And for many, as we continue to stay home and limit our time in public, this connection to food has increasingly become a way to experiment, explore and experience something new.

In FleishmanHillard's inaugural Gen Food research,

conducted in 2018, we uncovered a cohort united much more by their values about and relationship with food than demographics. As the pandemic approached the year mark, we wanted to see what had happened to these influential food consumers and how their food behaviors had and were likely to change. We also wanted to see if a pandemic-induced focus on food had changed how other consumers think about food.

Our 2021 Gen Food study shows COVID-19 has created a new "foodie,"

someone who previously thought of food only in a functional manner, but now sees food as a source of indulgence, creativity and escape. How this New Foodie is connected to Gen Food, and how their shared food values and behaviors will impact the food industry beg questions all food and beverage brands should be asking as we emerge from the pandemic.

To understand the New Foodie, we'll reintroduce you to Gen Food

and share how the pandemic has and has not changed their food values and habits. Then, we'll introduce the New Foodie and share some valuable insights into the consumer that will be driving the food industry reset. And through the lens of the New Foodie, we have four challenges for the food industry to consider tapping into the New Foodie and driving growth.



REINTRODUCING GEN FOOD

United by values and demographically diverse, Gen Food are engaged and informed food consumers.

They are individuals who ...

- Consider health impacts in the food choices they make
- Monitor food labels for nutrition information and ingredients
- Consume food-related media
- Share information about food, health, cooking and nutrition with others
- Weed out information about food production and processing
- Influence others when it comes to food and nutrition

In order to reconnect with Gen Food, TRUE Global Intelligence, the in-house research practice of FleishmanHillard, conducted an online survey among **2,100 consumers age 16-74**, with nationally representative splits in **age, gender, region and ethnicity**. Fieldwork was conducted Jan. 21 – Feb. 3, 2021.



WHAT'S CHANGED SINCE 2018?

STILL MINDFUL ABOUT FOOD, BUT WITH AN UPTICK IN INDULGENCE

The majority of the Gen Food at 64% remains mindful about their food choices. This was an important identifying attribute among this audience in 2018, and it remains so in 2021, but is down 10 points over the last three years.

That mindfulness is being activated through new eating habits, as 3 in 4 report their eating habits have changed a lot/somewhat over the past year.

And it's toward indulgent eating:

Fats+5

**Processed/
Refined foods**.....+7

Sugar.....+7

Sodium+4

Carbohydrates.....+7

It's also worth noting that we didn't see the same level of uptick for what you might call more healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables. In fact, these items declined slightly since 2018.



WIDER FOOD-RELATED BEHAVIORS HAVE SHIFTED DUE TO THE PANDEMIC

Beyond what Gen Food is eating, where, when, how and why they eat has shifted as well.

↑ 9 pts

At-home meals have increased

↑ 21 pts

with restaurants closed, they're ordering in much more

↑ 5 pts

Since 2018, a smaller but notable increase in those purchasing meal kits

Going into the research, we wanted to understand different factors that were impacting Gen Food's behaviors, and we have ...

86%

who said they're doing their part in limiting the spread of the virus

81%

said they're concerned about their finances due the unpredictability of COVID

79%

said they've had to cook and eat more at home because of local restrictions

What's interesting is that this has been a combination of different factors — active choices people are making to do their part, but also the result of restrictions placed upon them.

BASICS SUCH AS FOOD ACCESS AND FOOD INSECURITY ARE MORE PRESSING TODAY

As a values-based audience, it shouldn't be a surprise that Gen Food showed an increase in the importance of the basic essentials (food, water, safety) as opposed to higher order needs (esteem, self-actualization).

Access to good food.....+5

Reducing food waste.....+6

Food insecurity.....+9

And conversely, while the basics have gained in prominence, we've seen a 10-point decline in what we might consider a higher order need in transparent food labeling.

STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT FOOD

Similar to how Gen Food returned to the basics with regards to food-related concerns, they also desire more direct communication and interactions with loved ones.

Word of mouth with friends/family.....+9

not necessarily happening in-person, but still direct, whether through messaging, facetime, or a Zoom call; these are your virtual happy hours, online cooking classes and weekend discussions about grandma's signature recipe

Social media.....-8

for sharing this type of information, but 57% of them are still doing it regularly



**MOVE OVER
GEN FOOD,
THERE'S A
NEW FOODIE
IN TOWN**

The New Foodie leapt out of the data tables and into our discussions based on their response to one simple question:

Do you “live to eat” or “eat to live”? Not surprisingly, the New Foodie lives to eat.

78%

of Gen Food emerging as a New Foodie

63%

of consumers are Gen Food

The great news is that the New Foodie is nearly half of the consumer base and a sizable target group for food and beverage companies.

How do they “live to eat”?

Quite simply, for them food is an **experience**, and it must have a **story**. Words they associate most with food are people (family, friends, community) and experience (entertainment, nostalgia, creativity).

The New Foodie wants to try new things:

38%

are ordering groceries online

56%

are trying a new recipe every week

29%

are drinking more and different alcoholic beverages

They crave new information about food and food production:

50%

trust their family most

37%

trust friends

56%

are visiting food websites

49%

watch or stream food media

But what defines them goes beyond the plate as their food values drive their actions.

85%

believe if they take action, they personally can make a difference in the kinds of foods we eat and how they are grown

83%

of them feel they must take action and feel personal responsibility for food issues like sustainability, food availability, reducing food waste, ethical treatment of animals and food safety



THE NEW FOODIE POST-PANDEMIC CRYSTAL BALL

At first glance, the crystal ball is cloudy. Just over half of the New Foodies say their new and evolved food habits will stay the same post-COVID. But then we asked them if they wanted to return to food experiences that provided them with more opportunities to “live to eat,” and they most certainly do:

66%

want to entertain at home

60%

want to cook/bake for co-workers

76%

want to grocery shop in person

78%

want to get together with friends and family

73%

want to eat foods I haven't been able to eat during COVID-19

51%

want happy hours with friends and co-workers

How can these both be true? It's simple. To the New Foodie, “living to eat” wants to keep what they learned during and loved about food during COVID-19, but to do that both AT and AWAY from home. This should inspire all food and beverage brands as the New Foodie can and will be part of the food industry recovery.



CAPITALIZING ON THE NEW FOODIE

As we looked back to the data and forward to the post-pandemic food world, we see four opportunities for food companies to turn what drives the New Foodie into growth drivers for their brands.

Enable the Food Experience

The consumer who has spent a year in front of a screen learning about and engaging with food is craving an experience that speaks to all of their senses. They want to be a part of the process, not just a bystander. But, as the digital world has expanded the food universe, don't be afraid to continue to use technology to bring consumers to and through new food experiences as well.

Bring Them Together

While they have survived on Zoom happy hours, the New Foodie wants to visit your restaurant, brewery, winery and farm. They want to spend time with family and friends over food and drink. But they want to be safe, and they want you and your teams to be safe.

Educate and Activate Their Mindfulness

The New Foodie makes decisions equally on what is “good for them” and what is “good for the people and the planet.” By sharing your brand's ingredient stories, introducing them to your farmers/ranchers/brewers/chefs and updating them on your ESG and sustainability plans, they will have more reasons to buy your products.

Build a Relationship to Evolve Them Into a Brand Advocate

Do you know who your brand's New Foodies are? When they post about your product or service, do you engage with them? They want to know more about you.

Food has and always will bring us together — even in the depths of a global pandemic.

How the food industry will recover will depend on their ability to meet the evolved and still evolving needs of the new foodie.



Have additional questions?
Want to talk about how your
brand or business can activate
the New Foodie?



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THANK YOU!



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