

by A. Elizabeth Sloan

## U.S. Consumers Have a Taste for World Cuisines

Consumers in the United States have a big appetite for foods from around the world. Nine in 10 meal preparers (91%) polled in the 2009 *Gallup Survey of Dinner* report that they regularly eat ethnic foods/foods with an ethnic flavor either at home or in a restaurant. Thus, it seems clear that understanding the fast emerging new hierarchy of foreign cuisines, foods, flavors, and forms is essential for success in the U.S. marketplace.

Italian, Mexican, and Chinese remain the "Big 3" ethnic food categories. Gallup reports that 64% of meal preparers frequently cook Italian from scratch, 59% Mexican, and 46% Chinese; even more consumers frequently serve heat-and-eat products based on these cuisines.

In restaurants, French joins the list of mainstream ethnic cuisines, particularly among diners age 50+, who grew up on classical French cooking techniques and Chef Julia Child. According to Technomic's 2009 *Flavor Consumer Trend Report*, 84% of consumers will order Chinese, 83% Italian, 78% Mexican, and 66% French when they are dining away from home.

American Culinary Federation (ACF) chefs polled in the National Restaurant Assn.'s (NRA) *What's Hot?* survey, named amuse-bouche as the top appetizer for 2010; creme brulee was 11th on the list of trendy desserts. Regional ethnic cuisines topped the list of hot ethnic menu trends in the chefs' survey.

In *Nation's Restaurant News'* February 2010 "Food Writer's Diary" poll, Emilia-Romagna—home of Parmesan cheese, balsamic vinegar, spaghetti Bolognese, and mortadella sausage—and Sicily—birthplace of veal marsala and cannoli—were favorite regions for Italian food, followed by Tuscany and Puglia.

With Italy and France strongly associated with Mediterranean cuisine, expect them to continue to be a major influence on menus. Mintel Menu

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Insights' 2010 report *Global Inspiration* tallied 2,800 new items associated with Mediterranean cuisines on restaurant menus in 2009. Spanish and Greek cuisines are among the new Mediterranean pacesetters in restaurants. Technomic's flavor report found that 72% of consumers would order Spanish and 66% Greek food in restaurants. Thai and Japanese are the most preferred Asian regional cuisines in restaurants: 54% of consumers say they would order a Thai dish; 50% would order Japanese, according to Gallup.

Eight in 10 consumers (80%) order egg rolls, making them the No. 1 appetizer choice, according to Technomic's 2010 *Appetizer Consumer Trend Report*. ACF chefs ranked Asian appetizers, e.g., tempura, spring rolls/egg rolls, satay, and dumplings, as

the fourth-hottest appetizer trend for 2010, followed by Mexican appetizers.

Among Asian sauces, teriyaki is playing a more important role in menu offerings, per MenuMine. Ginger is now associated with more than 540 flavor pairings, e.g., wasabi, ponzu, plum, etc. Hoisin and peanut sauce are also growing in importance in foodservice, while sweet and sour and Kung Pao sauce remain lackluster.

Gallup reports that 6% of

Caribbean fare leads the way among regional Latin American cuisines; 66% of consumers would order it in a restaurant, 52% would order Cuban, and 35% Peruvian, per Technomic's flavor report. Mole, chorizo, andouille sausage, and flan are other hot items for 2010.

MenuMine reports that pico de gallo and chipotle sauce are appearing on more menus. In the months ahead, watch for ethnic soups/stews, including menudo, ribollita, miso, and classic bouil-

consumers regularly prepare Thai food at home, and just 3% serve either Japanese, Vietnamese, or Korean fare at home. However, 32% regularly eat Japanese take-out. In restaurants, 31% regularly eat Japanese, 10% Thai, 4% Vietnamese, and 3% Korean. Vietnamese pho and banh mi sandwiches are likely crossovers to American menus.

Ten percent of consumers regularly cook Indian food from scratch at home, according to Gallup, while 7% regularly eat Indian in restaurants, and 3% eat heat-and-serve or take-out Indian fare. Mentions of curry sauce on menus are up 200% in the past two years, per MenuMine.

ACF chefs named Latin American/Nuevo Latino the fourth-hottest cuisine for 2010.

labaisse, to gain in popularity. Ethnic flatbreads, including naan, papadum, lavash, pitas, and, of course, tortillas, are popular sides as well, as are couscous and polenta.

ACF chefs also cited ethnic-inspired children's dishes on menus as a hot trend for 2010. Asian-flavored syrups, scrambled eggs with chorizo, and coconut milk pancakes add an ethnic flavor to breakfast. With young adults partial to ethnic/spicy foods and America beginning to cater to its first generation of "foodie children," the scope of international cuisines likely to appeal to American palates will be unprecedented. **FT**



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