

Spices, Seasonings Come on Strong

Unique tastes are gaining importance as a key food selection attribute, which suggests that consumers' growing fondness for spices is likely to continue to develop. Claims touting unique flavors/recipes were found on 75% of the top-selling new blockbuster foods/beverages on SymphonyIRI Group's 2010–11 Pacesetter list, and distinctive new flavor claims were found on 36% of them—up 14% and 24%, respectively, compared with the 10-year running average.

With 31 million foodies watching television cooking shows and 72% of meals now prepared at home, sales of spices, seasonings, and extracts in food, drug, and mass merchandisers excluding Wal-mart are at an all-time high, topping \$2.1 billion in 2010, according to SymphonyIRI. Mintel's October 2009 *Seasonings—U.S.* report projects that sales will hit \$4.3 billion by 2014.

Other than salt and pepper, garlic (dry/powder), cinnamon, seasoning blends, chili powder, onion powder, nutmeg, cloves, cumin, and ginger were the most purchased dry seasonings in 2010, according to The Nielsen Co. Garlic, cinnamon, basil, oregano, parsley, vanilla extract, and black peppercorns were all used more frequently last year.

Those ages 25–34 are the most likely to be foodies/foodie cooks, according to Packaged Facts' *Foodies in the U.S.*, a 2009 report, and they are now the most likely to use fresh/dried herbs,

spices, and seasonings, according to Mintel. Those ages 18–24 are the most likely to use blends/rubs; those in affluent households are the most likely to use single seasonings.

Recipes/cookbooks influence seasoning purchases for 46% of consumers, eating at someone's house influences 40%, television shows 39%, and recipe websites 27%, according to Mintel.

More than half (55%) of meal preparers would buy more seasonings if they were available in smaller sizes. With Generation Y consumers the most partial to

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fresh products and 33% of all cooks already using fresh/whole herbs and spices, fresh spices appear to have a bright future.

Just over one-quarter (27%) of meal preparers go to specialty stores to buy seasonings, which suggests it's time to upgrade spice offerings and provide more authentic ethnic offerings for America's immigrant populations.

Dining out is a major influencer of seasoning purchases for 39% of meal preparers and for 60% for those ages 18–24, according to Mintel. Spices are also gaining attention on restaurant menus. According to the National Restaurant Assn.'s (NRA) 2011 *Forecast* report, spicy items are the third hottest trend among quick-service operators for 2011.

While Italian, Mexican, and Chinese remain the favorite ethnic cuisines for those ages 34 and older, according to Technomic's 2010 *Generational Report*, young adults are the most likely to order regional Italian, Spanish, Thai, Japanese, Greek, Mediterranean, and Indian dishes. Regional ethnic cuisines, ethnic fusion, Southeast Asian cuisine, Peruvian, and Mediterranean are the top five hot cuisines for 2011 cited by American Culinary Chefs surveyed by NRA.

Ethnic-inspired breakfast items and traditional ethnic

Institute's MenuMine database.

Uses of ethnic food kits such as General Mills' *Wanchai Ferry* brand are gaining steam.

Steam-in-the-bag fresh produce with seasoning will provide a strong new opportunity for spice sales. Eight in 10 shoppers (81%) buy prepared marinated meat/poultry, up 6% vs 2010; 61% marinate their own meat at home, according to FMI's *Power of Meat Survey*. Lastly, spices and herbs have long played a keen role in healthy foods. For low-sodium products, spices—especially chili, oregano, and garlic—are

breakfast dishes rank No. 1 and No. 2 among the hot breakfast trends for 2011, according to NRA. Culinary cocktails, which are made with savory, fresh ingredients, ranked third among the trendy alcoholic beverages for 2011; regional signature cocktails such as mint julep were No. 7, and herb-infused cocktails were No. 10.

Fresh herbs rank seventh on the list of hot produce items for 2011; savory desserts are fifth on the list of hot desserts. Black garlic and seasoned salts made the list of hot ingredients. Ginger, basil, dill, rosemary, cilantro, curry, lemon pepper, saffron, mint, sage, thyme, and tarragon are all gaining in popularity on restaurant menus, according to the Foodservice Research

excellent flavor-enhancing tools.

Indeed, spices are among the new superfoods. According to the McCormick's Science Institute, 1 tsp of cloves has more antioxidant potential (ORAC value) than ½ cup of blueberries, and 1 tsp of cinnamon has more antioxidant potential than 8 oz of pomegranate juice. Other spices have long been known for their medicinal properties (sage for stemming inflammation, for example). According to Sloan Trends TrendSense™ model, rosemary and ginger are currently the most marketable spices for their health linkages. **FT**



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