

## Go Fish!

One-third of adults are trying to add more seafood to their diet, according to Datassential's 2017 *MenuTrends Keynote Report*; trendy raw preparations (e.g., sushi and poke) are attracting younger consumers; and fresh semi-prepared products are offsetting Americans' inadequate cooking skills. For all of the preceding reasons, the time to make some waves in the seafood business is now.

Two-thirds of consumers eat fish/seafood at least occasionally. Higher-income households and those aged 35-plus are the most likely to do so. Just over half of adults eat seafood at least once a week, per Technomic's 2017 *Center of the Plate: Seafood and Vegetarian Trend Report*.

And there's plenty of room for growth. Seafood has the lowest household penetration for fresh food departments (54%), per Nielsen's April 2018 *Getting Hooked on Fresh Seafood* report. For a weekday lunch, 23% of Millennials eat fish occasionally, reports Ypulse's March 2018 *Food/Cooking Trends Survey*. Perhaps most importantly, fish and seafood have been overlooked within many of the fastest-growing packaged food categories (e.g., prepared meals, frozen appetizers, snacks, and breakfast items).

Dollar sales at the fresh seafood counter reached \$4.4 billion in mass channels for the year ended June 17, 2018, up 1%, per IRI, while volume fell by 4.4%. Salmon, shrimp, crab, and lobster are among the categories with the largest seafood counter sales.

Halibut and scallops were among the largest dollar sales gainers in fresh departments for the year ended June 30, 2018; tilapia, mussels, and herring had the biggest declines, per Nielsen. Shrimp and flounder were also top performers.

For the year ended Feb. 24, 2018, prepared seafood showed 3% volume growth; deli seafood entrées had volume growth of 10%; deli sushi, +12%; fresh seafood meals, +32%; and poke, +48%, per Nielsen. Value-added,

pre-prepared seafood (e.g., pre-marinated or kebabs) contributed 41% of total dollar growth for the year ended May 12, 2018, per IRI.

Nielsen reports that 29% of meal kit users say they eat more seafood when using a meal kit. Publix offers *Cook-in-Bag Dinners* that allow the customer to choose a type of fish

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plus seasoning and side for quick and convenient meal preparation.

Although shrimp is still America's most consumed seafood, according to the National Fisheries Institute, consumers are craving a wider variety of options. Other mainstream favorites include salmon, canned tuna, tilapia, Alaskan pollock, Pangasius, cod, crab, catfish, and clams.

Bluefin tuna, with menu mentions up 143% over the past four years, is among the fastest-growing fish on restaurant menus along with cobia, bluefish, rockfish, branzino, big eye tuna, steelhead trout, and lingcod, according to Datassential.

Seafood marketers should consider promoting American regional species (e.g., walleye, Lake Superior trout, perch, and crawfish) using regional descriptors such as New England cod and Pacific halibut. State-branded Alaska seafood influences the likelihood of purchase for 72% of shoppers.

In the National Restaurant Association's 2017 *What's Hot Culinary Forecast*, 45% of chefs cite underutilized fish (e.g., mullet, redfish), as a hot culinary trend for 2018. Seafood charcuterie is among the hot appetizer trends, local seafood is a top culinary concept, and fish sauce is a trendy condiment.

Although Datassential reports that 88% of consumers have eaten seafood as a snack, seafood is noticeably absent in the explosive \$2.3 billion frozen appetizer/snack roll sector

(sales up 6% for the year ended April 22, 2018, per IRI). *Sea Best Breaded Tempura Tilapia Bites* are right on target.

Over the past four years, oysters, trout, mussels, clams, shrimp, and fish have all enjoyed double-digit growth on breakfast menus, per Datassential.

With fresh soup up 14% in unit sales for the year ended July 15, 2018, per IRI, look for more seafood soup offerings like *Charleston She-Crab Soup* from Blount Fine Foods. Watch for shrimp/salmon patties, lobster/crab rolls, seafood salads, and po' boys to jazz up sandwich menus.

Two-thirds of consumers want to know the source or origin of the fish they buy; a similar percentage prefer wild-caught seafood, per Datassential. But while 64% of consumers say they feel it is important that the fish they purchase is environmentally sustainable, it is not a major part of the seafood purchasing decision despite being a high-profile topic within the industry, per Datassential. Moreover, sustainability seems to be more about fin fish than shellfish.

Only one in five seafood operators carried plant-based alternatives alongside fresh seafood; one-third have no interest in doing so, according to *Progressive Grocer's* March 2018 "Retail Seafood Review."

Nearly one-quarter of consumers (23%) noted an increased demand for farm-raised fish. Half of women in a 2018 Foodmix survey cited lower prices as an incentive to buy farm-raised fish. **FT**



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