

by A. Elizabeth Sloan

Let's Do Lunch

The demise of the midday eating occasion has been greatly exaggerated. In fact, lunch may well represent one of the largest opportunities for packaged foods and foodservice in the next few years.

On average, consumers eat lunch 5.9 times per week, according to FMI's *2018 U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends* report. Eighty-five percent of young adults (aged 18–35) and 92% of teens ate lunch on weekdays last year, per Ypulse's *2018 Cooking/Food Trends Survey*.

Lunch has edged out dinner as the leading foodservice day-part. Last year, 35% of lunches were sourced from foodservice; that includes 43% of Gen Z lunches, 41% of Millennial lunches, 34% of Gen X lunches, and 27% of Baby Boomer lunches, per Technomic's *2018 Generational Consumer Trend Report*.

Sales of retail fresh prepared refrigerated lunches reached \$2.5 billion in 2018. For the year ended March 24, 2019, sales of prepared salads topped \$1.8 billion, prepared sandwiches reached \$1.7 billion, and deli soups totaled \$227 million. Sales of hot sandwiches rose 11%, according to the IRI/International Dairy Deli Bakery Association's *2019 State of Deli & Prepared Foods* report.

Moreover, consumers, especially Millennials, Hispanics, and Asian Americans, increasingly cite lunch as the most important meal of the day, per Packaged

Facts' *2019 Eating Trends: Mealtimes & Snacking* report.

So, what is for lunch? Chicken and sandwiches were the most frequently eaten foods for a weekday lunch among those aged 18–35 last year, followed by left-

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overs, pizza, salad, pasta, burgers, vegetables, fruit, beef, rice, and soup, per Ypulse.

About one in five young adults ate noodles, fish, frozen prepared meals, turkey, Mexican food, or pork for lunch; about one in 10 had cereal, barbecue, seafood, sushi, or power/energy/nutrition bars.

Burgers, french fries, chicken sandwiches, pizza/flatbread, and chicken strips were the most ordered lunch items at fast food restaurants last year, per Technomic's *2018 Consumer Sandwich Trend Report*. NPD CREST reports that 8.6 billion meat burgers were ordered in restaurants during the year ended Feb. 19, 2019. In addition, foodservice patrons opted for 4 billion chicken sandwiches and 228 million servings of veggie burgers/veggie sandwiches.

Deli sandwiches were ordered at least once a month by 59% of adults; subs/heroes were ordered by 53%; wraps, 40%; mini sandwiches, 36%; panini, 30%; flatbread sandwiches, 29%; and ethnic sandwiches, 25%, per Technomic's sandwich report.

Peanut butter/jelly sandwiches are the sandwiches most often consumed at home, followed by ham, turkey, and cheese, per NPD Group's *2018 National Eating Trends Survey*.

Katsu sando, a Japanese cut-

cheese/cracker/dessert snack kits grew 8.5% in 2018 and 6.5% for the year ended May 18, 2019, per IRI's *2019 State-of-the-Snack Food Industry*. Half (54%) of adults, 75% of Millennials, and 65% of Hispanics say kits with

let sandwich, is this year's trendy ethnic sandwich. Regional varieties of Mexican chicken soup are the "hot" ethnic soup, per the *2018 What's Hot Chefs Survey*.

Expect global street food—inspired savory morsels, including dim sum, pupusas, arepas, shawarma, empanadas, and alcapurria, to take their place as savory midday morsels.

With 23% of Millennials occasionally eating fish for lunch, 16% having seafood, and 14% enjoying sushi, per Ypulse, seafood is a missed luncheon opportunity.

The sky's the limit when it comes to fries. Taco Bell introduced *Steak Reaper Ranch Fries* with sauce made from the Carolina reaper pepper.

Sixty percent of working adults admit that they "frequently don't take a real lunch break," per the National Restaurant Association's *Restaurant Industry 2019 and Beyond* report, and 45% of adults say they usually eat lunch alone. Thus, the opportunity for convenient grab-and-go and take-from-home lunches has never been stronger.

Sales of refrigerated meat/

familiar entrées in snack-sized portions are very/somewhat appealing, per Smucker's *2018 Snack-ified Trend Briefing*.

Just under half of workers (45%) bring frozen meals/snacks to work often/occasionally, according to the American Frozen Food Institute's *2019 the Power of Frozen* report. Forty-five percent of consumers sometimes substitute frozen appetizers/snacks for a lunch, per Mintel's *2017 Frozen Snacks—U.S.* report. For the 12 weeks ending June 16, 2019, frozen appetizer sales/snack rolls jumped 9.1%, per IRI.

Refrigerated lunch/dinner entrées are the seventh-largest gourmet specialty food category; frozen lunch/dinner meals/entrées are the ninth, per the Specialty Food Association's *2019 State of the Specialty Food Industry* report. Blount's new *Family Kitchen* line of refrigerated single-serve bowls are perfect for today's brown baggers. **FT**



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