

by A. Elizabeth Sloan

Favoring Fermented

For the second year in a row, dietitians surveyed in Pollock Communications' annual *What's Trending in Nutrition Survey* named fermented foods as the top superfood for 2019.

The term "fermented" grew 46% on U.S. restaurant menus over the past four years; kombucha was up 226%; kefir, +101%; kimchi, +92%; and pickled, +55%, per Datassential's Fall 2018 *MenuTrends*, as fermented food festivals, cooking schools, and clubs sprang up around the globe.

With half of Millennials and 40% of Gen Z, black, and Hispanic consumers eating more sour flavors this year than last (e.g., fermented foods and vinegars), according to Mintel's 2019 *Flavor & Ingredients Trends*, the future for fermented fare looks fabulous.

As the cultural shift from focusing on heart health to gut health and its connection to the brain continues, it's not surprising that 39% of consumers are adding more probiotics to their diets, per the Hartman Group's 2019 *Health + Wellness* report.

Digestive health now ranks third among the most sought-after benefits from foods and drinks—just ahead of heart health, according to the International Food Information Council's 2019 *Health & Nutrition Survey*.

Moreover, with 58% of consumers linking the microbiome to weight management, 57% associating it with energy levels, and 56% making a connection to mental well-being, according to the HealthFocus 2019 *U.S. Consumer Trends Survey*, interest in fermented foods will continue to grow.

While not all fermented foods contain viable probiotics, kombucha, kimchi/sauerkraut, natto, kefir/yogurt, and some fermented vegetables/pickles are among the trendy fermented foods that do, as long as they are not pasteurized or prepared using vinegar.

Nielsen reports that U.S. sales of kombucha grew 43% in 2018. Kombucha waters and

sparkling water kefir/sodas—claimed to be teaming with electrolytes, enzymes, and probiotics—are among the hot new fermented beverage trends.

Good bacteria can survive the aging process in some soft cheeses, including Gouda, mozzarella, cheddar, and cottage cheese. Could probiotic cheeses be a missed opportunity?

U.S. yogurt sales fell 6% for the year ending Feb. 28, 2019. At the same time, sales of skyr Icelandic-style yogurt jumped 23%. Yoplait's *Qui* yogurt, fermented in its own pot, was the third-best-selling new food/

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beverage in 2018, per IRI's *New Product Pacesetters*.

Consumers are also choosing foods that they believe help them to more efficiently absorb nutrients, per the Hartman Group. Post-fermentation, many foods deliver increased levels—and often greater bioavailability—of vitamins, antioxidant activity, digestive enzymes, and amino acids (Melini, Melini, Luziatelli, et. al. 2019). Many fermented dairy products, such as Greek yogurt, are also lower in lactose.

Natto, a fermented soy staple in the Japanese diet, is poised to be among the new superfoods. Natto not only provides probiotics, but is high in complete protein, vitamin K2, fiber, and calcium. Not only is there an FDA-approved heart health claim for soy protein, but natto naturally contains the enzyme natto-kinase, which plays an important role in blood pressure control and blood clot prevention.

Right after "taste" and "no artificial ingredients," "high protein" is the most important attribute when purchasing plant-based products, per Mintel's 2018 *Plant-based Protein—U.S.* report, and

high-protein fermented plant-based foods, such as tempeh and, to a lesser extent, seitan, are getting the nod.

SPINS reports sales of tofu/tempeh reached \$118 million for the year ended April 2019. Among the 73% of U.S. households that serve meatless meals at least once a week, serving tofu/tempeh doubled from 8% in 2017 to 17% in 2019, per FMI's 2019 *Power of Meat*.

Expect more global fermented foods to grab culinary attention. Injera is a sour-dough-risen flatbread and the national dish of Ethiopia. German Kolsch has grown over 100% on U.S. menus, per Datassential.

Tepache, a Mexican drink, is fermented from pineapple peels/rind.

Gochujang, a fermented Korean red pepper paste, is among the trendy condiments for 2019, per the National Restaurant Association's 2018 *What's Hot Culinary Forecast*. With Japanese the fastest-growing Asian cuisine in the United States, per Technomic, expect fermented flavors such as miso, koji, and yuzu kosho to move center stage.

Datassential reports that references to gochujang increased 200% on menus over the past four years. Thai fish sauce mentions were up 54%, and yuzu kosho was up 40%. Perhaps most unexpected, Technomic reports a 100% uptick in "fermented" citations on dessert menus over the past year. **FT**

Reference cited is available via a hyperlink in the digital version of this column.



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