



Top Food Trends for 2015

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At the start of a new year, what is “trending” in foods? This publication presents what some say consumers can expect in 2015. The list is not in any order of significance or importance or rating, nor is this an endorsement of food fads and trends, many of which are not based on sound science.

1. Saturated fats:

- a. Coconut: Last year was a big year for everything coconut and for the claim that coconut cures everything. The popularity of coconut was so intense in 2014 that one manufacturer had plans to set up twelve new processing plants within twelve months. But as with any fad or trend, the coconut fad may now be dwindling due to changing consumer expectations (Saunders 2014).
- b. Butter: Results of a study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* in March 2014 indicated that the link between saturated fat intake and cardiovascular disease may not be as strong as the scientific community believes. This paved the way for butter to become popular again in 2014. But the 2015 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee retains their 2010 recommendation that people consume no more than ten percent of their total calories from saturated fat (Saunders 2014).

2. **Clear labels, clean labels:** Almost 25 percent of all food and beverage launches in 2014 had “clean” labels, i.e., labels showing that the products contain only natural (“real,” not artificial) ingredients (Innova 2014). The rise in clean labels was a result of consumers opting for foods that are organic and natural (Cargill Foods 2014, Saunders 2014). Con-

sumers consider “clean” foods as “authentic” and “trustworthy”—not only for themselves, but also for their pets. However, since there is no legal definition of the term “natural,” consumers then asked for increased labeling transparency. “Clear” labels resulted, aiming to offer clearer and simpler claims and packaging for maximum transparency (Innova 2014). Clear labels are predicted to replace clean labels as the top labeling trend in 2015.

3. **Sugars:** Katie Couric’s film on added sugars, *Fed Up*, caught consumers’ attention, perhaps because her notoriety fueled the debate. The FDA proposed including “added sugars” in the Nutrition Facts Panel (Saunders 2014). But will this provide more information and be meaningful to the consumer, or will it cause more confusion?

4. **Gluten-free labeling:** Gluten-free products were introduced to protect those who are sensitive to gluten, much like allergen labeling exists to protect those who have food allergies. But because the word “free” in “gluten-free” does not follow the definition of other similar food label terms such as “sugar-free,” “dairy-free,” or “wheat-free,” “gluten-free” has been overly used on product labels for humans and animals. Many consumers now believe that gluten is an ingredient that they must eliminate from their diets to meet their weight standards or just to be “clean.”

5. **The new cook is a gourmet at home:**

- a. Almost 30 percent of the global population are millennials (~15 to 35 years old), who are “tech savvy and socially engaged” (Innova 2014). They

are less brand loyal than older consumers, are not afraid to try something different, and want to know the story behind the products and brands that they buy (Innova 2014).

- b. The new cooks equip their kitchens with machines formerly found only in restaurants (e.g., espresso machines) (Food Channel 2014).
 - c. The new cooks consider cooking as lifestyle relevant, not age dependent.
 - d. In their kitchens they create a cuisine of their own rules; e.g., they will use ingredients not used in many kitchens, such as exotic spices, and may snub others commonly found in kitchens, such as ketchup (Food Channel 2014).
 - e. The new cook hosts dinner parties (Food Channel 2014) and shares the experience through social media. Cooking at home is now perceived as fashionable, social, fun, and healthy (Innova 2014).
 - f. “Hand touched” replaces “handmade.” Consumers have the desire to cook from scratch again. But they do not want to spend too much time creating a dish, either. They want to obtain the cooked food fast. As explained in a trade magazine, “hand touched” food is food in which the cook has simply touched the ingredients, not necessarily measuring them, then put them together. The resulting food is “hand touched” rather than hand made (Food Channel 2014).
6. **Ethnic foods:** More ethnic foods are entering mainstream American cuisine (Food Channel 2014). Foods from different parts of the world seem to be readily acceptable to the American palate. Could this food acceptance help lead to increased harmony in attitudes and behaviors with regard to social issues beyond food?
 7. **Wine:** It is now an everyday beverage, no longer relegated to special occasions only (Food Channel 2014).
 8. **Protein-rich foods:** Protein claims increased by 15 percent for breakfast cereals in 2013 and by 34 percent for dairy products launched in 2010–2013. Chocolate was the top flavor for ready-to-drink protein beverages in 2013–2014 (Cargill Foods 2014), emphasizing its indulgent and high-quality characteristics.

9. **Food entrepreneurs:** There is an increase in the number of food entrepreneurs developing and marketing their own food products, resulting in part from an increase in new food incubators (Food Channel 2014).

It is interesting to note that while the above items do sound like fads and trends, they also underscore something new: the different forms of social media strongly influence this generation, resulting in behavior and attitudes that have not been seen before and that are sometimes unexpectedly intense and emotional. And when wrong information is disseminated at viral social media speeds, the correct and logical information that follows may be easily ignored. The literature suggests a need, occasionally obvious but sometimes not obvious but still necessary, for increased science-based and objective materials on food and health. *Science communicators must contribute to the discussion by presenting thoughts and facts based on sound science to help consumers make decisions important to their health and well-being, although at times such communication efforts may be frustrating and disheartening.*

Happy New Year!

References

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