

DATA SSENTIAL

20
26

Trends

PREVIEW REPORT



Preview Version

In This Preview

The *2026 Trends Report* from Datassential spotlights the biggest trends shaping the year ahead, including major trend themes that reveal where food and beverage are headed next. In the report, you'll also find two lists of foods, flavors, and beverages to know: *New Classics for 2026* and *Trends for the Future* — items Datassential experts see growing on menus and at retail in the years to come. This preview is a sample of the full subscriber report, including select descriptions of the trends defining the future.

Methodology

The consumer data populating this report comes from two online surveys fielded in September and October 2025.

- More than 1,000 consumers were surveyed overall, representative of the U.S. general population
- Operator insights were collected from 359 operators in September
- Additional data points were sourced from Datassential One and other proprietary reports

About the full 2026 Trends Report

The full *2026 Trends Report* delivers hundreds of data-backed insights across the food and beverage landscape. From the emerging ingredients and flavors gaining traction today to the cutting-edge concepts set to define menus and retail shelves tomorrow, this report captures it all. Backed by Datassential's proprietary data and expert Trendologists, it's an essential guide for anyone looking to stay ahead of what's next in food and drink.



2026 TRENDS RUNDOWN

KEY INDICATORS SHAPING 2026 TRENDS

Food, Flavor, & Beverage Trends

Rise & Decline: 5 Foods, Flavors, and Beverages on the Rise & 5 on the Decline

New Classics for 2026:

1. Basque Cheesecake
2. Lemon Pepper
3. Butter Chicken
4. Smashed
5. Hot Honey
6. Tomato in Unexpected Applications
7. Birria
8. Texture in Food/Beverages
9. Ube
10. MSG

Trends for the Future

1. Stracciatella
2. Camu Camu
3. Char Siu
4. Piloncillo
5. Peruvian Black Mint
6. Ataya Tea
7. Som Tum
8. Ancient Grain Beer
9. Fermented Black Beans
10. Grass Jelly

Major Trend Themes

Executive Summary: Key Findings

1. Fiber to the Max:

Fiber is the New Protein

2. Meat's Back on the Menu

3. Teatime is the New Happy Hour:

The Evolution of the Low/No Alcohol Movement

4. Keralan is the 2026 Cuisine to Know

KEY INDICATOR

How AI Will Shape 2026 & Beyond

63% of consumers
are interested in trying

BASQUE CHEESECAKE

an additional 13% have already tried it



No, that's not a cheesecake an amateur baker burned. **Basque cheesecake** features a golden-brown, "burned" top that gives way to a creamy, custardy mousse-esque texture inside. With no risk of overbaking the crustless cheesecake (it's baked at a high temp), Basque cheesecake is a trend-forward, less labor-intensive dessert. In fact, it's up 357% on dessert menus over the past 4 years (Datassential Menu Trends) and is predicted to grow another 98% on menus over the next 4 years (Datassential Menucast™).

TOP TAKEAWAY: Take a page out of a Basque cookbook and offer this approachable spin on cheesecake that requires fewer ingredients and less labor than traditional cheesecake. Also look for opportunities to leverage Basque cheesecake as a flavor for other items – for instance, Basque cheesecake tiramisu for a next-level mashup, or for a fall limited-time offer, chai-spiced Basque cheesecake.

Which of the following foods, flavors, or beverages would you be interested in trying? (n=1005). Fielded September 2025.
For each food, flavor, or beverage, please select what best describes your experience with it? (n=1005). Fielded September 2025.

63% of consumers
are interested in trying

LEMON PEPPER



Lemon pepper seasoning is made of dried lemon zest, black pepper, and salt (sometimes garlic powder and/or onion powder are also included). The spice blend (a regional staple in Atlanta, GA) has been around for ages, but has recently seen a resurgence, growing 79% on menus in the past 4 years (Datassential Menu Trends), and is predicted to grow another 26% over the next 4 years (Datassential Menucast™). Lemon pepper has cemented itself as a New Classic in categories like wings.

TOP TAKEAWAY: Use lemon pepper in any dish or beverage that could use a punch of pepper and bright acid – think chicken, seafood, or snacks like potato chips.

Which of the following foods, flavors, or beverages would you be interested in trying? (n=1005). Fielded September 2025.

25% of consumers are interested in trying **UBE**



If you've come across any social media food or beverage content, it's highly likely you've seen **ube** once or twice (or a billion times) – it's in Adoption on Datassential's Menu Adoption Cycle, up 222% on menus over the past 4 years (Datassential Menu Trends) and is predicted to grow another 86% over the next 4 years (Datassential Menucast™). The vibrant Filipino purple potato has taken over social media feeds, and while it's a staple in Filipino cuisine, it has broken through to becoming a New Classic stateside that can add natural color to everything from lattes to desserts to baked goods.

TOP TAKEAWAY: Use ube (which has a mild taste) to add striking, social media-worthy color to any variety of items – for instance, social media sensation cloud coffee, spins on fan favorite tiramisu for an approachable twist, and more.

Which of the following foods, flavors, or beverages would you be interested in trying? (n=1005). Fielded September 2025.

49% of consumers
are interested in trying
**PERUVIAN
BLACK MINT**
aka huacatay

an additional 6% have already tried it



While it may be called **Peruvian black mint (or huacatay)**, technically, this herb is not part of the mint family (it's a marigold). As the name implies, Peruvian black mint is a staple in Peruvian cuisine and boasts notes of mint, along with citrus, basil, and tarragon. Peruvian black mint is versatile and can add global flair to any dish where regular mint is used.

TOP TAKEAWAY: Peruvian black mint is traditionally used in aji de huacatay, a green sauce or salsa (could it be the next chimichurri?), but it could also add interest to approachable items that would typically call for mint (Peruvian black mint mojito, anyone?).

For each food, flavor, or beverage, please select what best describes your experience with it. (n=1000). Fielded October 2025.

58% of consumers
are interested in trying
CAMU CAMU

an additional 6% have already tried it



As functional, health-forward ingredients continue to trend, look to superfood ingredients that have the potential to break into the mainstream similar to acai (the Brazilian berry now in Proliferation on the Datassential's Menu Adoption Cycle). **Camu camu**, a small cherry-like fruit found in Peru and Brazil, has been dubbed a superfruit because of its high levels of vitamin C (some say as much as 40 times that of a small orange) and antioxidants.

TOP TAKEAWAY: Camu camu is primed for innovation and has potential to be crowned the next big superfood. It's grown 100% on menus over the past 4 years (Datassential Menu Trends) and is predicted to grow another 95% over the next 4 years years (Datassential Menucast™). While powdered camu camu is often leveraged as an add-in to smoothies, it could also star in bowls, baked goods, and juices/wellness shots.

For each food, flavor, or beverage, please select what best describes your experience with it. (n=1000). Fielded October 2025.

49% of consumers are interested in trying **PILONCILLO**

an additional 8% have already tried it



Piloncillo, an unrefined cane sugar made by boiling cane juice and molding it into hard, cone-shaped blocks, is a staple in many Latin American cuisines, where it's used to add complex, caramel/molasses-like flavor to everything from coffee (such as trendy café de olla) to trending tepache (a fermented beverage) to flan to savory mole sauces. Piloncillo can also star in simple syrups for flavoring cocktails or mocktails and allows operators to tap into the natural sweetener trend.

TOP TAKEAWAY: Piloncillo is in Inception on Datassential's Menu Adoption Cycle but is an approachable ingredient that can be used in any application brown sugar might be used. Piloncillo is notably up 60% on menus over the past 12 months (Datassential Menu Trends).

For each food, flavor, or beverage, please select what best describes your experience with it. (n=1000). Fielded October 2025.



59%

of consumers are
feeling **optimistic**
heading into 2026

Overall, how do you feel about the year ahead (2026)? (n=1005). Fielded September 2025.

64%

of consumers are looking forward to **new food & beverage** trends in 2026

Gen Z (77%) and Millennials (72%) are statistically more likely than Gen X (62%) and Boomers (46%) to be looking forward to new food & beverage trends in 2026.

Are you looking forward to new food and beverage trends in 2026? (n=1005). Fielded September 2025.



FIBER TO THE MAX

FIBER IS THE NEW PROTEIN

WHAT IT IS: Gut health and GLP-1s are trending, and with that, manufacturers and retailers are focusing on fiber (which can naturally increase the GLP-1 hormone in the body) and calling it out on food/beverage packaging. Fibermaxxing, a TikTok trend where consumers try to fit as much fiber as possible into a recipe or dish, is further propelling the fiber trend.

WHY IT MATTERS: Fiber is set to be the next big health trend following on the heels of protein, particularly at retail, where new products are popping up highlighting fiber in relation to gut health. Notably, over half of consumers say that when thinking about their health in 2026, consuming more foods/beverages for gut health will be important to them.

WHERE TO FIND IT: Retail



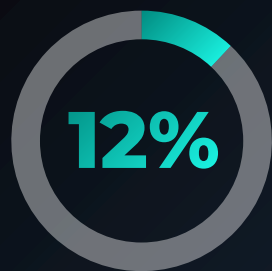
60%

of Gen Z consumers say they're interested in **foods & beverages that are high in fiber**

This is compared to 54% of consumers overall who are interested in foods/beverages that are high in fiber.

How interested are you in foods/beverages with the following attributes?
(n=196 Gen Z | top-2, 5 pt. scale). Fielded September 2025.

OPERATOR DATA



of consumers
know what
fibermaxxing is

Gen Z consumers (21%) are statistically more likely than other generations to know what fibermaxxing is.



of operators
know what
fibermaxxing is

52%
of consumers are
interested in **practicing
fibermaxxing** once
they know what it is

Do you know what “fibermaxxing” is? Would you be interested in practicing “fibermaxxing”? (n=1005 consumers). Fielded September 2025.
Do you know what “fibermaxxing” is? (n=359 operators). Fielded September 2025.

MEAT'S BACK ON THE MENU

PLANT-BASED MEAT HAS PLATEAUED

WHAT IT IS: Plant-based meat and seafood products have plateaued, both in retail store sales as well as in terms of consumer sentiment. Many consumers are getting back to basics and returning to eating animal meats such as beef, poultry, and pork.

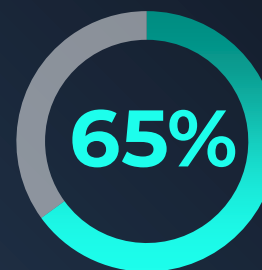
WHY IT MATTERS: Now is the time to rethink your protein strategy as consumers are shifting back toward animal meat as well as seeking out center-of-plate vegetables (cauliflower steaks, etc.) that simply let garden goodies shine.

WHERE TO FIND IT: Retail & foodservice

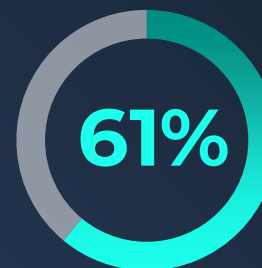


MEAT'S GOT IT GOIN' ON

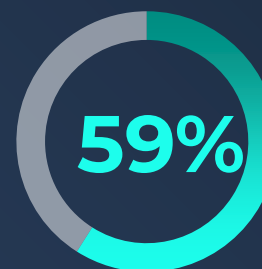
The majority of consumers say animal meat is **more natural, versatile, and craveable** than plant-based meat alternatives.



of consumers say that, in general, animal meat is **more "natural"** to consume than plant-based meat



of consumers agree animal meat is **more versatile** than plant-based meat



of consumers say they **regularly crave** animal meat – even if they don't consume it

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.
(n=993 | top 2; 5 pt. scale; among those who consume both animal meat and plant-based meat).
Fielded September 2025.



37%

of consumers say that over the past year, they have **increased their consumption of animal meat** more than they've increased their consumption of plant-based "meat"

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.

(n=993 | top 2; 5 pt. scale; among those who consume both animal meat and plant-based meat). Fielded September 2025.

TEATIME IS THE NEW HAPPY HOUR

THE EVOLUTION OF THE LOW/NO-ALCOHOL MOVEMENT

WHAT IT IS: Happy hour isn't what it used to be. Instead of just being centered around deals on alcoholic beverages in the evening, operators are rethinking what it can be, from the hours it begins to deals/specials on not just alcoholic beverages but also mocktails and food. Tea-based mocktails and cocktails are on the rise in line with the reinvention of happy hour, and afternoon teatime is making a comeback and marrying the little treat culture and newstalgia trends.

WHY IT MATTERS: Nearly half of Gen Z consumers (49%) say that when thinking of their health in 2026, reducing alcohol consumption will be important, and notably, Gen Z (23%) is statistically more likely than Gen X (9%) and Boomers (9%) to drink tea or tea-based beverages at happy hour. However, only 20% of operators currently offer tea-based mocktails on their menus and only 16% offer tea-based cocktails, revealing some missed opportunities.

WHERE TO FIND IT: Independent operators



49%

of Gen Z consumers say when thinking about their health in 2026, **reducing alcohol consumption** is important

This is statistically more than both Gen X (36%) and Boomers (25%).

When thinking about your health in 2026, how important are the following to you?
(n=196 Gen Z | top-2, 5 pt. scale). Fielded September 2025.

26%

of consumers are interested in a teatime-style or tea party-style happy hour featuring **alcohol-spiked teas** served in teapots and teacups, for instance

Gen Z (48%) is statistically more likely than other generations to be interested in a teatime-style or tea party-style happy hour featuring alcohol-spiked teas.

How interested are you in the following?
(n=964 consumers 21+ | top-2, 5 pt. scale). Fielded September 2025.

29%

of consumers are interested in a teatime-style or tea party-style happy hour featuring **non-alcoholic teas**

Gen Z (50%) is statistically more likely than other generations to be interested in a teatime-style or tea party-style happy hour featuring non-alcoholic teas.

How interested are you in the following?

(n=964 consumers 21+ | top-2, 5 pt. scale). Fielded September 2025.



KERALAN

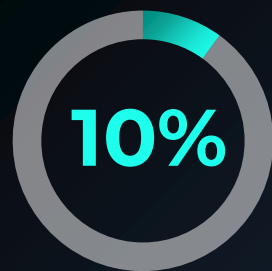
2026 CUISINE TO KNOW

WHAT IT IS: Keralan cuisine encompasses foods and beverages from the southwestern state of Kerala in India. It is characterized by seafood, rice, coconut, veggie-forward dishes, and spices (Kerala is nicknamed "the land of spices") like curry leaves, turmeric, mustard seeds, tamarind, chiles, and asafoetida (a pungent, funky, savory spice).

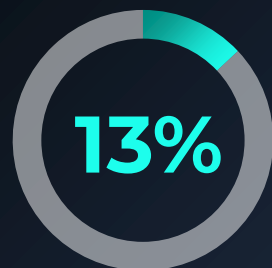
WHY IT MATTERS: Keralan concepts are popping up stateside, with a variety of operators calling Keralan dishes/beverages out on menus. Nearly any U.S. operator can take inspiration from Keralan foods, flavors, and beverages, as many of the staple concepts are approachable – think Keralan fried chicken or Indian filter coffee (kaapi).

WHERE TO FIND IT: Independent operators



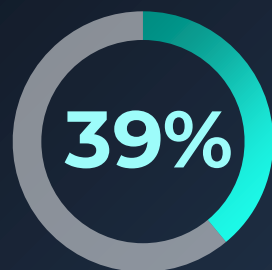


of U.S. consumers **know** what Keralan cuisine is



of U.S. consumers say they **have tried** Keralan cuisine*

*AFTER BEING TOLD WHAT IT WAS.



of U.S. consumers are **interested in trying** Keralan cuisine

Do you know what Keralan cuisine is? (n=1005). Fielded September 2025.
Have you tried Keralan cuisine before? (n=1005). Fielded September 2025.
How interested are you in Keralan cuisine overall?
(n=1005 | top 2; 5 pt. scale). Fielded September 2025.



Hallmarks of Keralan Cuisine

Keralan cuisine encompasses foods and beverages from the southwestern state of Kerala in India. It is characterized by seafood, rice, coconut, veggie-forward dishes, and spices like curry leaves, turmeric, mustard seeds, tamarind, chiles, and asafoetida.

SOME STAPLE DISHES IN KERALAN CUISINE INCLUDE:

Keralan egg curry or **mutta curry** (pictured right) stars hard-boiled eggs simmered in a sauce consisting of coconut milk, tomatoes, and onions. It's seasoned with spices like curry leaves, mustard seeds, and ginger-garlic paste. It's commonly served for breakfast with appams (coconut rice pancakes) or idiyappam (steamed rice noodles).

Snacks like **unniyappam** are sweet fritters similar to donut holes made by deep-frying a batter featuring jaggery syrup, banana, cardamom, coconut, and rice in a round mold.

Desserts such as **palada pradhanam**, which is similar to kheer, featuring steamed rice sheets called ada cooked in a sauce made of coconut milk, jaggery syrup, and ghee with cashews, cardamom, and sometimes raisins mixed in.

Kaapi, or Indian filtered coffee, is a quintessential part of Keralan cuisine prepared using a special steel filter. Finely-ground coffee sometimes blended with caffeine-free chicory is brewed in a traditional Indian filter that resembles a cup within a cup and then mixed with hot milk and sometimes sugar. Often, it's served with a frothy layer on top that comes from pouring it between a tumbler and dabarah saucer, traditionally from a meter high.



HOW AI WILL SHAPE 2026 & BEYOND

MAKING SENSE OF AN
AI-SATURATED FUTURE

WHAT IT IS: Artificial intelligence (AI) is being integrated increasingly into everyday life, from personalized assistants and agentic systems to AI-generated media. Going into 2026 and beyond, there will likely be a large impact from AI on society and culture at large.

WHY IT MATTERS: AI is simultaneously reshaping consumer behavior and unlocking new operational capabilities across industries, food and hospitality included. Understanding its impact is essential to staying relevant, trusted, and competitive in a changing world.

WHERE TO FIND IT: Everywhere, including foodservice & retail



63%

of consumers use AI tools at least once per month

An additional 16% of consumers say they use AI tools to some degree, but less often than monthly.

Gen Z (81%) and Millennials (70%) are significantly more likely than older generations to say they use AI tools on at least a monthly basis.

IN THE PAST MONTH...



49%

of consumers used an AI-powered chatbot or virtual assistant (e.g. ChatGPT, Copilot, etc.)



41%

of consumers interacted with AI-powered customer service (e.g., online support chat, ai drive-thru ordering)



29%

of consumers asked an AI system to help with a personal decision (e.g., budgeting, meal planning, etc.)



29%

of consumers used AI-powered tools at work or school (e.g., drafting text, analyzing data, etc.)



27%

of consumers noticed an AI feature in a restaurant, café, or retail store (e.g., ordering kiosk, personalized promotion, etc.)

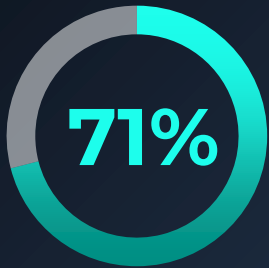


25%

of consumers used a health or fitness app that relied on AI (e.g., workout recommendations, sleep tracking, etc.)

How often would you say you use AI tools? (n=1005). Fielded September 2025.
Have you done any of the following in the past month? (n=1005). Fielded September 2025.

In an age where AI feels impossible to ignore, **it's especially critical to help consumers build healthier relationships with AI** – and technology at large.



of consumers feel like AI technology is **popping up everywhere they look, and they can't escape or avoid it**

This figure increased by 6% compared to data from October 2024.

Please rate your level of agreement with the following statements.
(n=1005 | top 2; 5 pt. scale). Fielded September 2025.



DATASSENTIAL ONE

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