



Foraging for Food Trends: Sustainables and Organics on the Menu in 2007

Are you a student of the culinary arts, eager to learn where the food industry and your career could potentially be headed? Perhaps you're a chef or restaurant owner, hungry for whatever the area's competing restaurants might be serving up next. Get ready to go green... sources say that sustainable food service and organic ingredients could potentially become menu mainstays for the country's finest food establishments in the not so distant future.

Culinary Trends for 2007 and Beyond

Sustainable food service.

Sustainability is a growing trend in the food industry that has the potential for tremendous economic and social impact. The term *sustainable* refers to locally grown ingredients, and describes food service organizations who make their menu selections from whatever seasonal choices their neighborhood farmer's crop has to offer.

According to a recent article published by BuildingBetterRestaurants.com, "Since 2005 we witnessed a 15% growth in the number of chefs who focus on locally grown, seasonal ingredients." While local ingredients do cost more, the reasons to go sustainable are numerous. Fresh-picked simply tastes better, and offers more nutritional value than produce that has endured a cross-country journey in the back of a truck - or worse, has been shipped in from another continent.

Locally grown foods are also far less likely to contain pesticides, hormones and antibiotics, or have undergone genetic mutation as a means of preservation. Consumers know this, and those who frequent the country's more upscale restaurants are typically willing to pay more for seasonal meats and produce that have been cultivated on local soil, or fish caught fresh from the area's rivers, lakes and streams.

One organization who has made rapid strides in sustainable food service is Bamco.com, Bon Appetit's management company. According to their website, "If you eat locally then you are simultaneously investing in your own community and helping to preserve local farmers and artisans ensuring their traditions continue. If you buy local, you are helping to ensure that we can savor these authentic flavors in the future."

Sustainable food service is a trend that's expected to rise in the coming years. While for many restaurants, the plan to go 100% sustainable is still not yet a viable option, it is indeed possible to give diners a hearty side helping of the local harvest. Consider showcasing an array of fresh, seasonal selections as part of the chef's specials, and see what kind of interest crops up.

Organic ingredients.

According to the Agricultural Marketing Resource Center 2006, "Organics have grown at a rate of nearly 20 percent per year for the last seven years, and industry experts are forecasting continued growth."

Again, with the focus of more American citizens on the issues of health and environmental preservation, many restaurants are turning to organically grown ingredients as a way to meet the demands of their patrons. Organic foods have slowly managed to shed their former reputation, moving past the widely held misconception that "good for you" means bad-tasting, or at best, bland and flavorless.

With so many food stores now offering organic produce at a fraction of what it cost ten years ago, it is easier than ever for great restaurants and experimental chefs to try their hand at creating fantastic ethnic and regional dishes using all-natural, pesticide-free produce and meats. Organic fruits and vegetables, free-range chickens, and cattle that remain clear of hormone and antibiotic treatments have become sought-after commodities for many restaurants, and the organic trend is expected to continue well into the next decade.

However, it is worth mentioning that with all the hype about organics of late, many major food suppliers have been quick to snatch up the term. Once exclusively synonymous with locally grown ingredients, the word "organic" is now being bandied about on many a corporate food giant's label. While the United States upholds specific requirements that must be met in order for a food to be stamped as "Certified Organic," the question of imported, so-called "organic" ingredients from countries in Europe and Asia comes into play here.

Those who are concerned with "keeping it real" in the culinary industry should be on the lookout for ways to incorporate all-natural, organic ingredients into their gastronomic creations... for "organic" is one trend that is surely here to stay.

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