

# 20 TREND INSIGHT 15 REPORT

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## COMFORT FOOD

We all have our own ideas of what comfort foods tug our heartstrings and make us feel better. According to Merriam Webster, comfort food is defined as food that is satisfying because it is prepared in a simple or traditional way and reminds you of home, family or friends.

Comfort foods are the foods we probably shouldn't crave but do, a guilty pleasure and the culinary equivalent of your favorite childhood television show.



# COMFORT FOOD AT A GLANCE

## CHOCOLATE

IS THE TOP MENTIONED  
COMFORT FOOD.



## BLANKET

IS THE TOP MENTIONED  
NON-FOOD COMFORT ITEM.

## CHOCOLATE CHIP COOKIE

IS THE TOP RATED COMFORT FLAVOR.

## FAMILIAR

IS THE WORD THAT BEST DESCRIBES  
COMFORT TO CONSUMERS.



42%

OF CONSUMERS PURCHASE  
A COMFORT PRODUCT 3-4  
TIMES PER MONTH.

## WHY COMFORT FOOD?

It is a combination of things. Consumers are busier than ever, more stressed and asked to do more with less. They want to feel safe and secure—the way we did when we were young and the world seemed more simple and rides in the car seemed like they took forever.

Based on our research, we have divided comfort food into three main categories. We will dig deeper into what's happening on the restaurant menu, in the marketplace and what consumers believe are the top comfort food flavors.

1.

### Healthy Comfort Food

*where tradition meets nutrition*

2.

### Grown-Up Comfort Food

*not your grandma's lasagna*

3.

### International Comfort Food

*ethnic mashups*



# Healthy Comfort Food

*where tradition meets nutrition*

Now that the weather has gotten chillier and we have put our flip-flops away, you are probably beginning to crave more comfort foods. Hearty comfort foods like soups and chili are especially popular during fall and winter because they are substantial and best of all—warming inside and out.

Consumers are looking for new ways to nourish their body and souls without sacrificing their waistlines. We are spotting skinnier versions of our favorite comfort foods.

- Potatoes and french fries are the ultimate comfort sides. There has been a 540% increase in trans-fat free potato claims on the menu. It is important to note that potatoes are usually menued without a claim—this shows that restaurants are exploring new trans-fat free options.
- According to the Huffington Post, cauliflower is the new kale. Cauliflower can be mashed, grilled, broiled or cut in steaks and barbecued, served on its own or in a salad or tossed with herbs, vinegars and oils. From recipes using cauliflower as a pizza crust, pureed or mashed, the options are many for a healthier mock comfort food using cauliflower.
- Skinnytaste.com— which features delicious, healthy, low fat, family-friendly recipes several times per week, has a recipe for zucchini lasagna. According to the website, “By replacing the lasagna noodles with thin sliced zucchini you can create a delicious, lower carb (gluten-free) lasagna that’s loaded with vegetables, and you won’t miss the pasta!” This version is only 345 calories per serving.
- VeggieGrill, a restaurant in CA, WA and OR, redefines classic American comfort food with flavorful and craveable 100% plant-based soups, salads, burgers, sandwiches and desserts. They celebrate vegetables in new ways and brings them to the center of the plate.



## **BBQ Tempeh Plate at VeggieGrill Los Angeles, CA**

Featuring organic blackened tempeh, house-made BBQ, super-grains and caramelized onions. A guilt-free option for the health conscious, who still want their wings but without the meat.

# Grown-Up Comfort Food

## *not your grandma's lasagna*

Despite the moves consumers have been making toward wellness and better-for-you options, comfort food has been making a comeback on restaurant menus with a whole new look. Welcome to the brave new world of old-fashioned comfort foods—where childhood favorites are deconstructed, modernized and signaturized with specialty ingredients. Where grandma's meatloaf now shows up on the appetizer menu as meatloaf sliders and grilled cheese sandwiches now feature brie and swiss cheese and are paired with tomato bisque.

Upscale comfort food not only appeals to the consumer desire for the occasional indulgence, but bold unexpected flavors generate excitement in somewhat familiar ways.

- Millennials are especially interested in looking beyond the traditional to elevated comfort foods. 65% of millennials are interested in elevated breakfast comfort foods. An example of an elevated breakfast comfort food is the Red Eye Benedict at Nosh in Geneva, IL. This features a coffee-crusting steak and shitake mushroom hollandaise sauce.
- Macbar serves just what the name states—macaroni and cheese, but 12 different ways. From the classic to mayan chipotle, mac rieben and mac 'shroom there are new varieties that are new to the comfort food realm. Their website says "we at macbar are obsessed with all things mac and cheese. We know that once you try our delicious combinations of artisanal cheeses and organic ingredients, you won't be able to stop yourself."
- Ramen Burger takes the dorm room staple of ramen noodles to a whole new level. This burger was voted one of "The 17 Most Influential Burgers of All Time" by Time Magazine. Ramen Burger's chef, Keizo, was once told by a famous friend that "a burger isn't a burger if it ain't beef," so he was inspired and created a REAL Ramen Burger™. Ramen Burger is made using a fresh Certified Angus Beef Steakburger from Burger Maker.



### **Original Ramen Burger™ at Ramen Burger Brooklyn, NY**

Is described as, "unlike anything you've ever tasted before." A fresh USDA Prime ground beef chuck patty sandwiched between two craftily formed buns made from freshly cut ramen noodles.

# International Comfort Food

## *ethnic mashups*

While homemade mac & cheese and meatloaf with mashed potatoes have been staples for many of us—for others comfort foods come in different shapes, sizes and flavors from across the pond. Today's diners are once again clamoring for food fusions. Ethnic mash-ups are not new, chefs have been creating them for decades, but it is still something consumers crave. An example would be the menu at the Cheesecake Factory. You could not find a more everyday concept, but more than half of the menu is Asian comfort foods. Quesadillas and fried mac & cheese bites share the page with crispy wontons, Vietnamese summer rolls and pot stickers. Both exotic and familiar, Asian flavors are convenient, fried and often bbq'd and are comforting whether you know how to use chopsticks or not.

- Consumers are now accustomed to Americanized ethnic cuisines—more authentic and regionalized cuisines are coming into play and allowing consumers to explore new ingredients and flavors. 62% of consumers have visited an ethnic quick service restaurant in the last month. Chipotle is an excellent example of an ethnic mash-up and have taken it one step further appealing to a new audience with their braised tofu sofritas.
- Belly Shack, a casual restaurant in Chicago offers several iconic windy city foods like the hot dog and beef sandwich, but features an ethnic twist. They marry signature flavors and ingredients of international cuisines to create an entirely different world of tastes. According to their website, "Combining the flavors of Chef Bill Kim's and his wife Yvonne's Korean and Puerto Rican youth, Belly Shack takes you on a playful journey through the foods that defined their childhoods. Approachable and scrumptious in every sense, Chef Kim and his wife find imaginative ways to blend each other's culinary backgrounds, introducing creative new comfort food that you'll savor with every bite."



### **Belly Dog at Belly Shack Chicago, IL**

Featuring an all-beef hot dog topped with tart pickled green papaya, spicy kimchi salsa, and, most surprisingly, crunchy egg noodles.

## CONSUMER SURVEY: COMFORT FLAVORS

We conducted an online survey of 219 consumers in October 2014 to gain insight into their preferences of certain comfort foods. The majority of the respondents were between the ages of 25-64. We provided a list of flavors and asked respondents to rank them for their overall preference. Below are consumers' most popular comfort foods.

Chocolate Chip Cookie

Pizza

Chicken Pot Pie

Cinnamon Roll

Mac & Cheese

Chili

Chocolate Cake

Banana Bread

Chicken & Dumplings



### FONA CAN HELP!

Let FONA's market insight and research experts translate these trends into product category ideas for your brand. They can help you with concept and flavor pipeline development, ideation, consumer studies and white space analysis to pinpoint opportunities in the market.

Our flavor and product development experts are also at your service to help meet the labeling and flavor profile needs for your products to capitalize on this consumer trend. We understand how to mesh the complexities of flavor with your brand development, technical requirements and regulatory needs to deliver a complete taste solution. From concept to manufacturing, we're here every step of the way.

#### CONTACT OUR SALES SERVICE DEPARTMENT

at 630.578.8600 to request a flavor sample or visit [www.fona.com](http://www.fona.com).

#### SOURCES

1. Mintel GNPD
2. Mintel Menu Insights



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