



## COMFORT & INDULGENCE in the Food & Beverage Space

Whether due to gloomy weather, stress or a simple food craving, consumers today are searching for a little comfort and indulgence. What qualifies as “comfort food” can vary across cultures and cuisines, but anything indulgent, full of carbs, cheesy or fried is always a good start. In fact, 45% of U.S. consumers regularly eat indulgent foods. Brands that are considering bringing a little indulgence or comfort into their lineups will be pleasantly surprised to see the ways in which this space has expanded to include international flavors, interesting textures, and even some better-for-you options. Thinking about getting comfortable? Read on to see how it might work for your brand.

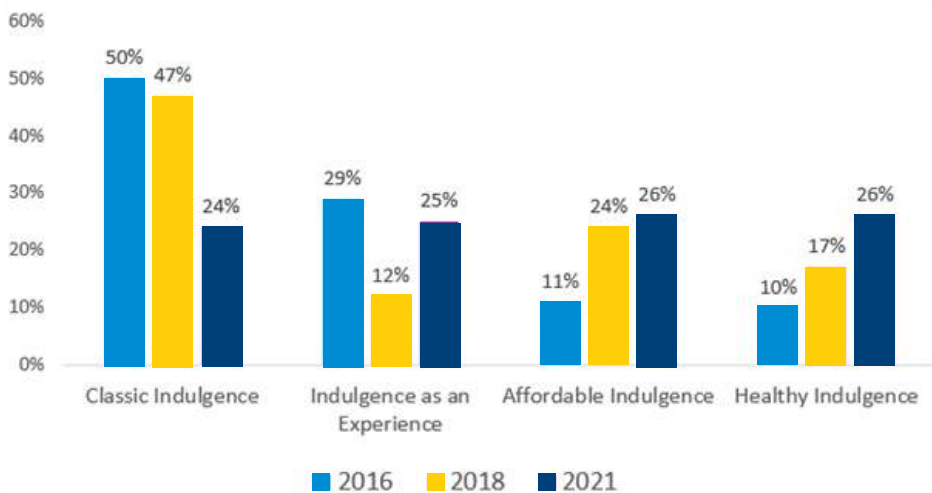
# CONSUMERS, COMFORT & INDULGENCE

Consumers are searching to treat themselves whether through classic or more permissible and healthy indulgences. We surveyed 1,000 consumers with a 50/50 male; female split between the ages of 18-73 years old.

Interestingly, we've spotted a huge shift over time for consumers preferred type of indulgence. For 2021, each type of indulgence is almost equal in our survey results, showing an overall opportunity for indulgent flavors in the food and beverage space. We also took a look at consumers' favorite flavors in the indulgence space, and found favorites including Birthday Cake, Brownie Batter and Cookies & Cream.



## INDULGENCE PREFERENCE



## TOP RATED INDULGENCE FLAVORS

Consumers rated a list of flavors from extremely indulgent to not at all indulgent. The flavors below rose to the top.

- Chocolate Éclair
- Birthday Cake
- Cookies & Cream
- Red Velvet Cake
- Brownie Batter
- Cookie Dough
- Tiramisu
- Crème Brûlée
- Raspberry White Chocolate

# THE FLAVOR FACTOR

Consumers consider many different factors when evaluating indulgent and comforting food and beverage products, but there's one that trumps them all: flavor.

Mintel reports that 54% of consumers consider the flavor profile of a dessert item before other variables such as format. Additionally, Gen Z over indexes in their interest in trying unfamiliar flavors and ingredients in dessert, suggesting a blend between comfort food and new flavors. Datassential gives examples of some of these newer flavors in the restaurant space today, stating states tahini, cajeta, yuzu, miso and cardamom to be growing dessert flavors.

But new flavors don't have to be limited to dessert; opportunity can be found cross-category. For example, "Flavor Seekers," as defined by Mintel, are often in the 45+ age group and actively seek out new flavors in their food, but prefer to sample them before committing to a larger dish. This makes appetizers and snacks an ideal entry point for innovative comfort and indulgence flavors. And with this, fried favorites like mini empanadas or loaded tater tots -- predicted by Datassential to grow by nearly 200% on restaurant menus over the next four years -- are perfect for creative ingredient and flavor additions.

Source: QSR Magazine, Coast Packaging Co. Nielsen IQ, Mintel



## PRODUCTS OF NOTE



**HONEY MAMA'S TAHINI TANGERINE COCOA TRUFFLE BAR** is a paleo product made with dark cocoa, raw honey, sesame butter, cacao nibs and tangerine. It is free from preservatives, refined sugar, soy, dairy and gluten.



**TRADER JOE'S CHICKEN & CHIMICHURRI EMPANADAS** have dark chicken meat, vegetables and chimichurri sauce in a traditional flaky pastry.

50% of consumers responded that they likely or definitely would buy this product.

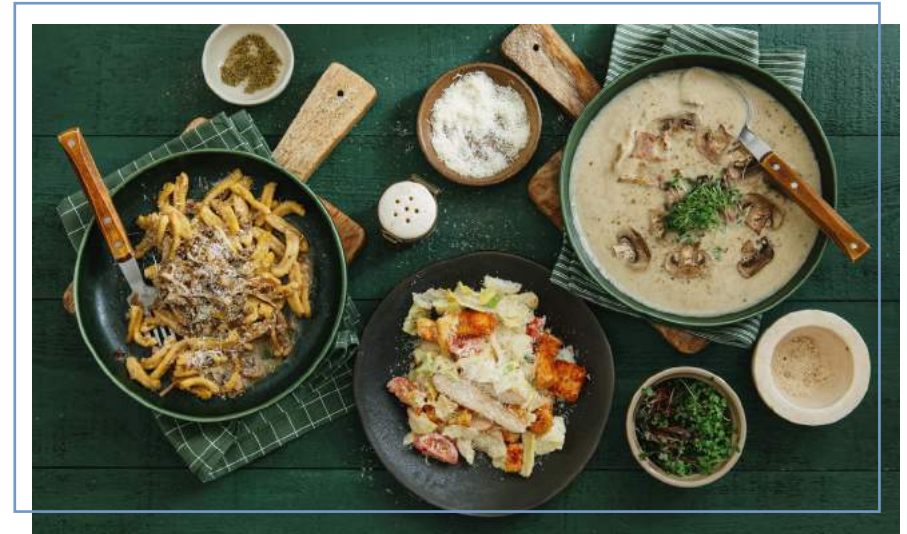
# CARBO-LOADING

While flavors may vary, people across the world turn to rice, noodles and bread (in a word, carbs,) when they want to be comforted.

Noodle dishes like lasagna and ramen have been restaurant staples for a while now, but other options are gaining ground fast: Datassential predicts that the availability of traditional Roman pasta dish cacio e pepe on restaurant menus will grow by 99% in the next four years. For brands, this could mean that there is opportunity in broth, stock and other categories for more experienced home cooks to cook upscaled meals at home, as well as in prepared refrigerated/frozen products that might provide comfort with an added bonus of convenience.

Rice dishes are also particularly popular. In fact, 37% of millennials use flavored dry rice mixes. And Mintel notes that there is ample opportunity in the category for experimenting with international flavors. For example, 55% of Gen Zs and 62% of millennials are interested in West African cuisine, and thus packaged jollof rice “would offer younger consumers an easy way to sample the global eats they show high interest in.”

Source: IFIC Survey, FONA International Clean Survey



## PRODUCTS OF NOTE



**TRADER JOE'S CACIO E PEPE PASTA SAUCE** is described as a traditional Italian pasta sauce with pecorino romano cheese and black pepper.

42% of consumers responded that they likely or definitely would buy this product.



**TWIST FLAVOR CO WEST AFRICAN INSPIRED SPICY JOLLOF RICE** is suitable for vegetarians, and comprises savory rice and spicy tomato curry sauce with grilled red and yellow peppers, cilantro and onion. It is microwavable, and retails in a 3.70-oz. pack.

# SWEETEN THE DEAL



You can't talk comfort food without talking dessert!

Sweets are one of consumers' favorite ways to indulge, and for the most part, they aren't looking

for ways to add health claims. In fact, 45% of customers say they don't think about nutrition info when it comes to desserts according to a recent Datassential report.

Consumers are most focused on flavor and price rather than on health claims such as "organic," and similar claims. When it comes to baking mixes, for example, a majority of home bakers say they don't expect mixes to be healthy. In this case, brands can find opportunity by positioning themselves as purveyors of exciting flavors and quality ingredients that will allow consumers to indulge at home.

Taking a look at the restaurant space, donuts, many cookie varieties such as sugar and chocolate chunk, and global formats are among the fastest growing desserts according to Datassential. Food and beverage developers can find inspiration from these offerings for their own brand innovations.

## PRODUCTS OF NOTE



**BLUE BUNNY COOKIES & CREAM FROZEN DAIRY DESSERT** features an added artificial flavor. The ice cream contains 200 calories per 2/3 cup serving.

69% responded that they likely or definitely would buy this product.



**ALDEN'S ORGANIC OOHEY GOOEY BROWNIE ICE CREAM** is loaded with fudge and brownies, and contains organic milk and cream from cows not treated with rBST. It's also free from high fructose corn syrup, GMOs, carrageenan, antibiotics, artificial sweeteners, artificial colorings and artificial flavorings.



**SAËNA BAKING CO. ANGEL BAKE FRENCH MACARON COOKIE MIX KIT** makes a delightfully light and chewy cookie that is sophisticated and difficult to master. It contains buttercream filling mix and is free from GMO and gluten. The product retails in a 13.3-oz. pack that can make 24 cookies.



**TRADER JOE'S MOCHI CAKE MIX** produces a Hawaiian inspired cake with a chewy mochi texture, buttery and coconutty flavors requiring only the addition of water, eggs and butter.

48% of consumers responded that they likely or definitely would buy this product.

# COMFORT AS AN INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Many U.S. consumers equate comfort food with American classics like mac and cheese or pot roast, but an increasingly diverse population is also expanding the idea of what counts as comforting.

While international cuisine might once have been concentrated in cities, Mintel reports that “consumers in suburban settings lead consumption of Japanese, Thai, Indian and Greek cuisine,” indicating that the general population is ready to move beyond the familiar flavors of Mexico and Italy. Datassential reports also suggest that Eastern European food is becoming increasingly popular with consumers. This increase in international cuisine can provide opportunity for developers looking to introduce more unique global inspired flavors in their products.

## A LOOK AT DEMOGRAPHICS

Millennials and Gen Z are the most adventurous when it comes to eating and cooking new cuisines. Japanese, Latin, Korean and African cuisines specifically are of interest when experimenting in the kitchen. All of this translates to an opportunity for brands to introduce diners to comforting new ingredients and dishes from around the world.

Source: FONA Suzy Survey



## PRODUCTS OF NOTE



**TYSON INSTANT POT KITS TERIYAKI CHICKEN & RICE** comprises all natural boneless skinless seasoned chicken thighs, a sweet teriyaki sauce packet, and a long grain white rice packet.

40% of consumers responded that they likely or definitely would buy this product.



**KASIA'S POTATO & CHEDDAR PIEROGI** are traditional European homestyle dumplings filled with fresh Idaho potatoes and cheddar cheese, and are free from trans fat, artificial colors and flavors.



**GREAT TO GO FROM MARKET DISTRICT CHICKEN ADOBO MEAL KIT** comprises Filipino-Style chicken with jasmine rice, carrots and cucumber salad. The fiber pulp bowl is made from renewable resources and is 100% compostable.



**CAFÉ CAPS MEXICAN MOCHA PREMIUM COFFEEHOUSE CREATIONS** are individual pods made with 100% Arabica coffee and include a cap for flavor infusions. They're a rich, sweet blend of cocoa, spices and cream to create a café mocha experience.

25% of consumers responded that they likely or definitely would buy this product.

# CAN COMFORT & INDULGENCE BE BETTER-FOR-YOU?

For many consumers, better-for-you indulgences are those that come to their claims not through prohibiting ingredients, but instead using them thoughtfully. In fact, 81% of U.S. consumers agree that healthy eating is about balance, not restrictions according to Mintel.

For desserts, this can mean that instead of trying to replicate traditional sweet profiles, brands could lean into the combination of sweet and savory, such as chocolate with herbal flavors. These new flavor profiles, says Mintel, can help to naturally reduce sugar content without impacting the perception of indulgence.

The growing popularity of plant-based eating is another opportunity to explore the better-for-you side of comfort and indulgence. Plant-based meat is an easy substitution in savory dishes, as it generally contains less saturated fat than animal products. Plant-based has also already taken hold in the sweets category with “vegan” as the fastest growing term on frozen dessert menus, up 169% over last four years.

On the other hand, products that focus on balance through lower sugar, yet high-protein or high-fiber additions can also be opportunistic in the better-for-you indulgence space.



## PRODUCTS OF NOTE



**OUTSHINE MANGO FRUIT ICE BARS DIPPED IN TAJÍN CHILI LIME SEASONING** are made with real fruit and fruit juice, contain no GMO ingredients and are a good source of vitamin C.

**45%** of consumers responded that they likely or definitely would buy this product.



**GARDEIN PLANT-BASED CHICK'N NOODL' SOUP** is made with hearty chunks of plant-based chick'n, tender vegan noodl's and vegetables, and provides 13g protein per can.

# THE TAKEAWAYS

With the definition of comfort and indulgence food expanding from classic flavors to embrace global cuisines, experiences and better-for-you options, there are more opportunities in this space than ever before. And the even better news is that consumers are interested in a wide range of flavors, whether it be a twist on an old favorite like Mexican chocolate, or something less familiar to many palates, such as yuzu. So, if your brand is ready to expand its range of comforting options, keep the focus on flavor and consumers will be excited to indulge. Trying to find out your “what’s next?” We can help you capitalize in this space.



## YOU DESERVE MORE. LET'S GET STARTED.

What does true partnership look like? You deserve a flavor partner ready to turn these trends into the tangible.

Let FONA's market insight and research experts get to work for you. Translate these trends into bold new ideas for your brand. Increase market share and get to your “what’s next.” Our technical 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. Let’s 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 for you — every step of the way. Contact our sales service department at 630.578.8600 to request a flavor sample or chat us up at [www.fona.com/contact-fona/](http://www.fona.com/contact-fona/)

## SOURCES

- Mintel
- Mintel GNPD
- Datassential
- FONA Suzy Survey
- QSR Magazine
- Coast Packaging Co
- Nielsen IQ
- IFIC

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