

Local food movement taking new form in national restaurant chains

CHICAGO, USA: In 2007, the word "locavore" was chosen by the New Oxford American Dictionary as the word of the year: "one who eats food grown locally whenever possible." This started a revolution that is still going strong today. According to Mintel Foodservice, the "local" claim on US restaurant menus has grown by a healthy 13% in the past year alone.



As identified in the 2011 foodservice trends, Mintel Menu Insights sees a push toward indigenous ingredients, taking the local trend a step further.

"This extends the idea beyond geography to include other important attributes such as 'seasonal', 'traditional', and 'authentic', especially as it relates to global cuisines," notes Kathy Hayden, foodservice analyst at Mintel. "Serving the best of the season communicates freshness and a 'get-it-now' urgency. Perhaps most importantly, indigenous ingredients help the migration away from overly processed food toward more recognizable and simpler ingredients sourced closer to home."

This trend also recognizes that many consumers have come to know the best sources for some regional dishes and ingredients, such as Maine lobster and New Orleans po'boys. Meanwhile, Southern-style collard greens and black-eyed peas are showing up everywhere from Brooklyn to Chicago.

According to Kathy Hayden, this regional pride is where national chains have made the most of indigenous ingredients and local foodways. For instance, Burgerville, a Vancouver, Wash.-based quick service restaurant prides itself on serving Oregon and Washington berries, meats, cheeses and vegetables. On the other coast, fried chicken chain, Popeye's has aligned its brand more closely to its New Orleans roots with a menu that emphasizes Louisiana spices, sweet cane tea and Cajun and Creole-inspired dishes.

With more than half (58%) of restaurant-goers interested in seeing more locally grown products on menus, we can expect restaurant chains to respond with fresh, innovative offerings to meet this demand.