

2009 food trends: The first 100 days

Written by By CINDY WELCH, News-Telegram Food Columnist
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The first 100 days are important in the presidency. We use them to judge, inaccurately sometimes, if our president has kept his campaign promises, changed our country's economy, and fixed what is broken. The first 100 days are also important for trend predictors and trend setters. National Public Radio food commentator Bonny Wolf predicted that "comfort, value and simplicity" will sum up the culinary scene in 2009.

1. Breakfast will become a food offered all day by restaurants because it is a comfort food and a good value. Several fast food establishments and restaurants are now advertising a new all-day breakfast service or emphasizing that they have always had all-day service. Breakfast for supper is one of my family's favorite treats, especially on Sunday nights.

2. Less expensive, more casual dining will become popular. People will turn to bistro-style places with lower prices, smaller portions, more a la carte options and dishes that can be shared. Fixed-price meal packages will become popular. This trend is in full swing. Restaurants are providing meal combos such as TGIF's two-for-twenty meal deals that include an appetizer, entrée and dessert for two. Fast food restaurants are quickly adding to their dollar menus.

3. Cooking at home will increase. Our economy has dictated this because of the lower cost and the need to draw our families closer together in tough times. Home cooks will bring a rise in comfort foods such as meatloaf, spaghetti, mashed potatoes and soups. The casserole may make a great splash on the food calendar this year.

4. Cooking classes and books on simple meals will continue to increase. The past 10 years have seen a gradual rise in this anyway because of food shows and increased awareness. Now our adult population will be learning to cook again as a basic skill necessary for economic survival. Need a lesson or two? E-mail me at ccwelch60@yahoo.com and I can give you some information.

5. Restaurants and fast food companies will continue to increase customization of portion

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sizes. Some will add larger portion choices with a family-style service that will feed two or more while others will continue to add smaller-portioned meals to their menus.

6. Two ethnic foods that will be in the spotlight in 2009 are Asian noodle bowls and Peruvian cuisine. Asian noodle bowls come as soups or served as pasta with toppings of meat, greens, sauces and vegetables. They are one of my favorites. They are filling, simple ingredients and great comfort food. Look for new noodle restaurants to appear on the scene in the metroplex.

Peruvian cuisine is definitely on the rise. I found three restaurants listed in Dallas just by googling "Peruvian Restaurants." These included Inca's Café, Chichos Peruvian Restaurant and Alo. Peruvian recipes include a lot of potatoes, tomatoes, fish and fruit and are very diverse because they have been influenced by French, Chinese, Spanish and Indian cuisine.

7. Steamable packaging is increasing because new developments in the frozen food aisle have led to foods that can be steamed in the microwave in just minutes. These foods now have quality that is as good or better than cooking them in microwave-safe containers. Because they are disposable, there is a lot less mess.

8. Foods developed specifically for allergies and food intolerance will continue to increase as more people are diagnosed with gluten intolerance, nut and soy allergies and lactose intolerance. There are new laws concerning identification of these items in packaging that will change how labels are produced.

9. Several new natural low-calorie sweeteners have hit the market. Stevia has gone mainstream and causes negligible effect on blood sugar. It will soon be used to sweeten major sodas and baked goods.

10. Meals will continue to become more healthy. Whole-grain cereals and pastas are becoming the norm rather than the oddity on shelves. More foods are reducing the sodium and sugar levels in the products. More companies and restaurants are adding organic choices to their wares.

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11. Locally grown and harvested food purchases are on the rise. As evidenced in the growing crowd at our own Farmer's Market, consumers are wanting to know where their food came from and who produced it. They are also discovering that it is fresher and lasts longer in their refrigerator. This past Saturday I purchased fresh Gulf shrimp, just picked broccoli and summer squash and tamales. They were all great and not much more than what I would pay in the store.

12. Eggs will become a popular addition to many dishes. Fried or poached eggs on top of dishes such as huevos rancheros or the classic French frisee salad are being added back to menus.

13. Coupon shopping is becoming a new sport. How much can you get for your food dollar? New coupon shopping sites online and books with tips on increasing your grocery dollar abound. Later this month I'll share some coupon shopping tips.

14. Online shopping for food items is on the rise. People are buying in bulk and having it shipped directly to their homes. This is especially helpful for specialty items such as flours and products for those with food allergies. It is often cheaper to order online and have it delivered than to spend the time and money to drive to Dallas where it is available in a store.

Most of these predicted trends have proven to be true during this first 100 days. It will be interesting to see how they affect big food celebrations such as Mother's Day, summer barbecues, and the fall and winter holiday celebrations.

To me, anything that brings your family together over a shared meal can't be all that bad. Sometimes the hard times are what it takes to bring unity to family, home and country. Food is a way of saying "I like you, I love you and I care about your well being." It has always been a sign of welcome and giving. We may have to do it simpler and cheaper, but that doesn't mean we have to do it with less care, less quality and less focus.

Try something new at home or when you eat out. Try to see how little you can spend and still provide an interesting time for your family that fills their stomachs and their hearts.

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For the past 20 years, Cindy Welch has been involved with all aspects of cooking, including formal culinary training, experience as food service director for First Baptist Church of Euless, a personal chef and owner of Cindy's Casa Cuisine. Her columns cover all aspects of the cooking experience.