Exercises & Case Study
The Latest Scams

BY BONNIE LIEBMAN

It’s hard to keep up with the food industry. Just when you think you’ve seen it all, some marketing exec comes up with a new plan to boost profits. If that means fooling at least some of the public some of the time, well, that’s business. Here are some recent tricks (and a few that have been around for a while).

Information compiled by Melissa Pryputniawicz

Almond Non-Milk

There’s a new milk in your dairy case. And it sounds perfect.

Silk Original Pure Almond milk has “60 calories per serving,” is “rich in antioxidants,” and is “lactose-free and soy-free,” according to the label.

Silk’s Web site gives almonds all the credit. “A serving of almonds provides an excellent source of vitamin E (a natural antioxidant), and a good source of protein and fiber. In fact, almonds are higher in protein and fiber than any other tree nut.”

Maybe so, but a 1 oz. serving of almonds (about two dozen) has 6 grams of protein (and 165 calories). A cup of almond milk has just 1 gram—far less than the 8 to 9 grams of protein in a cup of cow’s milk (or the 6 to 8 grams in a cup of soy milk). How come?

It turns out that almond milk doesn’t have many almonds. Judging by the 2½ grams of fat in every serving, a cup of almond milk is made from about four nuts. The “milk” is mostly water and enough evaporated cane juice to supply about two teaspoons of added sugar per cup.

(That’s for the Original. The 90-calorie Vanilla has about 4 teaspoons of sugar per cup and the 120-calorie Dark Chocolate has 5½ teaspoons.)

And Original and Vanilla Pure Almond are “rich in antioxidants” only because Silk adds vitamin E to them. The company also tosses in vitamins A and D, potassium, and calcium to make them equal to cow’s milk.

Blue Diamond’s Almond Breeze milks are similar to Silk’s, except that the Breezes come in 40-calorie unsweetened versions. Both brands may appeal to vegans (who eat no dairy foods) or to people who are allergic to dairy.

If that’s you, here’s a tip: Odds are, you’re better off with protein-rich soy milk.

Full of It

“You know that hunger you get between meals?” asks the box of Ritz Crackerfuls. “Crackerfuls provides the perfect snack break!”

It’s presumably perfect because the crackers have “6 g of whole grain per serving,” “3 g of fiber,” and “140 calories.” And they’re “made with real cheese.”

Impressive...unless you realize that the crackers are mostly white flour, and that more than two-thirds of their fiber comes from added “resistant corn maltodextrin.” (Resistant means that the maltodextrin resists digestion, which is why the Food and Drug Administration lets Ritz count it as “fiber.” But there’s no good evidence that resistant corn maltodextrin helps prevent heart disease, diabetes, or constipation, like the intact fiber in whole grains does.)

As for the “real cheese,” it’s mostly cream cheese plus cheddar cheese powder. A serving of Crackerfuls contains just 2 grams of protein and 4 percent of a day’s calcium. A 1 oz. slice of cheddar has about 7 grams of protein and 20 percent of a day’s calcium.

Crackerfuls are just a gussied up version of ordinary cheese-and-cracker sandwiches. A smidgen of cheese between two mostly white-flour crackers may hold you over until lunch.

But a “perfect snack break”? Only to Nabisco.
Cheeri-Nos

When you’ve got a good thing going, why stop?
That must be General Mills’ attitude towards Cheerios.
Ever since the Food and Drug Administration agreed that the
soluble fiber in oats can lower LDL (“bad”) cholesterol, ads
and labels have made Cheerios sound like a statin drug.
Eating 3 grams a day of
oats’ soluble fiber (beta-glucan) can lower LDL by about
3 percent. But you’d have to eat three 1-cup servings of
Cheerios every day to get that much. And that’s original
Cheerios, which comes in the familiar yellow box.

General Mills makes 10 other kinds of Cheerios, each
with more sugar and less oat fiber than the original. The
latest: Chocolate Cheerios. It’s 33 percent added sugar
(original Cheerios is less than 1 percent sugar). In fact,
Chocolate Cheerios has more sugar and corn syrup than
oats. Its main ingredient is whole-grain corn, not oats.

So how can the box say “May reduce the risk of heart
disease”? Chocolate Cheerios qualifies for that claim
because it (like most cereals) is low in fat. Berry Burst
Cheerios, Cheerios Crunch, and Banana Nut Cheerios
also make heart disease claims because they’re low-fat,
not oat-rich.

And that’s not the only trick.
Banana Nut Cheerios, for example, has more salt than
banana puree. And Yogurt Burst Cheerios has more sugar
than “naturally yogurt flavored coating,” which is made
with more sugar and palm kernel oil than dried heat-
treated yogurt. (“Heat treated” means that the bacteria
that make it yogurt are dead.)

General Mills is betting that the Cheerios name will
make any cereal sound healthy. Got that right.

Where’s the Veggies?

“Every 8 fl oz glass of Mott’s Medleys
has 2 total fruit & veggie servings, the
powerful antioxidant Vitamins C & E and the bone mineral magnesium,”
says the bottle of Mott’s Medleys
Tropical flavored fruit & carrot juice
blend.

How does Mott’s squeeze two serv-
ings of fruits and vegetables into one
8 oz. cup? Simple. The U.S. Department of Agricul-
ture’s MyPyramid food guide says that a serving of
juice is just half a cup. So an 8 oz. glass of any juice is
two servings. Voila!

But Mott’s manages to squeeze a serving of veggies
in there, too, right? Not exactly. “Two total fruit &
veggie servings” sounds like one fruit and one vege-
table. But Mott’s doesn’t promise a full serving of
veggies. And it doesn’t deliver one, either.

Each glass has just 6 percent of a day’s vitamin A.
If the glass were half carrot juice, it would have
450 percent. So Mott’s is selling mostly water plus
nutrient-poor apple and grape juice fortified with vita-
mins C and E and magnesium.

“Tastes just like the fruit juice your family loves!”
promises the label. That’s because it is fruit juice.

Ocean Spray Fruit & Veggie 100% Juice, with
“2 servings of fruits & vegetables” combined, also
has more grape and apple than carrot or other juices.
Judging by its vitamin A content, an 8 oz. glass has,
at best, 1 oz. (2 Tbs.) of carrot juice.

Bottom line: You’re better off eating fruits and veg-
etables than drinking them.

Noodles for Two?

“Annie Chun’s Noodle Bowls are
Instant Gourmet Food, perfect for
lunch or a quick dinner at your
fingertips!” says the company’s Web
site. “Keep these bowls in your desk or
cupboard, then just heat and serve.”

Serve yourself and a co-worker, that is.

Annie Chun’s Noodle Bowls and Soup Bowls sure look like
one serving. But the Nutrition Facts are for ½ bowl.” Most
people won’t notice, of course. They’ll just assume that the
Nutrition Facts apply to the entire bowl. So when they eat a
Pad Thai Noodle Bowl, for example, they’ll get 460 calories
(not 230) and 1,420 milligrams of sodium (not 710 mg).

Annie isn’t the only trickster. KA-ME, Thai Kitchen, and
A Taste of Thai also pretend that each package serves two. In
contrast, Simply Asia owns up to the full package.

And it’s not just Asian dishes. Campbell pretends that its
regular, Chunky, and Healthy Request single-serve container
microwaveable bowls serve two. So do Healthy Choice and
Health Valley. Who are they kidding? Not you any more.
Supersneaky

"Antioxidants & hearty whole grain texture," boasts the label on Kellogg's new Nutri-Grain Superfruit Fusion Cherry Pomegranate bars.

Judging by the size of the claim, most shoppers would assume that the cherries and pomegranate that are splattered all over the box are the source of the antioxidants. But the smaller print says otherwise...if you know the code.

Start with the name. They’re not Superfruit Fusion bars, they’re Superfruit Fusion flavored bars. And they’re not Cherry Pomegranate bars, they’re Cherry Pomegranate naturally & artificially flavored bars.

“Flavored” is code for “hardly any.”

“We’ve taken traditional fruit and blended it with superfruit flavors,” says the back of the box. Translation: the filling has more high-fructose corn syrup than cherry purée concentrate, and more natural and artificial flavors than pomegranate juice concentrate. (Pomegranate is hot because a few very preliminary studies suggest that it may lower the risk of heart disease and prostate cancer.)

Then there are the antioxidants. They’re just the vitamins C and E that Kellogg adds along with a bunch of other vitamins.

Kashi TLC Soft-Baked Cereal Bars also offer just a smidgen of the fruit that’s in the name. (Kellogg owns Kashi. Hmm.) Whether it’s Blackberry Graham, Ripe Strawberry, or Baked Apple, you’re getting more pear juice concentrate, evaporated cane juice, and molasses or tapioca syrup than any fruit purée or powder.

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FOOD WATCH

Stay In for Restaurant Prices!

“The select ingredients and simple preparation of Restaurant Favorites allow you to easily prepare restaurant-inspired entrées any night of the week,” explains the Romano’s Macaroni Grill Restaurant Favorites box. “Stay In and Go All Out!”

What a great idea. Take the Creamy Basil Parmesan Chicken & Pasta. For roughly $5, you get a box of linguine pasta, creamy sauce, basil & cheese seasoning, sun-dried tomatoes, and grated Parmesan & Romano cheese blend. Together, they weigh half a pound, so you’re paying $10 a pound for the dish.

Well, not the entire dish. You still have to buy a pound of raw boneless skinless chicken breasts, two tablespoons of butter, and ¼ cup of milk.

One more thing: the label says that a box contains five servings, which means that each person gets about 2½ ounces of cooked chicken and ½ cup of cooked pasta plus sauce. But odds are, most people will split the box among two. That means 750 calories (not 300, as the box claims), 1,250 milligrams of sodium (not 500 mg), and half a day’s sat fat (not a quarter of a day’s) for each diner. And those 750 calories are less than the 1,000 calories you’d get in a typical pasta dish at a restaurant.

General Mills (which also makes Hamburger Helper) offers five Romano’s Macaroni Grill Restaurant Favorites. What a great deal...for the company.

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Smart Corporate Bank Balance

“Tastes rich & creamy like 2% milk!” boasts the label on Smart Balance Fat Free Milk.

It’s got “antioxidant vitamins C & E, 25% more calcium, and 25% more protein,” says the large print. More than what?

“Than whole milk,” notes the smaller print.

Gosh, that sounds good. It must sound good enough that some people are willing to fork over $4.50 for a half gallon, even though ordinary milk is only about $2.50 per half gallon.

Well how does this sound? The extra vitamins C and E don’t lower your risk of heart disease or anything else. In fact, in some studies, people who took more than 400 IU a day of vitamin E had a slightly higher risk of dying. (Smart Balance Fat Free has 50 IU per cup.)

Smart Balance does have extra non-fat milk solids, which gives each 8 oz. glass 35 percent of a day’s calcium, marginally more than the 30 percent in ordinary milk. The extra milk solids also supply 10 grams of protein, slightly more than the 8 grams in most kinds of milk. But many store brands of fat-free or low-fat milk also have extra milk solids. And they don’t charge an extra $2 per half gallon.

The company that sells Smart Balance is smart, all right. All the way to the bank.
Corn (and its many forms)

- Acetic acid
- Alcohol
- Alpha tocopherol
- Artificial flavorings
- Artificial sweeteners
- Ascorbates
- Ascorbic acid
- Aspartame (Artificial sweetener)
- Astaxanthin
- Baking powder
- Barley malt
- Bleached flour
- Blended sugar (sugaridextrose)
- Brown sugar
- Calcium citrate
- Calcium fumarate
- Calcium gluconate
- Calcium lactate calcium magnesium acetate (CMA)
- Calcium stearate
- Calcium stearoyl lactylate
- Caramel and caramel color
- Carbonmethylcellulose sodium
- Cellulose microcrystalline
- Cellulose, methyl
- Cellulose, powdered
- Cetyearyl glucoside
- Choline chloride
- Citric acid
- Citrus cloud emulsion (CCS)
- Coco glycerides (cocoglycerides)
- Confectioners sugar
- Corn alcohol, corn gluten
- Corn extract
- Corn flour
- Corn oil, corn oil margarine
- Corn starch
- Corn sweetener, corn sugar
- Corn syrup, corn syrup solids
- Corn, popcorn, cornmeal
- Cornstarch, cornflour
- Crosscarmellose sodium
- Crystalline dextrose
- Decyl glucoside
- Decyl polyglucose
- Dextrin
- Dextrose (also found in IV solutions)
- Dextrose anything (such as monohydrate or anhydrous)
- d-Gluconic acid
- Distilled white vinegar
- Drying agent
- Erythorobic acid
- erythritol
- Ethanol
- Ethocel 20
- Ethylcellulose
- Ethylene
- Ethyl acetate
- Ethyl alcohol
- Ethyl lactate
- Ethyl maltol
- Fibersol-2
- Flavorings
- Food starch
- Fructose
- Fruit juice concentrate
- Fumaric acid
- Germ/germ meal
- Glucomate
- Gluten
- Gluten feed/meal
- Glycerides
- Glycerin
- Glycerol
- Grits
- High fructose corn syrup
- Hominy
- Honey
- Hydrolyzed corn
- Hydrolyzed corn protein
- Hydrolyzed vegetable protein
- Hydroxypropyl methylcellulose
- Hydroxypropyl methylcellulose phthalate (HPMCP)
- Inositol
- Crystalline fructose
- Cyclodextrin
- DATUM (a dough conditioner)
- Lactate acid
- Lauryl glucoside lecithin linoleic acid
- Lysine
- Magnesium fumarate
- Maize
- Malic acid
- Malonic acid
- Malt syrup from corn (barley malt is fine)
- Malt, malt extract
- Malitol
- Maltodextrin
- Maltol
- Mannitol
- Methyl gluceth
- Methyl glucose
- Methyl glucoside
- Methylcellulose
- Microcrystalline cellulose
- Modified cellulose gum
- Modified corn starch
- Modified food starch
- Molasses (corn syrup may be present; know your product)
- Mono and di glycerides
- Monosodium glutamate
- MSG
- Natural flavorings
- Olestra/olean
- Polenta
- Polydextrose
- Polyactic acid (PLA)
- Polysorbates (e.g. Polysorbate 80)
- Polyvinyl acetate
- Potassium citrate
- Potassium fumarate
- Potassium gluconate
- Powdered sugar
- Pregelatinized starch
- Propionic acid
- Propylene glycol
- Propylene glycol monostearate
- Saccharin
- Salt (iodized salt)
- Semolina (unless from wheat)
- Simethicone
- Sodium carboxymethylcellulose
- Invert syrup or sugar
- Iodized salt
- Lactate
- Sodium citrate
- Sodium erythorbate
- Sodium fumarate
- Sodium lactate
- Sodium starch glycolate
- Sodium stearoyl fumarate
- Sorbate
- Sorbic acid
- Sorbitan
- Sorbitan monooleate
- Sorbitan tri-oleate
- Sorbitol
- Sorghum (not all is bad; the syrup and/or grain can be mixed with corn)
- Splenda (Artificial sweetener)
- Starch (any kind that's not specified)
- Stearic acid
- Stearoysls
- Sucralose (Artificial Sweetener)
- Sucrose
- Sugar (not identified as cane or beet)
- Threonine
- Tocopherol (Vitamin E)
- Treacle (aka golden syrup)
- Triethyl citrate
- Unmodified starch
- Vanilla, natural flavoring
- Vanilla, pure or extract
- Vanillin
- Vegetable anyching that's not specific
- Vinegar, distilled white
- Vynil acetate
- Vitamin C and Vitamin E
- Vitamins
- Xanthan gum
- Xylitol
- Yeast
- Zea mays
- Zein
McDonald's Must Pay Obese Employee $17.5K for Weight Woes
by Edecio Martinez

SAO PAULO (CBS/AP) A Brazilian court ruled this week that McDonald's must pay a former franchise manager $17,500 because he gained 65 pounds while working there for a dozen years. The 32-year-old man said he felt forced to sample the food each day to ensure quality standards remained high, because McDonald's hired "mystery clients" to randomly visit restaurants and report on the food, service and cleanliness.

The man also said the company offered free lunches to employees, adding to his caloric intake while on the job. His identity was not released.

The ruling was signed Tuesday by Judge Joao Ghisleni Filho in Porto Alegre. Ghisleni said McDonald's could appeal the case, and the Brazilian headquarters of the chain said in an e-mailed statement Thursday it was weighing its legal options.

McDonald's also noted that it offers healthier food choices. "The chain offers a large variety of options and balanced menus to cater (to) the daily dietary needs of its employees," the company said in the statement. McDonald's headquarters is in Oak Brook, Illinois.

1. Should foodservice establishments be held responsible for the health of their employees? Consumers?

2. What responsibility do the employee and the consumer have to choose healthy food? What responsibility does the foodservice establishment have?

3. Should McDonalds have to pay their franchise manager for gaining 65lbs?

4. Should a company encourage healthy choices? If so, How?
Support Articles
Many Restaurants Lying About Menu Items Being 'Organic' or 'Locally Produced'

By Carey Sweet

Restaurant diners beware: That local, organic dish you're wrapping your lips around - and paying dearly for - may be a fraud. It may not be all-natural, as your menu promised, and it may come from a huge national vendor like Sysco rather than the family-owned farm that the menu touts.

Restaurateurs be warned: If you're caught mislabeling your menu - and chances keep getting greater that if you are, you will be - then you're not only in for your customer's wrath. You may well be "fired" by the very vendors who supply your best ingredients.

Seem like a stretch scenario? It's not. As the Slow Food movement gains popularity across America, terms like "sustainable" and "artisan" (refer to the craft of hand making food products, such as bread, beverages and cheese.) are showing up on more Valley menus. It's not uncommon to find this statement at the bottom of many bills of fare these days: "We proudly support local farmers and producers whenever possible." But what does that really mean?

Or, as a recent e-mail from an industry insider and regular reader of this column posed: "What about restaurants that violate truth-in-menu laws by saying their dishes are organic when, in fact, they are only using organic produce when the vendor sends it to them by chance? They say they offer cage-free eggs (but don't), and organic coffee (yet their brand is not certified). Patrons deserve to know that they are buying into a restaurant that has decided to jump on the Green Bandwagon without actually backing it up."

Indeed, organic food has become big business. According to the Organic Consumer's Association, sales hit $18 billion last year. Though still only about 2.5 percent of the agricultural market, demand for organic has grown 20 percent annually in recent years. While just a few years ago, only small, chef-owned restaurants like Vincent on Camelback listed their boutique vendors on their menus, lately, I've seen artisan ingredients promoted by the chain-owned Houston's in Scottsdale and wild-caught sustainable salmon at P.F. Chang's.

Unfortunately, there are no actual "truth-in-menu" laws, and even the word organic is used loosely. There's a difference between the term "organic," which may mean food raised without pesticides or antibiotics, and the more intensive "certified organic," which is legally regulated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The phrase "all-natural," meanwhile, is defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture only as "minimally processed" with no artificial ingredients or colors.

Essentially, a restaurant may call its ingredients organic whether they're factory-farm Chilean products grabbed from the shelves of Wal-Mart, or whether they're hand delivered by a small Arizona farm after being picked that morning.

Or, as Patrick Duncan, owner of Duncan's Trading Co., a high-end produce farm in Litchfield Park, points out, "There's a lot of wiggle room in that statement, 'whenever possible.' Maybe it's only 'possible' for them to have one tomato a week."
So what's a diner to do?

It's a difficult problem, acknowledges Robert McClendon, owner of a USDA-certified organic produce farm in Peoria. "Chefs find that the Slow Food or local vendor name drives business."

It's a difficult problem, acknowledges Robert McClendon, owner of a USDA-certified organic produce farm in Peoria. "Chefs find that the Slow Food or local vendor name drives business."

He's actually had to "fire" clients who contract with him and then abuse the relationship. Working with a maximum of 25 to 30 restaurants at any time, "we know our customers really, really well," he says. "If they're going to put our name on the menu, then they shouldn't be salt and peppering - buying one box from us and 20 from commercial."

To keep on top of the market, McClendon and his wife dine out at least once a week, not necessarily to secret-shop, he says, "but of course, if we order mixed greens, we know instantly if they're ours."

Should the McClendons come across a suspicious salad, it may warrant a visit to the chef's walk-in cooler. Not to rough him up, presumably, but to check his produce boxes, and see what can be done to augment his orders.

Duncan says he once had to sue a major resort who was using his name but only ordering two boxes of salad mix a week - "not enough for even half a lunch service on a Tuesday."

In some cases, an advertised farm may not even be a farm. The cozy sounding White Marble Farms shows up on restaurant menus around town, but it's actually a designer brand of Sysco, using pork from an enormous meat processor. In response, some of the Valley's best restaurants are turning in the other direction and removing names from their menus.

At Rancho Pinot in Scottsdale, one of the Valley's original Slow Food restaurants when it opened in 1995, the menu reads: "We use locally grown, organic produce, eggs and dairy whenever available." Yet owner Chrysa Robertson says that's an acknowledgement that quality is more important than a label. "Just because it's local and organic doesn't mean it tastes any good," she says. "I can't tell you how many times I have had to delicately tell a local farmer that their stuff is too big (mature), bitter or unripe. It needs to taste good, first and foremost."

Even chef James Porter, of Tapino and its popular Locavore dinners, concedes it's difficult to stay local. "Of course I want to use as much local as possible, but if it doesn't taste good or doesn't exist, lying about it is just unethical and immoral. There are some local ingredients that are just not consistently produced, so I can't use them."

The larger the restaurant, too, the more difficult it is to maintain organic and/or local practices. While Houston's of Scottsdale indeed is a McClendon client, it's rare for a chain to be a boutique buyer. Organic produce costs can be 10 to 20 percent more than wholesale, and the supply is much more limited and unpredictable.

Noca chef Chris Curtiss promotes local in his global-eclectic restaurant, which opened in the Biltmore Plaza last month, but within reason. "I think it has become very trendy for chefs and restaurants to name-drop different farmers, to use catch phrases like local, sustainable and organic," he says. "Certain chefs are doing the public a disservice by stating that they are organic, local and sustainable when the reality is there is no way that a restaurant in Arizona could truly live up to that."

Ultimately, diners need to be aware, self-educate, and ask questions. "If you see heirloom tomatoes in January or fresh citrus in August, it's 180 degrees away from the season," says McClendon. Metro-Phoenix farms virtually shut down in August and September, notes Duncan.

Diners also should pay attention to their taste buds. According to P.F. Chang's research and development chef Robin Stotter, "Organic generally tastes better. Produce is more earthy, pungent; tomatoes have higher sugar and acidity. You should have a much stronger and better eating experience."

"In the end, if a restaurant is advertising local and organic product when it's substituting mass-produced commercial grade product, it will come back to bite them," says Noca owner Eliot Wexler. "There is no substitute for the flavor of field-grown McClendon's or Duncan farms produce."
SIDESHOWS in the SPOTLIGHT

Sharing center plate these days is a wide array of tempting side dishes that shine on their own

BY DR. A. ELIZABETH SLOAN

Time is on the side of side dishes. In a still-slow economy, changing up sides is a more cost-effective menu R&D proposition than taking on center-plate items. Fresh, produce-heavy sides appeal to today's health-minded eaters. à la carte sides fit nicely with a new "build-your-own" approach to putting together restaurant meals from several menu sections. And with increased demand for sampling, sharing and smaller portions, creative side dishes can be a strong draw for young adults and families.

The success of McDonald's Snack Wraps, Burger King's Mac & Cheese Snacks and Au Bon Pain's Portions menu proves that the market is open to more à la carte options and ways for diners to make their own light meals from menus that offer a variety of portion sizes, sides and assorted extras.

Demographics are also working in favor of side dishes. With one in 10 adults grazing and 16 percent eating smaller meals throughout the day, according to Mintel's Portion Control report from April 2009, side dishes are perfectly proportioned for mini meals and snacks. Side-dish salads and non-fried vegetables ranked second and fourth as the most-ordered restaurant menu items for those aged 65 and older in 2008; they ranked third and seventh, respectively, for the 50-to-64 age group, according to NPD/CREST.

As relatively higher-spending older diners increase their visits to restaurants, side dishes will get a boost. This group, raised on the more traditional "basic three or four" concept of eating, look for a balanced plate — with a protein, starch and one or two sides. At home, older diners are significantly more likely to serve an entrée with side dishes for dinner: 72 percent of the 65-plus group versus 51 percent of those 35 to 49, reports Gallup.

SHIFTING SIDES

That's the good news for sides, but there are some challenges. For the year ended January 2010, servings of side dishes (including french fries) fell 6 percent across all restaurants. A tight economy and ethnic-food trends toward one-dish meals are two patterns giving side dishes a run for their money. But smart operators should see these challenges as an opportunity and apply more culinary creativity toward destination-making sides like nutty pilafs, roasted, seasonal vegetables and updated fruit salads.

Vegetables, fries, salads and potatoes topped the list of side dishes offered on menus in the last quarter of 2009, according to Mintel Menu Insights (see Figure 1). But the
real news comes from independents and emerging chains, where side dishes like Brussels sprouts, lentils and macaroni and cheese are getting more play, notes Maria Caranfa, director of Mintel Menu Insights in Chicago.

"Root veggies like parsnips and carrots and greens like rapini and kale are also emerging," she adds. "Also, biscuits are on the menu more. These all go along with the 'down-home' trends we are seeing."

The National Restaurant Association's (NRA) 2010 Restaurant Industry Forecast reports 73 percent of adults are trying to eat more healthfully in restaurants than they did two years ago. And what better place to load up on fruits and vegetables than sides?

Look for fewer fried side options, except for sweet potato fries — high in fiber, folate, potassium vitamin B-6 and beta carotene — to take a bigger part of the side story. Oven-roasted potatoes help keep spuds in the running, while simple vegetable-and-dip options reconfigure "side salads."

Whole grains, legumes and beans are all nutritious, hearty options to add to the roster when better health and smarter spending are top of mind.

START FRESH

Menuing creative fruit and vegetable sides is good business. The Packer's Fresh Trends 2010 reports that 64 percent of consumers make a conscious effort to choose fresh fruits and vegetables as part of their restaurant meals, up from 50 percent in 2006. Of these diners, 71 percent ordered a side salad as part of their meal; 25 percent chose a produce side dish; and 4 percent put produce at the center of the plate.

Moreover, 72 percent of operators in the June 2009 NRA/Produce Marketing Association's (PMA) report entitled "An Examination of Fresh Produce Usage in the Restaurant Industry" found that emphasizing fresh produce in their marketing efforts drove more customers to their restaurant.

Locally grown produce topped the list of 215 culinary items ranked "hot" for 2010 in the NRA survey among American Culinary Federation (ACF) chefs, as did upgraded versions of traditional salad ingredients, like micro vegetables and greens and heirloom tomatoes (see Figure 2). NRA's Forecast reports that 70 percent of consumers are more likely to visit restaurants that serve local produce.

With ACF chefs ranking appetizer salads as the No. 4 "hot" appetizer for 2010, better side salads are another opportunity.

Mintel Menu Insights reports that spinach, corn, mushrooms and carrots are among the fastest menu gainers, while The Packer cites potatoes, tomatoes, onions, carrots, corn, broccoli, mushrooms, sweet potatoes, cabbage...
and cauliflower as the vegetables bought regularly by more than half of American consumers.

Buoyed by the trend toward American regional cuisines and rustic and earthy foods, root vegetables, such as parsnips, rutabaga and beets, will continue to crop up on more menus. Fresh peas, sweet peas, pods and peas and dark, bitter greens like collards, kale, beet tops and chard are also moving to center stage.

A FINER POINT ON PRODUCE

America is clamoring for sweet potatoes on the menu, keeping up with demand at retail, where 56 percent of consumers purchased sweet potatoes last year, per The Packer. Specialty potatoes like purple, fingerling and Baby Dutch Yellow were named as a hot trend by more than half (56 percent) of ACF chefs, as were fava beans and other beans. Mintel Menu Insights reports that red-skinned, Idaho, Red Bliss and Yukon Gold potatoes are gaining in menu mentions, as are potato “tots,” which are becoming a French-fry alternative.

Menu Mintel Insights finds that Cajun, garlic, Parmesan cheese, blue cheese, rosemary and herb are the flavors most associated with potato side dishes on menus. Preparation styles are no surprise: Fried tops the list, but roasting and kettle-cooked are potato preparation methods growing on menus, according to Mintel.

Potatoes and beans are easy to dress up; consider drizzling mashes or purees of both with high-impact ingredients like truffle oil or pesto. Sautéed bean mixes add sizzle, and roasted potatoes are open to flavorful extras, such as chili-lime dustings and dip trios.

Mushroom varieties like shiitake, straw, enokitake, chanterelle and morel are sure to have high diner appeal this year, according to ACF chefs. Steakhouses have led the way in offering mushrooms as sides or toppings. Lone Star Steakhouse and Ted’s Montana Grill feature sautéed mushrooms and onions; Ruth’s Chris Steak House menus mushrooms sautéed with butter, while Chops Lobster Bar in Boca Raton, Fla., and Atlanta offers a side of local, farmed, mixed mushrooms. Black Angus Steakhouse and Ruby Tuesday serve sautéed fresh baby portobellos.

Baked, deep-fried and sautéed are more prominent restaurant techniques applied to vegetables, reports Mintel Menu Insights (see Figure 3). This list of fairly typical preparation techniques leaves plenty of room for branching out. Vegetable carpaccio, terrines, soufflés, cakes, braises and mashed or pureed versions of sturdy vegetables like potatoes, cauliflower and parsnips are other big ideas.

FRUIT FITS THE BILL

Bananas, apples, grapes, strawberries, cantaloupe, watermelon, oranges, peaches, blueberries and cherries top the list of fruits purchased by more than half of consumers in the past year, according to The Packer. And fruit isn’t just for snacking anymore. The Packer found 18 percent of consumers use apples as a side dish at home; 15 percent use grapes and 12 percent use pears.

Figs, persimmons, coconuts and watermelons are among the fruits gaining momentum on the menu. With superfruits making the list of 2010 hot trends with 73 percent of ACF chefs, it’s time to start adding tropical versions like acai, goji berry, mango, kiwi and mangosteen to fruit mixes. Exotic fruits, including durian, passion fruit, dragon fruit and guava, will also come on the scene. Domestic favorites like berries, melon, apples and other tree fruits are a hit with all ages.

For, fruit-and-veggie-and-dip sides have become standard fare on most quick-serve, limited-serve and family-dining menus. Adding single-serve applesauce cups, dried-fruit pouches or fresh grape bunches as side

Diners like their sides BAKED and FRIED

Top 10 vegetable preparations on menus

1. Baked
2. Deep-fried
3. Sautéed
4. Steamed
5. Fried
6. Boiled
7. Grilled
8. Roasted
9. Dried
10. Dumpling

SOURCE: MINTEL MENU INSIGHTS, INC. 2009

Sweet-potato fries are on the rise, and creative dips like this gazpacho-inspired one give them even more menu appeal.
dishes or to-go options is an easy way to freshen up side offerings.

“IN” GRAINING

“Whole grain” is now the most-sought-after health claim on retail food labels, ranking “very important” to 57 percent of consumers, according to the Food Marketing Institute’s 2009 U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends report. In foodservice, rice is seen as a healthful option and is the most-popular side dish purchased in the past three months; 63 percent of consumers opted to add it as a side, according to Mintel’s Side Dishes June 2009 report. Nearly one-third (31 percent) are eating more couscous, tabouli and other wheat or grain salad items, reports Mintel; another 29 percent opted for beans and 26 percent, flavored rice.

Ancient grains continue to gain attention, led by kamut, spelt and amaranth. ACF chefs ranked quinoa as the “hottest” side/starch for 2010; braised vegetables were No. 2; brown/wild rice ranked No. 3; and buckwheat, barley, mashed or pureed vegetables, lentils, couscous and polenta reached the top 10, respectively.

Look for more exotic forms of rice, e.g. Bhutanese Red, Madagascar Pink and Black Pearl, to gain in popularity. American-grown rice, such as local brown rice and Arborio, will also get more attention. Brown-rice pilaf proves successful on Ruby Tuesday’s lengthy side-dish list, which also includes sautéed creamy mashed cauliflower, mashed potatoes and a relatively new lobster mac-and-cheese option.

Mintel reports that poblano peppers, herbs, Cajun and jambalaya are the flavors most associated with rice in restaurants. Chipotle menus Cilantro-Lime Rice, while Bonefish Grill serves Herbed Jasmine Rice.

Pasta sides also are poised for a comeback, ranking 12th on the ACF chefs list of “hot” sides for 2010. Consider a side of tricolored tortellini skewers and a bacon, wild mushroom and penne toss or an orzo-and-dried-fruit salad.

WELL-SEASONED SIDES

Dill, seasoned, spicy, jalapeño and sweet are the key flavors associated with vegetable side dishes, reports Mintel (see Figure 4). But, as the American regional trend heats up, the flavor options should expand.

Consider adding classic hush puppies, black-eyed-pea side salads or authentic Louisiana red beans and rice to add some Southern touches to the menu. New England apple-and-cranberry stuffing or Boston baked beans give a taste of the Northeast, while barbecue sides like Fuddruckers’ Texas BBQ Baked Beans are easy regional additions. Southwest flavors are also appealing; Legal Sea Foods serves spicy jalapeño-cheddar polenta.

With ACF chefs voting regional ethnic the No. 1 “hot” ethnic cuisine for 2010, followed by ethnic fusion, North
Selling FRESHNESS and COMFORT on the side

Top 10 side-dish menu descriptors

1. Fresh
2. Crisp
3. Homemade
4. Creamy
5. House
6. Seasonal
7. Crispy
8. Signature
9. Garden-fresh
10. Special

SOURCE: MINTEL MENU INSIGHTS, MARCH 2010

Spoon bread and Charra Beans, as well as black and barbecued beans, are a few of the many sides supporting the Mexican fare at Don Pablo’s.

African/Maghreb, Latin American/Nuevo Latino and Southeast Asian, use side dishes to introduce diners to these emerging influences.

Moroccan spice blends are perfect for flavoring starchy sides like potatoes and couscous, and Latin cuisines lavish attention on side dishes. Don Pablo’s serves Charra Beans, pinto beans prepared with spices, tomatoes and onion. Baja Fresh Mexican Grill serves cebolitas, or seasoned, fire-roasted green onions, and Pollo Campero’s sides include yuca fries, sweet plantains and signature Campero Beans.

For Asian inspirations, look for more Vietnamese rice or noodle salads and salad rolls to shift from starter menus to sides; Filipino pancit and Japanese seaweed salads also could have stellar careers as side dishes.

Tempura vegetables and simple, steamed edamame are gaining ground as starter/side crossovers, and vegetarian versions of sushi make great sense as side packages.

Rustic, regional Mediterranean cuisines are more sources for side-dish inspiration. Combine spinach and feta (with rice, potato or bulgar) for Greek flavors; sidesaddle your Italian entree with polenta, risotto, sauteed escarole or cannellini puree for a trendy, Italian touch.

Adding new flavors, textures and varieties of vegetables, fruits, grains and pasta to side dishes is a creative and economical way to bring interest to standard menu items. Where many sides were once fried or covered in cheese, the door is open for healthier ingredients and cooking methods. Focusing on bolder ethnic flavors and freshness from seasonal and local produce will also help build an exciting sideshow menu.

DR. A. ELIZABETH SLOAN, president of the consulting firm Sloan Trends & Solutions, can be e-mailed at lisasloan@sloantrend.com.
Pesticide-producing GM crops

Pesticide-producing GM crops may cause allergies
In addition to herbicide tolerant crops, the second major trait in GM crops is built-in pesticide production. When bugs take a bite of such a GM plant, the toxin creates holes in their stomach and kills them.
The fact that we consume that same toxic pesticide is hardly appetizing. But biotech companies tell us that the pesticide, called Bt-toxin, has a history of safe use, is quickly destroyed in our stomach; and wouldn't react with humans or mammals in any event. Research tells a different story.

Bt-producing crops dangerous to humans
For years, organic farmers and others have used solutions containing natural Bt bacteria (Bacillus thuringiensis) as a method of insect control. Used as a spray by organic farmers, Bt degrades easily in the soil. But in Bt crops, the Bt doesn't degrade; every cell of the plant (and food) exudes the Bt pesticide all the time at full potency.
Studies verify that natural Bt-toxin is not fully destroyed from digestion and does react with mammals. Mice fed Bt-toxin, for example, showed an immune response as potent as cholera toxin, and become immune sensitive to formerly harmless compounds. Moreover, when natural Bt was sprayed over areas around Vancouver and Washington State to fight gypsy moths, about 500 people reported reactions — mostly allergy or flu-like symptoms.
Farm workers and others also report serious reactions. Authorities have long acknowledged, "People with compromised immune systems or preexisting allergies may be particularly susceptible to the effects of Bt."
The Bt-toxin produced in GM crops is "vastly different from the bacterial [Bt-toxins] used in organic and traditional farming and forestry." GM plants produce about 3,000 to 5,000 times the amount of toxin as the sprays, which also are designed to be more toxic than natural varieties. Like the protein in GM soy, properties of Bt protein fail the WHO criteria designed to prevent allergenic GM crops from being approved.

Bt cotton triggers allergic reactions
In 2005, a medical team reported that hundreds of agricultural workers in India are developing allergic reactions when exposed to Bt cotton, but not to natural varieties. Their symptoms are virtually identical to those described by the 500 people in Vancouver and Washington who were sprayed with Bt (see table).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Upper respiratory</th>
<th>Eyes</th>
<th>Skin</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bt sneezing, runny nose, exacerbations of asthma</td>
<td>Watery, red</td>
<td>Itching, burning, inflammation, red, swelling</td>
<td>Fever, some in hospital</td>
</tr>
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<td>Fever, some in hospital</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bt corn pollen may cause allergies
Bt-toxin is produced in several varicities of GM corn. The toxin can be eaten intact or even breathed in from pollen. In 2003, during the time when an adjacent Bt cornfield was pollinating, virtually an entire Filipino village of about 100 people were stricken by mysterious skin, respiratory, and intestinal reactions. The symptoms appeared progressively from those living closest to the field to those further away.
Blood samples from 39 individuals showed antibodies in response to Bt-toxin — supporting, but not proving, a link. When the same corn was planted in four other villages the following year, however, the symptoms returned in all four areas — only during the time of pollination.
The potential dangers of breathing GM pollen had been identified in 1998 by the UK Joint Food Safety and Standards Group; it warned that genes from inhaled pollen might transfer into the DNA of bacteria in the respiratory system.
If Bt genes transfer to human bacteria, either in the lungs or, as confirmed in the soy study above, in the intestines, the microorganisms may be converted into living pesticide factories, possibly producing Bt-toxin inside of us year after year.

This section on Consumer Health Concerns from genetically modified food crops is derived entirely from the work by Jeffrey M. Smith, director of the Institute for Responsible Technology and author of "Genetic Roulette: The Documented Health Risks of Genetically Engineered Foods" and "Seeds of Deception."  

www.responsibletechnology.org

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Emerging health concerns about pesticide residues

authors
William Pease

publication information

author affiliations
W. Pease is Toxicologist, Environmental Health Sciences, School of Public Health, UC Berkeley.

For more than 30 years, most public and regulatory concern about pesticide residues in food has focused on whether life-long exposure to some chemicals in the diet could increase the incidence of cancer. The Delaney Clause, a 1958 law banning the use of animal carcinogens as food additives, remains at the center of the current Congressional debate over pesticide reform. There is growing interest, however, in examining whether pesticide exposures could have other adverse effects on human health. Public concern about diseases other than cancer has been stimulated by the results obtained from more thorough toxicity testing of pesticides. As scientific understanding of the full range of pesticide toxicity has improved, a new question is being asked in policy debates: Can exposure to pesticide residues in our diet harm our reproductive, neurological or immune systems?

Assessing these potential risks involves many of the same scientific uncertainties that plague current efforts to estimate cancer risks. It is clear from the results of toxicological studies on laboratory animals that many pesticides in widespread use have the capacity to damage important physiological systems. There is also epidemiological evidence that workers with relatively high levels of pesticide exposure can suffer from a variety of acute and chronic health effects.

Some pesticides are reproductive toxicants, capable of damaging the human reproductive system. The normal sperm count of workers formulating DBCP (dibromochloropropene), for example, was lowered substantially because this nematocide is toxic to critical germinal cells in the male testes. Highly exposed workers became infertile and were unable to father children. Other pesticides (for example, organochlorine insecticides like endosulfan) mimic the activity of human hormones and may affect female reproductive capacity. Toxicological evidence indicates that many pesticides can also cause birth defects: Of some 200 pesticides tested to date, nearly half are reported to induce birth defects in experimental animals.

Some pesticides can damage the immune system, triggering hypersusceptibility to chemical exposures or hindering an organism's ability to successfully fight off infections. Occupational exposures to captan, for example, can induce contact hypersensitivity, a type of dermatitis. Toxicological studies have demonstrated that other pesticides can damage the immune system. Pesticides such as carbofuran and methyl parathion, for example, reduce an experimental animal's capacity to resist bacterial infections.

Entire classes of pesticides, like the organophosphate and carbamate insecticides, target enzymes that are essential to the functioning of a healthy nervous system. Farmworker exposures to mevinphos and methomyl, for example, have resulted in several mass poisoning incidents. Workers experience both physical and neurological symptoms, including nausea, breathing difficulties, irritability and confusion. Epidemiological studies indicate there can also be long-term damage (such as memory disturbances and deficits in intelligence and motor functioning) as a result of repeated acute exposures to neurotoxic pesticides.

Whether these types of adverse effects are occurring in humans as a result of dietary exposures to pesticide residues is largely unknown. Such endpoints often involve nonspecific symptoms. It is also difficult to characterize the pesticide exposures people experience. There is a complex mixture of many different pesticides in normal diets, as well as a number of other potential routes of exposure (for example, home consumer product use). This has made it virtually impossible to conduct epidemiological studies of the non-cancer effects of low-level dietary exposures.

Current scientific efforts compare estimated dietary intakes with pesticide dose levels known to cause adverse effects. The recent NAS report on pesticides in children's diets, for example, examined whether the
cumulative intake of different pesticides that inhibit cholinesterase could have adverse neurological consequences. The report found that while the vast majority of children do not consume sufficient quantities of pesticide residues to raise any health concerns, about 1% of children on any given day are receiving pesticide doses that exceed EPA's acceptable exposure level. This finding has not resolved whether serious noncancer effects can be associated with food residues. Rather, it represents a new phase in the debate over food safety, as regulators begin to focus on reducing cumulative effects potentially associated with the variety of pesticide residues in the food supply.
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