

DELICIOUSLY UNEXPECTED

OPPORTUNITIES IN THE FOOD
AND BEVERAGE SPACE



TREND REPORT BITE

Due to today's creative food expressions popping up on social media, people are craving more novel experiences and flavors to satiate their senses. Food service operators are "reimagining the familiar to indulge modern guests" with intriguing mash-ups and unique limited time offerings*. Contrasting combinations and traditional flavors are being served in unexpected formats to surprise, delight, and evoke curiosity by restaurants and CPG brands. This anything goes approach to flavor opens the door for endless innovation possibilities. Read on to learn more.

*2025 Dining Trends That Will Keep Guests Coming Back, QSR Magazine & Mintel

Intriguing Formats • Unexpected Pairings • New Takes on Sweet Brown



43%

of consumers globally say they're looking for crazy creations that provide an ultimate experience.

Innova, 2025 Trends Survey

INTRIGUING FORMATS



Brands have embraced mashups that apply popular flavors to intriguing formats to generate social buzz and media coverage. For example, General Mills released limited-edition Totino's pizza flavored Cinnamon Toast Crunch cereal for the 2025 Super Bowl season. And in 2024, Oreo and Coca-Cola thrilled consumers with cross over creations that mix flavor and formats. Beyond brand collaborations, developers can use familiar flavors in new ways to evoke curiosity and excitement. By applying beloved flavors to intriguing formats, you're also creating a delightful dissonance because consumers are experiencing a novel food concept that may seem odd, but is surprisingly satisfying. For instance, you could bite into a crunchy potato chip – to find that it's bursting with the flavor of sweet vanilla ice cream!

FROM OUR BENCH: ICE CREAM POTATO CHIPS

Have you ever dipped a potato chip into ice cream and were surprised by how great it tasted?! Homer Nieto, Sr Scientist, brought to life this intriguing taste experience in a seasoning format by balancing sweet, salty, creamy, and vanilla flavors on a crunchy, fatty chip.

FROM OUR BENCH: INDIAN “65” KETCHUP

Chicken 65 is a deep-fried, spicy chicken dish that originated in a Southern Indian hotel and has become popular across the country. Aiming to introduce the profile to a North American audience, Ron Taylor, Principal Research Chef replicated the taste in ketchup. Blending a garam masala flavor base, caramelized onions, Kashmiri peppers and more into the beloved condiment, the delectable, bold taste of the Indian appetizer can be enjoyed in a familiar application.



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Ahead of Super Bowl LIX, General Mills partnered with Totino's for a pizza-flavored cereal. [Click](#) to view the article from People.com. Jan 22, 2025.
Photo: General Mills



Quillo Gourmet offers elevated potato chip flavors like Fried Egg and Foie Gras.



Green Curry Sponge Cake @ Moon Rabbit in Washington, DC
The innovative Vietnamese restaurant features savory and spicy flavors like green curry on its [dessert menu](#).

UNEXPECTED PAIRINGS

As consumers claim to seek unlikely combinations for an extraordinary experience, there is an opportunity to deliver unexpected flavor pairings. For example, spicy and cooling pairings, like cucumber with chili create flavorful taste contrasts. Also, look to regional food traditions for inspiration for combinations that may seem unique to your audience, but are surprisingly delicious such as utilizing avocado in sweet applications.

Unexpected Pairing Thought Starters

- Cheddar Apple
- Vanilla Avocado
- Miso Lime
- Cucumber Thai Chili
- Calamansi Gochujang
- Scotch Bonnet Peach
- Serrano Mint
- Thai Tea Pork



FROM OUR BENCH: SWEET VANILLA AVOCADO SMOOTHIE

Incorporating avocado into sweet applications may seem unusual; however, it is commonplace in Brazil. Taking inspiration from the Brazilian avocado smoothie which blends the fruit with milk and sugar, Vanessa Chavez, Sr Scientist created a non-dairy version using oatmilk. The inherent brown notes from oatmilk boost the added avocado flavor. And to improve sweetness and mouthfeel, premiated vanilla extract and an Optify™ creamy enhancer were included.

FROM OUR BENCH: APPLE PIE SORBET WITH CHEDDAR ICE CREAM

Topping apple pie with cheddar cheese may seem bizarre, but the pairing has been around since pre-colonial America. The tradition is still practice in areas with lots of dairy farms, like New England and the Midwest. With a love for the sweet, slightly salty combo, Paul Hoffman, Scientist II developed a layered dessert that features sorbet with apple and cinnamon flavors topped with a cheddar cheese flavored ice cream.



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Avocado Vanilla Smoothie Recipe by Truvia® [Click for recipe.](#)

Chili Cucumber Salad trending on TikTok 22.9M views in 2024. [Check it out.](#)



Kalamansi with Gochujang Sorbet by Araw London "This unique sorbet combines the bright and zesty essence of kalamansi with the bold and fiery kick of gochujang." [Click to learn more.](#)



Domo Zero Proof Elixir Dietary Supplement With Ginger Miso Mule Flavor Zingy ginger fused with the salty-sweet richness of miso deliciously contrasting the tartness of kombucha, lemon and lime. U.S., Oct 2024

NEW TAKES ON SWEET BROWN

Sweet brown refers to warm spices and flavors associated with baking, the cooking process, and sweet applications, like cinnamon and caramel. Often tied to positive memories and the holiday season, sweet brown flavors tend to be comforting and nostalgic. However, sweet browns also can deliver an unexpected taste dimension when paired with other flavors or typical savory applications. Consider exploring complex combinations like sweet & salty and sweet & spicy.

Mix and match flavors to create unexpected takes on sweet brown

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|---|---|---|
| <p>Brown Spices Cinnamon, Ginger, Clove, Cardamom, Nutmeg</p> <p>Brown Flavors Chocolate, Honey, Maple, Coffee, Caramel, Nuts</p> <p>Vanilla</p> | & | <p>Savory & Umami Miso, Fish Sauce, BBQ, Bacon, Smoked Meats</p> <p>Veggie Carrot, Corn, Squash</p> <p>Spicy Cayenne, Chipotle, Ancho, Curry</p> |
|---|---|---|

FROM OUR BENCH: CINNAMON GINGER AJI PEPITAS

Sweet brown meets spicy in a seasoning developed by Margarita Luy, Sr Principal Scientist. The warm flavors of brown sugar and vanilla combine with the sharp spicy notes of cinnamon and ginger to complement the fruitiness of the aji amarillo pepper. The bold, satisfying blend is great for snacks, fruits and more!



FROM OUR CHEFS: FISH SAUCE CARAMEL CHICKEN WINGS

Caramel fish sauce is a next-level sweet and salty combination that also packs a punch of umami. Traditionally found in Vietnamese cuisine, the sticky sauce has emerged in recent years in everything from meat glazes to confections. Check out Sr. Research Chef Adriana Lavin's take on it that also incorporates Frank's RedHot® on chicken wings. [Click](#) for recipe.

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Beck's Broth: Coffee and Hot Chocolate Bone Broth-Based Drinks Canada, Jan 2025. [Click](#) to learn more.



HEB Churro Cinnamon & Sugar Seasoned Bacon. U.S., March 2024.



FOOD&WINE

Grilled Baby Vegetables with Fish Sauce Caramel

This recipe features a sauce made with fish sauce, brown sugar and maple syrup. [Click](#) for the recipe.

THE TAKEAWAYS

Since consumers are now expecting the unexpected when it comes to their food and drink, brands have the opportunity to get creative and take a no-boundaries approach to flavor. Surprise and delight your consumers with reimagined but familiar flavors in complementary, original formats. Reinvent the classics with spicy and cool pairings or new takes on sweet brown flavors. Not sure where to start? Allow us to be your partner for your next deliciously unexpected innovation.

YOU DESERVE MORE. LET'S GET STARTED.

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

Let McCormick Flavor Solutions 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, seasoning 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.

From concept to manufacturing, we’re here for you — every step of the way. Contact your sales representative or [click here](#) to chat us up.



FROM OUR CHEFS:

SWEET CORN CAKE WITH SPICY CHOCOLATE BUTTERCREAM

Slathered in a chipotle chocolate buttercream, this seemingly standard yellow layer cake is anything but ordinary. Tender cake layers flaunt a beautiful yellow hue and sweet corn cake flavor enhanced by the smokiness and subtle heat of the buttercream for an unexpected flavor pairing that is both creative and curiously complementary. [Click](#) for the recipe.

Hungry for more? Click to check out all of the ‘Deliciously Unexpected’ recipes.



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