Which consumer trends are expected to drive food and drink innovation? And how will the industry respond? Take a look at our predictions for what 2020 has in store.

Times are changing when it comes to social drinking and the industry needs to pay attention. Millennials and Gen Z adults are leading the charge. Some are shunning booze-filled nights out altogether, while others are making a conscious choice to drink less or follow the #sobercurious movement. In fact, overall alcohol consumption rates have reportedly dropped; just over a quarter of UK consumers are now drinking more low/non-alcoholic drinks compared to a few years ago. A figure which rises to 42% among under 35s\(^1\). This shift in behaviour has not gone unnoticed by producers who are responding with a raft of innovative concepts aimed at this new breed of consumer - and the low/zero alcohol market is showing growth.

**Where next?** Look out for greater premiumisation in the low/no alcohol market - particularly in the spirits category, where high-end branding and botanical infused flavours will be used to engage a lifestyle-driven audience. Also, expect to see a lot more variety in your local pub for the non-drinkers.

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\(^{1}\) Mintel 2018
Food for mood

More and more consumers are switching on to the link between diet and emotional wellbeing. It’s fuelling a proactive push to understand more about how specific nutrients can support mental health. Increasing awareness of the gut-brain connection, for example - which was recently the subject of a widely-publicised research study - has fuelled increasing consumer demand for pre and probiotic foods and supplements, as well as high fibre applications.

This growing interest in neuro-nutrition is also driving a renewed focus on adaptogenic and nootropic ingredients. Associated with cognitive-enhancing and mood-moderating benefits, these natural substances are gaining traction - particularly in applications, such as tea, which are already positioned within the wellness sector.

Where next?

Be prepared for a new wave of concepts formulated to combat concerns around anxiety, stress and mental fatigue. Producers will continue to explore exciting new applications for natural herbal ingredients, such as ashwagandha and holy basil; where these ancient remedies are reinvented for modern life.

Plastic-free

With more than 150 million tonnes of plastic choking the world’s oceans and 12.7 million tonnes being added every year\(^2\), reducing the use of plastic has become a global environmental priority - and the food industry is under pressure to take definitive action. Packaging is under scrutiny like never before and now a significant part of the purchasing decision for many eco-conscious consumers. Major supermarkets have taken note and unveiled new initiatives to demonstrate their commitment to the cause. The so-called “Waitrose Unpacked” trial scheme, for example, encourages customers to bring and refill their own containers for a wide range of dispensed products such as pasta, coffee and grains, as well as loose fruit and veg.

Where next?

With the backlash against plastic showing no signs of slowing, pressure will continue to build on the food industry. Only by investing in new packaging strategies to replace plastic with other sustainable materials can retailers, brand owners and manufacturers hope to retain consumer loyalty.

\(^2\) European Commission
Snacks from the sea
Interest in marine ingredients is tipped to grow beyond seaweed, to embrace other intriguing options such as kelp jerky, puffed water lily and lotus seeds, as well as salmon skin crisps. Sustainable and natural credentials are key to the success of this trend and were instrumental in the trailblazing success of seaweed. But equally important is the fact that these ingredients are not only linked with high protein content - an enduringly popular platform for consumers - but also viewed as “better for you” compared to traditional carbohydrate-based snacks or meat alternatives.

Where next? As increasingly adventurous consumers look for unusual ingredients, non-traditional options which also offer wider, “healthier-eating” benefits will be the ones to watch.

The CBD revolution
Cannabidiol (CBD) is one of the hottest trends to hit US and European markets over the last year. The UK market alone is predicted to be worth almost £1bn a year by 2025; equivalent to the current size of the entire UK herbal supplement market. This dramatic uptake of CBD is largely due to its broad appeal; widely believed to help with mental health issues, such as relieving anxiety and stress, it aligns with two of 2020s most influential trends - “Food for Mood” and “Eating for Me”. Interestingly, this projected success is despite the fact that the legal position for CBD remains a grey area; its status as a novel food in Europe and a legal ingredient in the US is under consideration.

Where next? We will see the emergence of CBD across food categories and, at the same time, a push for greater clarity in terms of legislation.

3 Centre for Medicinal Cannabis (CMC)
Vote Vegan

Last but not least, no trend report would be complete without mentioning the influence of vegan and plant-based eating. Exploding onto the mainstream market in 2019, this category will continue its upward trajectory over the coming year as consumers increasingly engage with a more ethical and sustainable way of living. In fact, it seems that vegan may ultimately overtake vegetarian in terms of preferred platforms.

Producers certainly seem to think so, with the number of new product launches featuring a vegan claim over the last five years on the up, while use of vegetarian is declining⁴.

Where next? R&D will continue to push the boundaries to create more realistic meat and dairy substitutes to attract and retain consumers, providing manufacturing challenges to ensure the product is free-from. Look out for alternatives to pretty much any animal-based products.

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Eating for me

Consumers are no longer content with a general approach to food. They want to be able to create personalised diets; where foods are adapted to specific health issues, intolerances and even their day-to-day jobs and lifestyles. This is shaping emerging demand for diets which meet an ever-increasing range of goals from vegan, keto and paleo, to fertility and mental health. We’ve already seen the arrival of subscription food boxes for convenience, but in this era of personalisation additional choice in terms of content, volume and even limited-edition personalised packaging are all becoming standard practice.

Where next? Personalisation will be taken to the next level, with DNA-based nutrition used to develop highly individualised diet plans.

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⁴ Mintel 2019
About Reading Scientific Services Ltd

RSSL is firmly established as a trusted partner in the provision of product development, analytical, consultancy and training services to clients in the food and consumer goods sectors.

Our expertise is wide ranging and includes all aspects of food and drink product development, structural and product analysis, claim substantiation, ingredient stability, allergen management, authenticity, contaminant identification and more.

RSSL is UKAS accredited which ensures that our analytical services meet the needs of industry. We are trusted by industry to provide a solution with scientific excellence, outstanding customer service and professionalism.