



## 7 Key Food Trends for 2011

While most of us would likely love to eat a completely organic diet from 100 percent whole foods from the farmer's market all of the time, in this busy world, it's not always possible. So if you're planning on stepping foot inside a grocery store this year, it's good to know the food trends that are brewing, and how to make them work favorably for your family's health.

Here are some food trends forecast by Mintel, a consumer, product, and market research firm.

### **Quiet reductions.**

Many food manufacturers will further quietly reduce concentrations of salt in their products as more and more studies link excess salt to not only high blood pressure, but also to osteoporosis, dementia, cancer, and other ills. Reductions in sugar and high-fructose corn syrup may be more in-your-face, with food companies using the reductions as marketing claims on labels to draw customers in.

How to eat healthy and save money.

**Make the trend work for you:** Support marketers that are making healthy changes by voting with your dollars. Products with reduced salt content, for example, make it easier to follow the newest salt guidelines: 1,500 milligrams (mg) or less of sodium a day for adults. That's 800 mg less than the previous limit. Most of that sodium is coming in the form of processed foods like crackers, frozen meals, soups, and pasta sauces, in addition to fast-food sources, so check labels and buy accordingly.

According to the new *Prevention* book *The Salt Solution*, hidden sources of salt lurk in lunch meat and many breads. Among the junk-food culprits, salt and vinegar chips rank among the most salt-laden of chip snacks. The next time you're shopping, pay special attention to sodium, and to kill your salt cravings, try this salt detox program from *Prevention* magazine. It just might save your life!

### **Redefining natural.**

Mintel forecasts a "natural shakedown" in 2011. That's because a recent survey found that more and more customers are skeptical of the term natural on consumer products and food. More than half believe the term should be held to a legal definition. While there still aren't tough rules for calling something natural, they may be coming.

**Make the trend work for you:** Natural means nothing, so don't fall for the marketing claim. For instance, "natural" meat often comes from factory-farm settings, and from animals that were fed food grown with toxic pesticides and genetically engineered crops like corn and soy. If what you're looking for is food free of pesticides, GMOs, and irradiation, and grown without the use of human sewage sludge, which is often tainted with heavy metals and pharmaceuticals, choose certified organic. It's a legal term, and in food, the aforementioned contaminants are strictly banned.

6 Things food industry executives aren't telling you.

### **"Professionalisation" of the amateur.**

Mainstream brands are going to put more effort into selling "professional" products to everyday consumers, whether that's salon service-type do-it-at-home products, "professional-strength" cleaning products, or chef- or restaurant-endorsed food products.

**Make the trend work for you:** You'll likely see more packaged food products endorsed by chefs or famous restaurants, but don't let that deter you from looking at the nutritional breakdown or ingredients list. GMO ingredients are in nearly all nonorganic and non Non-GMO Project foods, whether they're endorsed by a chef or not—up to a whopping 90 percent of supermarket foods contain GMOs, which have been linked to potentially precancerous changes in the GI tract, infertility, allergies, and other ills.

The professionalisation of the amateur will tap into nonfood grocery store products, too. Don't confuse products advertised as "professional" as being safe. For instance, many salon services are highly toxic, and many cleaners in the supermarket aisles—even the "green" cleaners—contain harmful contaminants that can wreck your health. To find safer personal-care products, or to rate your favorites in terms of safety. To save loads of money with basic, safe cleaning ingredients that effectively kill germs, such as white vinegar.



*5 Ways food labels try to fool you.*

### **Sustainability in packaging.**

As consumers continue to be more critical of ingredients, they're also considering packaging. Look for more companies to shrink packaging size (but not shrink the contents) in 2011. Also along the lines of sustainability, expect to see more companies touting their water-saving actions.

**Make the trend work for you:** Here are some of the leaders in sustainable packaging: At Natural Products Expo East in Boston last October, Nature's Path Foods won an award for reducing packaging, and using FSC-certified (Forest Stewardship Certified) and 100 percent recycled materials for granola boxes. Stonyfield Farms also nabbed a packaging award for reducing the weight of and material used for its organic yogurt cups. Stone Hearth Pizza created a reusable container for to-go pizza customers, and Sagomonian Farms created recycled-plastic packaging manufactured with 50 percent onsite solar.

### **The return of retro.**

Over the last year, we have seen more big brands revitalize old products and old ad campaigns, tapping into the escalating trend of nostalgia. We anticipate more of these in 2011. Companies are returning to a time when life seemed somehow easier, whether that's the 1980s for consumers in their 20s, or the 1970s or 1960s for older consumers. You'll see this with brands using old formulations, old package designs, re-runs of advertising campaigns or new ads with a retro feel.

**Make the trend work for you:** Retro doesn't necessarily mean it's good for you. You may have already noticed that Pepsi's marketing its throwback soda, but even though sugar replaces high-fructose corn syrup in the retro formulation, it's still more sugar than the average American needs. Some leading obesity researchers believe too much sugar is the most significant obesegen. Be sure to eyeball calorie counts and ingredients closely in retro products, and if you truly want to go retro, make a big pot of healthy soup from scratch and eat the leftovers all week!

Here are a couple of other trends predicted by Phil Lempert, the Supermarket Guru.

### **Increased demand for humanely raised meat and dairy.**

Lempert says people are increasingly concerned about the welfare of animals. And while USDA organic standards ensure a lot—no pesticides, hormones, antibiotics, GMOs, or crops grown in human sewage waste, and more space requirements for animals—they may not be going far enough yet in the animal welfare department. Some large-scale organic eggs come from hens raised "free-range" inside large warehouses. While this is certainly a step up from a battery-cage system, where 90 percent of the eggs are from chickens raised in factory-farmed cages and given drugs, some consumers want animals raised primarily outside.

**Make the trend work for you:** According to the Humane Society of the United States, "Animal Welfare Approved" is the highest animal welfare standard of any third-party auditing system. The Certified Humane seal means animals are raised free-range, although they may be inside and they may be given drugs. Be sure to understand the animal welfare claim before buying into it. The sustainable-farming advocacy group The Cornucopia Institute also offers scorecards, ratings that can help you choose the type of organic eggs and dairy products that are best for your needs.

### **Multiple Certifications**

Lempert also says consumers will start seeing more side-by-side certifications, such as certified organic and Animal Welfare Approved, or certified organic and gluten free and/or the Non-GMO Project.

**Make the trend work for you:** This is just a matter of what's important to you, the consumer. "The Non-GMO Project" certification doesn't mean foods are grown free of pesticides, but they are tested to make sure they aren't contaminated with GMOs. "Organic" certification bans farmers using GMO seeds or chemical pesticides, among many other things. "Fair Trade" sees to it that workers are paid a fair wage for their work, and a "Bird Friendly Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center" seal means that coffee is 100 percent shade-grown and certified organic. The key is to look for strong third-party auditing systems, like the ones mentioned above. If you don't want to keep track of all of these different certifications, look for organic because it has many benefits that protect the consumer and the environment. The best-case scenario? Buy organic from a local farmer, so you can see the farm conditions for yourself. Visit [LocalHarvest.org](http://LocalHarvest.org) or [EatWild.com](http://EatWild.com) to find cleaner food.