

Our Nation's Fiery New Passion

In a market led by taste buds, a zesty new character is taking control of the reins. He calls himself hot and spicy, sweet and tangy, and sometimes “BAAM!” Until recently, he spent most of his time accompanying exciting dishes in India, China, Mexico, and other international “hot-spots.” But it was only a matter of time before he graced the U.S. with his presence.

It seemed for years we were content with our mild-mannered comfort foods. PB & Js, cheeseburgers, and French-fries were a common staple among our daily dining rituals. However, times are beginning to change and some of our more mild-tasting options are finding a comfortable place on the shelf to collect dust.

Consumers are now clamoring for the more intense flavors. You know, the ones with that kick that leaves you grabbing for more. Children are also growing up with more uniquely flavorful and multicultural options like sushi and Thai that, at times, seem to put old-fashion corny dogs to shame.

The Center for Culinary Development's polling company, Wharf Research, even inquired the input of children ages 10- to 13-years-old on the subject. They asked 400 children from all over the U.S. what their favorite foods were and found some remarkable results: Chinese food topped the list, followed by Mexican, Japanese, Italian, and finally, American in a solid fifth place.

Some of the old hot dog and hamburger classics will most likely never be replaced, but rather “improved” to a spicy or jalapeno-covered rendition, making it clear that bold, hot foods are easily finding their niche in the U.S. food sales market.

Why the sudden change in appetite? Many researchers attribute the change to Generation X – those 30 to 45 year olds – who have spent the last 20 or 30 years watching the world go by and are now ready to taste it. This might explain the presence of foreign flavors like cumin, habanero, and curry that chefs around the nation are beginning to incorporate to zest-up their dishes.

Other experts attribute the increase of foreign flavors to the rise in population of foreign cultures in the U.S. According to the most recent census data, the number of Hispanics living in the U.S. has increased by 15.1 million over the past 10 years and the Asian and Pacific Islander community has grown by 3.2 million. As these other cultures move in, they begin to share their cultural tastes, and we like it.

One of Mintel International's food analysts, Maria Caranfa, firmly believes that this rising trend is here to stay, and judging by America's overwhelming response, it's hard to disagree.

For more information on our nation's new fiery passion, contact the FoodWise Group at www.foodwisegroup.com.

Sources include: San Francisco Chronicle