



Defining modern food culture

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“Food culture is changing very quickly today—it’s speeding up—and I think there’s a tension there between those of us in the food industry who think about the old traditional culture and what is today’s modern food culture,” said Laurie Demeritt, CEO of The Hartman Group, a food consulting firm.

Speaking at the opening keynote of the [reThink Food](#) conference on November 4, Demeritt laid the groundwork for a conference that examined the intersection of technology, behavior, design, and food in order to offer solutions for rethinking the future of food amidst radically changing food markets around the globe. As Demeritt explained, there are many factors which have shifted the food culture away from what it was just two generations ago to what it is today. Those factors include:

1. **Societal roles have changed immensely.** Two generations ago, it was typically the female head of the household who was responsible for all of the cooking and shopping. Today, the roles and responsibilities have changed and we are actually doing less cooking inside the home.
2. Traditional food culture was about **servicing basic needs** and providing safe and consistent food. “Things were good that came off a production line because it meant it was safe,” said Demeritt. “And what we have done in two generations is totally flip that on its head. The last thing most consumers want is something that looks like it was produced and manipulated.” Cooking used to be a chore but today it’s a choice.
3. Today, **consumers get to be engaged** in food. In the past, it used to be only the cooks who were engaged. Today, consumers want to be involved in the design process and they can decide how involved and engaged they want to be with their food.

Demeritt went on to explain that the modern household looks very different from what it used to look like. Today, only 28% of households have kids and the same percentage are actually single-person households. In addition, we eat alone more often. In fact, 47% of eating occasions are alone.

Today's consumers also shop differently. We are no longer one-stop shopping; 71% of consumers are going to five or more channels monthly for food. This includes places like big box retailers, dollar stores, convenience stores, and specialty stores. Additionally, 63% of food choices made today are decided within an hour of consumption.

Concluding her presentation, Demeritt stressed that today's consumers are more food literate than ever before and therefore have higher expectations of food companies. "They want information available, accessible, transparent, and customized for them," she said. "So we have to figure out what that means and get it to them in the right way."



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