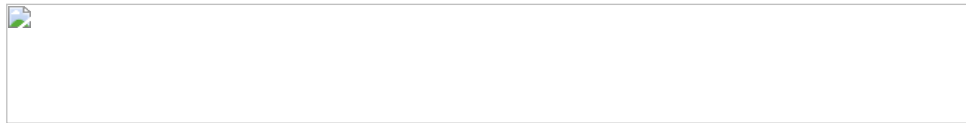


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SPECIAL REPORT: Foodservice (/Pricing-Insights/Marketing-Profiles/Foodservice)

Foodservice takes aim at millennials

By Tom Burfield (/users/tomburfield) July 11, 2016 | 10:44 am EDT

Millennials may be the ideal foodservice customer.

Not only have they become the largest age demographic, they tend to dine out more than other generations, said Helen Lundell, a consultant at The Hartman Group, Bellevue, Wash.

"They're more about real food made by real people who understand who they are and what they're trying to achieve," she said.

A 2016 Hartman Group report titled Food Ways of the Younger Generations indicates that millennials, which Harman identifies as those age 19-37, are less tied to traditional ways of eating, she says.

"They're more flexible and individualistic in how they eat."

Millennials also are more informed about the food they eat than members of past generations, said Brent Scattini, vice president of sales and marketing for Gold Coast Packing Inc., Santa Maria, Calif.

"The total approach of marketing to the next group of consumers is a totally different mindset," he said. "They're smart, and we have to be smart to provide them with the types of products they want."

Millennials have been affected by efforts to promote healthful eating habits, he said.

"All the things we've done as an industry for the last couple of decades or longer to try to encourage healthy eating habits are starting to come to fruition," Scattini said.

Millennials tend to be more creative with food, said Mike O'Leary, vice president, sales and marketing for the fresh-cut division of Boskovich Farms Inc., Oxnard, Calif.

"They are engaged in healthy alternatives and wellness programs," he said, "and they are expecting to find that 'something new' during their dining experience."

Boskovich Farms is challenged to provide those offerings, he said.

"As a grower-processor of vegetable ingredients, we see tremendous opportunities for providing new offerings to foodservice."

By taking to their smartphones and social media platforms, millennials can drive food trends "at the speed of light," said Kori Tuggle, vice president of marketing for Church Bros. Farms, Salinas, Calif.

And they can help promote a chef, a restaurant or a new flavor food product — "good or bad."

Millennials also want food "instantly," she said, and they want information like where it came from, who grew it and how many calories it has.

"As fast as millennials demand their food, they also want to feel good about the story behind what they are ordering," she said.

They want sustainable, local and no waste, for example.

Scattini said it's actually easier to promote products and communicate with millennials than other demographics because of social media.

"You can get to consumers fairly easily now," he said, whereas reaching end users 20 years was harder for produce companies.

There's also a wealth of data available today about how they buy, what they like, what they are searching for and what recipes and flavor trends they want, Scattini said.

Consumer impact on restaurants isn't limited to millennials, said Diane Dumpster, organic specialist, for Seattle-based Charlie's Produce.

Interest in food trends dates back to the 1970s and 1980s, she said, and exists among all generations.

"Now, the baby boomers are concerned about their health because they're ready to retire, and they realize that smoking and (similar bad habits) don't work."

As smart as they may be, Jeff Olsen, president of The Chuck Olsen Co. Inc., Visalia, Calif., said some millennials may have a misconception about today's conventional food offerings, which they may perceive as "being saturated with all of these terrible chemicals."

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"I think (millennials) have a vision in their heads that the way people farm is irresponsible, which is not the case at all," he said.

About the Author:

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Tom Burfield has been Western correspondent for The Packer for more than 20 years, and he also writes for Produce Retailer magazine and has contributed to several other Farm Journal Media publications.
