

?Gluten-free?, ?freshly made? and ?natural hot dogs? are top trends at US food show



Peter Backman: "We are seeing two extremes in product innovation"

Peach-flavoured milk, butter with maple syrup, gluten-free dishes, ginger blossom-flavoured drinks, and the chilli-based flavouring sriracha were just some of the new foods on taste for the first time at this year's National Restaurant Association (NRA) show in Chicago.

The NRA, one of the world's biggest food and drink trade shows, is traditionally the launch-pad for weird and wonderful food products, ingredients and flavours many of which eventually make their way to the UK. Peter Backman, managing director of foodservice consultancy Horizons, visited the show and found the overriding trend this year concerned promoting the 'freshness' of foods - whether made from fresh ingredients or freshly prepared - as well as dishes made 'personally' for the customer.

'There is a new preoccupation with serving food and drinks made specifically for each individual customer - just the way bacon they want it. In many ways this is an extension of Starbucks writing your name on a coffee cup. If restaurants can adapt dishes and drinks to incorporate particular requests, then it makes the customer feel as if they've had a personal service,' added Backman.

The annual NRA show, attended by 70,000 people and 2,000 suppliers, can be an indicator of the trends and products the UK is likely to see down the line.

Fresh milk flavours such as orange and vanilla cream cloud, cookies 'n' cream and purrfect peach, were on show for the first time, designed to arrest declining milk sales. The ever-popular cookie also received an indulgent makeover with new varieties ranging from chocolate pretzel crunch with peanuts to rocky road - a calorie-rich chocolate medley of 'all-natural' white and semi-sweet chocolate chips and toffee.

'Healthy', 'locally sourced', 'containing no additives' and 'natural' were also descriptions very much in evidence - 'natural hot dogs with celery juice' being one example! The number of gluten-free foods is also on the up, with the likes of gluten-free peanut butter, teriyaki sauce and gluten-free hot dogs.

'Healthy foods for kids were also on-show, along with new iced tea flavours, coconut water and tropical flavoured teas and desserts,' said Backman.

Winners of the NRA's Food & Beverage Innovations Awards included: the Bonfire Wine Pouch, which is said to keep wine fresh for four weeks and reduces packaging and waste; Deya's gluten free flour which uses dried egg whites as a key ingredient; Schmacon, a

low-fat, low-sodium alternative to bacon made with smoked and cured beef slices; and Sweety Drop Peppers, a sweet-flavoured pepper than can be added to salads, pizzas or pasta. Another award winner was Gardein Vegan Fishless Fillets ? said to deliver the taste of fish, but with no cholesterol or trans fats.

?There seems to be two extremes in product innovation ? either indulgent, calorie-laden treats or healthy products, ?free from' various ingredients and freshly prepared. We seem destined to become a nation of extremes in our eating habits,? added Backman.

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Editor's Note

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