What's Cooking

Study: Children Eat Most Nutritious Meals at School

Many of the meals consumed by Americans are low in nutritional value, reports a study published in April in *JAMA Network Open*, with the study author claiming, "Schools are now the single healthiest place where Americans are eating."

Using data from 2003 to 2018, the study reviewed the nutritional quality of meals from restaurants, grocery stores, worksites and other locations, evaluating them against the American Heart Association's Heathy Diet Score and USDA's Healthy Eating Index 2015. During the study period, overall scores for meals served in K-12 schools increased by more than 8%, while the estimated proportion of children consuming poor diet quality school meals decreased by more than half. The study notes that the significant improvement in nutritional quality of school meals was seen after implementation of the provisions in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010.

"This finding is particularly timely, given widespread school closures over the last year from COVID-19," study co-author Dariush Mozaffarian, dean of the Gerald J. and Dorothy R. Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy at Tufts University in Medford, Mass., said in a press release. "Our results suggest substantial nutritional harms for the millions of kids who have *not* been consistently receiving meals at school and who must rely on other sources." **Read More: "Trends in Food Sources and Diet Quality Among U.S. Children and Adults, 2003-2018," *JAMA Network Open, www.tinyurl.com/schoolmealquality-SNmag***

McCormick Forecasts Flavor

AMERICANS ARE STILL ALL IN ON THE PLANT-BASED FOODS TREND, according to McCormick's *Flavor Forecast, 21st Edition*. The forecasting team took a look at how Americans are currently cooking, flavoring dishes and making meal choices, uncovering four notable themes:

- **Plants Pushing Boundaries.** Plant-forward cuisine is now mainstream, with consumers across many demographics embracing the vibrant colors and hearty textures of "flora-focused eating." Trending ingredients include trumpet mushrooms, edible flower buds and ube (purple yam).
- **Humble Nosh.** Inspired by the Yiddish word, *nashn*, meaning to nibble on, this trend reflects the desire for comfort and familiarity—foods and flavors that deliver "warm fuzzies." Within that space are global influences to elevate traditional comfort foods; these include chaat masala (an Indian spice blend), pandan kaya (Malaysian jam) and crisped chiles.
- **Underwater, Under Discovered.** This trend takes flavors from the coasts, diving into less-explored ingredients such as seaweeds and algae. Flavor potential is found in spirulina (blue-green algae) and sea grapes (soft green algae).
- **Physiological Eating.** Representing the re-emergence of mindfulness and intention, this trend focuses on the Ayurvedic practice of using six tastes—sweet, sour, salty, bitter, astringent and pungent—to achieve balance. Key flavors include coriander, lemon, sea salt, cumin, turmeric and ginger.

"Food continues to be a way to bring people together, even virtually," said Kevan Vetter, Executive Chef and Director of Culinary Development for McCormick, in a press release. "Despite global travel restrictions, lockdowns and logging in from vastly different time zones, it was moving to see everyone committed to our mission to study emerging trends and identify the flavors that will undoubtedly spark inspiration for both the home cook and professional chef for years to come." **Read More: *Flavor Forecast 21st Edition*, McCormick, *www.flavorforecast.com***