



# What We Foresee for 2023

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Canada's foodservice industry saw substantial sales gains over the past year as it emerged from the height of the brutal pandemic. Dining rooms reopened and consumers eagerly embraced the opportunity to return to social occasions. But restaurants are now facing new burdens that will carry over into the coming year, including steep inflation and rising interest rates, supply chain disruptions and labour shortages. These challenges, coupled with an end to government aid, will cause the foodservice industry's pace of growth to slow.

What leading trends are on the horizon for 2023? Read on to see what is forecasted to shape our industry.

## Doubling Down on Foodservice Fundamentals

Rising prices will tighten consumers' wallets and compel them to make more conscientious decisions about where, what and how much to purchase from foodservice. But their desire for social restaurant occasions is higher today than before the pandemic. So, how can operators encourage visitation in next year's challenging environment? They should reinvest in the dining experience, have a strong brand positioning, make every foodservice occasion feel special and overdeliver on value. Appealing to younger generations, who most frequent

restaurants, will be key, and they are placing greater importance on basic principles such as quality food and service. On the culinary front, guests will gravitate toward focused menus with specialty items that can't be easily replicated at home. For service, operators will need to concentrate on hiring dedicated staff and training them to properly re-engage with guests for both on- and off-premise occasions.



**Desire for social restaurant occasions is higher today than before the pandemic**

## Preservation Preparations Find Momentum

Food preservation methods—pickling, fermenting, dehydrating and freeze-drying—will increasingly pop up on menus. These preps extend the shelf life of various ingredients—a growing necessity given supply chain challenges—and lend interesting,



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often nontraditional, textures and flavours to dishes or drinks. In 2023, expect operators to offer up unusually pickled items outside of the typical veggies, including proteins and seeds. Additionally, they'll turn to globally inspired ingredients, such as Indian pickled condiments amba and achar, and Indonesian fermented kasundi sauce, to add new flavour complexity to menus. Look for fermented callouts in menu descriptions and fermented ingredients in drinks, such as Brazilian cachaca (a fermented sugarcane spirit) or Japanese amazake (a fermented rice drink). Lastly, dehydrating proteins, including beef or chicken into

jerky, and freeze-drying fare such as honey will provide intriguing textures to and extend the use of standard ingredients.

## Tech Takes a Turn

Both operators and guests are re-evaluating the technologies that were crucial for restaurants at the height of the pandemic. As consumers' comfort levels at restaurants ease, we'll see a revival of traditional handheld menus that don't require the same scrolling and squinting as contactless QR code ones. And given the surge of guests who now rely on mobile ordering, often causing longer wait times than anticipated, some consumers may turn back to in-store ordering and dine-in. But not all technology will take a step back. Loyalty programs that drive frequency using rewards will become a bigger necessity in the coming year, especially to spark engagement with younger cohorts who will tighten their purse strings. Priority investments in the back of house will include cooking equipment that delivers consistent speed of service and quality of preparation, digital menu boards for kitchen staff and automated inventory management software to reduce food waste.

## South of the (Mexican) Border

Canadian operators are looking further south beyond the U.S. and Mexico for inspiration, particularly Central America and South American Andean states. These regional cuisines appeal to consumers eager for new and unique global options, while still providing elements of familiarity and comfort. Operators will turn to Salvadoran, Dominican and Honduran dishes (such as Honduran-style baleadas tacos) and ingredients (such as Dominican garlic-based wasakaka sauce and Salvadoran cabbage relish curtido) to appeal to adventure-seekers. And Andean dishes and ingredients, including Peruvian aji amarillo and rocoto peppers as well as Bolivian empanada-like saltenas, will add even more excitement to menus.

## Retro Health Cues Make a Resurgence

While consumer demand for healthy fare will remain, interest in the types of better-for-you offerings on menus will take a more nostalgic turn. Expect functional ingredients that spiked during the pandemic—



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such as immunity-boosting turmeric, ginger and citrus, as well as specific vitamin callouts—to be less of a driver of foodservice visits for consumers. Instead, we'll see attention return to traditional health cues that promote quality, such as “real” and “natural,” as consumers look to maximize their restaurant experiences. Also, the reawakening of social encounters after years of stress eating and home confinement will lead to the revival of classic dietary descriptors such as “free,” “reduced,” “lower” and “without,” as well as high-protein diet terms including keto and paleo.

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