



McCain Foodservice  
***2018 Casual  
Dining Report***





# McCain Foodservice *2018 Casual Dining Report*

**Over the last decade, casual dining has gained a rightful reputation as a haven for the foodservice industry's innovators and entrepreneurs.**

With a willingness to think creatively, try out new things, and offer unique experiences, the sector has undeniably been home to some of the most exciting cooking of recent years.

Whether in a new independent bringing new trends to the table, or an established chain listening and adapting, casual dining's success has been set by chefs, operators, and professionals unwaveringly marching to the beat of their own drum.

From pubs, to restaurants, to bars, at McCain we've supported professionals across the casual dining industry for years. In an increasingly competitive sector, we understand how important it is for operators to have an open mind, carry out research on new trends, and ultimately listen to what consumers want.

That's why with our 2018 casual dining report, we've broken down six of the hottest consumer trends impacting the sector right now.

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# Creating Experiences

More and more, it seems that consumers aren't simply happy with the concept of a traditional, sit down meal at a restaurant. Shifts in spending patterns indicate that consumers are increasingly gravitating towards outlets and businesses that offer experiences, whilst handing over less money to traditional retail and foodservice outlets.<sup>1</sup>

As the economy slows down, casual dining locations need to be savvy in order to drive new footfall. Although serving consistently great food at affordable prices will be enough to hold on to existing customers, in an increasingly competitive industry, creating tangible experiences could be the way to stand out.

In the UK, various types of eatery are already embracing this more creative casual dining approach,

and are thriving while doing so. One success story of experiential eating is Korean BBQ, with the traditional "DIY" nature of this cuisine offering a clear differentiator to consumers<sup>2</sup>. In traditional Korean BBQ and Bulgogi restaurants, tables are fitted with in-built grills – or otherwise portable stoves – as operators allow customers to cook their meats themselves, grilling their food to their own liking and creating their own, memorable experiences in the process.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thecaterer.com/articles/508112/more-than-just-a-meal-the-rise-of-experiential-hospitality>  
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.abouttimemagazine.co.uk/food/top-7-korean-bbq-restaurants-in-london/>





### **Bulgogi**

Thin strips of beef marinated in soy – a Korean BBQ staple

Although offering a different kind of experience, the success of street food and pop up restaurants is similarly indebted to this desire for outlets that go beyond just serving food.

With the limited time nature and frequent changes within much of street food culture creating a "blink

and you'll miss it" hype, eating out is now more of a personalised, exclusive experience than ever. This exclusivity hype is something we explored at the launch of our McCain Staycrisp products earlier this year, teaming up with street food traders to create bespoke seasoned fries only available to try within a limited time frame.



## Lighter Indulgence

The continuing trend of healthy eating has become a deciding factor in consumers' choices when visiting restaurants, with growing numbers of consumers seeking out options with a greater focus on health benefit in general.

In fact, around 50% of diners say they consider whether a healthy option will be available when choosing where to dine out.

However, the picture is more complex than it might seem, for while many consumers don't necessarily want to make choices they view as "unhealthy" when dining out, they're not heading to restaurants simply to calorie count or moderate either. Instead, customers just want food that tastes as good as it is good for them. a desire that casual dining operators are increasingly looking to meet.

Now, many casual dining operators are increasingly looking to meet the idea of "healthy indulgence" on menus, whether that means offering meals that are lower in carbohydrates, fats, salts, sugars or even animal products.

**50%**  
**of diners**  
look for healthy  
options when  
eating out<sup>3</sup>

However, operators need to walk the fine line between letting consumers know that a menu item is a lighter option, whilst not explicitly marketing the food as "healthy", as doing so is likely to reduce the illusion of indulgence for consumers. An easy way to do this is to offer vegetarian or vegan versions of meat dishes – which are often viewed as lighter by consumers – simply replacing meat in burgers or wraps with items like falafel, halloumi, or jackfruit.

Meanwhile, offer reduced portion sizes for more indulgent menu items or desserts, or offer sweet potato fries for items usually accompanied by regular fries, so that customers looking for a compromise can still order. After all, at the heart of healthy indulgence is the desire for choice, and the need for casual dining operators to listen and adapt to the needs of consumers.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thecaterer.com/articles/522831/diners-increasingly-taking-healthy-options-into-consideration-when-selecting-venues>





# Bringing it Home

When consumers decide that they'd prefer to eat at home, rather than dine out, that doesn't mean they're content with doing the cooking themselves. In fact, the truth is increasingly far from it.

The consumer demand for takeaway options has seen huge growth in recent years, with the growth of takeaway intrinsically connected to changes in the technology available to both restaurants and consumers. Over the past 10 years, the UK's annual spending on takeaway has grown to £9.9 billion, a 34% growth from 2009. Similarly, with UK households spending 25% more per month on takeaway than they were 10 years ago, it's safe to say that delivery is big business. To cater for the burgeoning out of home market, some companies are now even tailoring products specifically designed to keep heat and travel well, with our McCain Staycrisp fries just one example.

Casual dining has arguably been both an instigator and beneficiary of the takeaway boom, with more and more outlets looking to make their menus accessible

to both in house and at home diners. Adopting this kind of model can potentially benefit restaurants in two ways, giving greater accessibility to already familiar diners, whilst also increasing exposure amongst consumers who may otherwise have been unlikely to visit in person.

In theory, by adopting delivery quieter establishments might be able to increase their covers on an otherwise quiet night, while busier restaurants could maximise profits and income. However, delivery may only be an option to those operators who have sufficient staffing and resources on hand; for already busy restaurants, spending time cooking up extra food for delivery may not be feasible. A compromise is offering a reduced, simpler menu for delivery, containing menu items that are both easier for chefs to prepare and that travel well.

**£9.9 Billion**  
UK's annual  
spending on  
takeaway<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.justeatplc.com/files/3/2215/0045/3682/TAKEAWAY\\_ECONOMY\\_REPORT\\_2017.pdf](https://www.justeatplc.com/files/3/2215/0045/3682/TAKEAWAY_ECONOMY_REPORT_2017.pdf)





**7%**  
of adults in the  
UK are vegan<sup>6</sup>

# The Vegan Revolution

Over the past few years Veganism has grown from a relatively fringe movement into a fully-fledged mainstream concern.

Since 2016 the number of adults going vegan has increased by over 500%, with an estimated 3.5 million adults in the UK now choosing to avoid eating meat, fish, and animal by-products altogether. The number of so called “flexible vegans” has grown too, with around 20% of under 35s at some point experimenting with a fully Vegan diet.<sup>5</sup>

It’s only natural that Veganism’s rise has led to a far wider availability of purely plant-based foods, with a wide variety of supermarkets, independents and high street outlets now offering vegan options to consumers.<sup>7</sup> It’s estimated that around 52% of restaurants offer at least one vegan option, with this number set to grow over the coming years.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/apr/01/vegans-are-coming-millennials-health-climate-change-animal-welfare>

<sup>6</sup> <https://metro.co.uk/2018/04/04/3-5-million-brits-7-brits-now-say-vegan-7439337/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.vegansociety.com/whats-new/news/vegan-lifestyle-winning-hearts-and-minds-across-britain-survey-shows>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.thecaterer.com/articles/526288/the-caterers-40-trends-food>



**52%**  
of UK  
restaurants offer  
Vegan options



## Meet the substitutes

Whilst once upon a time Vegan diets may have been little understood or even unfairly maligned, the wider spread of the lifestyle has shown that plant-based diets can be vibrant, varied, and innovative. Nothing illustrates this as well as the rise of so called vegan “junk food”, with outlets around the country turning out plant-based versions of favourites like burgers, tacos, fried chicken and even fish and chips.<sup>9</sup>

Far from being junk, this new creative wave of cuisine has revitalised the concept of what constitutes a vegan meal, and has arguably helped to raise awareness of veganism in the wider public. After all, whilst plant centric chefs are of course aiming to please vegan, veggie and “flexitarian” consumers, there’s a wider appeal too, with vegan “junk” food set to convince many die hard carnivores that you don’t necessarily need meat to have a good time.

**Jackfruit** The mild and fleshy texture of jackfruit makes it a perfect replacement for meat - try cooked down with BBQ sauce and served with sweet potato fries to make “pulled pork”.

**Seitan** Made from wheat gluten, seitan is highly adaptable and can be used in curries, stir fries, and even to create “chicken” wings.

**Tempeh** Made from soybeans, tempeh is a staple in south east Asia and is easily adaptable. Try breaking into small pieces and cooking into a chilli, then using to top our Staycrisp fries.

**Aquafaba** Created from the water used to cook chickpeas, aquafaba’s binding properties make it ideal for creating both sauces and cakes. Try using to make vegan mayonnaise, served on top of bean burgers or alongside crispy fries

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.veganfoodandliving.com/a-london-fish-n-chip-shop-is-now-offering-a-vegan-menu/>





## Community spirit

The success of casual dining has always been partly driven by a consumer desire for informality, choice and affordability, and these three tenets are perhaps the foundations behind one of the sectors most recent and visible success stories.

Offering a mix of permanent and regularly changing local traders within renovated and restored buildings, food halls aim to give consumers both choice and familiarity in a setting designed to inspire a sense of community.

Placing an emphasis on the communal aspect of both cooking and eating, food halls have witnessed great success over the past couple of years, with the UK's largest – Market Hall Fulham<sup>10</sup> – opening in London back in March 2018, and a further 16 halls set to open in the city over the next few years.<sup>11</sup>

Although it may be easy to assume that food markets are purely a London concern, that's far from the case, with York's new SPARK shipping container complex alongside Manchester stalwart Altricham Market showing that the concept has legs around the country. Nor are food halls just a UK phenomenon, with Lisbon's Time Out Market now a veritable

tourist attraction, drawing in crowds with its ethos of serving both fine dining in a casual environment alongside street food that "should have a Michelin star".<sup>12</sup>

The open and spacious set up of these new food markets aims to appeal to a truly cross generational audience, whether that means families looking for food options that please everyone, or a younger crowd wanting to try out the latest trends and experiences.

Customers can feel free to eat at their own pace, spending a day lingering, chatting with friends and exploring new traders, or just popping in for a quick bite from a favourite whilst on a lunch break. Plus, with many halls offering proper plates, crockery, and even table service, they're equally as appealing to consumers wanting a casual bite as to those looking for a slightly more formal dining experience.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.justopenedlondon.com/market-hall-fulham-london/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bighospitality.co.uk/Article/2018/05/15/What-can-the-new-wave-of-food-halls-learn-from-one-of-the-concept-s-pioneers>

<sup>12</sup> <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/portugal/articles/an-insiders-guide-to-mercado-de-ribeiras-time-out-market/>





**64%**  
Increase in UK  
breweries between  
2012 - 2018<sup>14</sup>

## Craft beer meets craft food

Over the past decade the number of breweries in the UK has almost doubled, rising to over 2000 for the first time since the 1930's last year.<sup>13</sup>

This rapid expansion is a result of the UK's craft beer boom, with a new wave of brewers catering to a more discerning, savvy breed of beer drinker. Growing outwards from independent bars to large chains and supermarkets, the craft beer revolution is now a firmly planted in the mainstream, with a wider number of consumers than ever taking pride in knowing their stout from their saison.

Now, craft beer is taking strides from bars and pubs into the world of casual dining. As consumers choose to "drink less, but better" when eating out, restaurants are increasingly moving to offer bespoke and varied beer lists, as a counterpoint to the more traditional wine list.

For a younger consumers looking for restaurants that offer something a little different, this ticks multiple boxes, offering a more affordable and informal option

to a bottle of wine whilst also containing a hard to underestimate novelty factor. However, if you're considering doing the same, you'll need to be careful to make sure that there's substance behind the novelty.

Just as a rich Bordeaux may drown out the flavours of a delicate fish dish, a strong London porter may do the same, so it's important that operators offer some guidance to consumers if creating a beer list. Providing written tasting notes for each beer is a good idea, as is giving suggested beer pairing for certain menu items, as we showed with our recent HOP beer and food pairing guide. This doesn't necessarily need to mean tipping your menu into overly format territory, as at its core beer pairing should be fun and informal, giving customers an experience they may not have necessarily considered before.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.mccainfoodservice.co.uk/craft-beer>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/oct/23/craft-beer-boom-pushes-number-of-uk-breweries-past-2000>





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