



Consumer Trends: 2012 Food Predictions

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LEESBURG, Va. (The National Conference Center) — The National Conference, located in Leesburg, Virginia is one of the largest and most comprehensive conference training centers in the nation. It has more than 900 rooms and boasts the largest ballroom in Northern Virginia. NCC also has a highly skilled, award-winning executive chef who is often tasked with producing more than 3,000 meals a day.

As a talented chef, with several Culinary Institute of America certifications and a repertoire for cooking great food and including locally fresh, locally grown ingredients, Mason is in tune with customer demands.

For 2012, he says, “Goodbye Thai food and burgers. Those crazes have come and gone.” Last year, his predictions were like hitting the bull’s-eye in a game of darts. Mason’s [2011 Food Predictions](#) included more quasi-meal places like Chipotle would appear on the map and chefs would prepare food with less seasonings, sticking to the basics – salt, pepper and garlic. Executive Chef Craig Mason’s 2012 food predictions are a list of commodities and concepts he views as popular in the next year:

- **Farm-to-table and more of it** – Mason predicts a continuation of the current farm-to-table movement. He says local will begin to make strides towards becoming “the normal,” and almost expected. He doesn’t necessarily believe organic will be the standard in consumers’ food purchasing but foresees shopping at farmers markets to grow in popularity.
- **Flavored Vinegars** – “We’ll see it more in restaurants first,” Mason explains, “Weird flavored vinegars, such as pomegranate vinegars, house-made vegetables and fruit pickles will be among those to start the movement.” Watch out for the follow up in grocery stores.
- **More heirloom food** – You’ll begin to see fruits and vegetables that aren’t common or have disappeared from the produce section. Among those uncommon fruits and vegetables, Mason says will be honey crisp apples.
- **All about value!** – People spending money on dining out will be looking for the best experience with their money. He states, “People want to go out and be seen. The intrinsic need to go and be seen is human nature, but people will be looking for more value for their money in terms of service experience.” One trend the Executive Chef foresees, more restaurants incorporating *amuse bouche*, which Mason describes as little “snacks” to whet the appetite and awaken your taste-buds. Unique, up-scale establishments typically serve these single, bite-sized hors d’oeuvres; but in 2012, you may see them in places offering more value and experience for your money.
- **Imported wines** – In 2011, Mason predicted an emphasis on local wine, but in 2012 Mason says there’s going to a high demand for higher-quality, value-priced wines from

places like Spain and South America. He also believes the market should anticipate a high demand for natural wines that entailed minimalistic farming, meaning the farmers spray when they have to spray, rather than spraying every day.

- **The explosion of special diets** – Mason says there's already a confusion of preference versus dietary restrictions. In 2012, consumers will be even more caught-up in dairy-free, gluten-free, soy-free, rice-free menu options as a personal preference, rather than a dietary restriction.
- **A great whole-grain explosion** - Not only will 2012 see the trend in special diets but Mason predicts diners will begin to see different grain varieties on the menu. Quinoa will be a staple on many menus, barley will begin to replace rice and whole-wheat pizza will be a new menu addition for pizza-lovers.
- **More atmosphere** – The Chef who enjoys grilling outdoors, predicts (and probably has secret wishes) that new restaurants will cater to people who enjoy a fun atmosphere. Mason says, "2012 will be the year of leaving behind the stuffy restaurants and sitting outside in a fun atmosphere, a place where people can have great food in jeans." He also says beer gardens will become more popular.
- **Small chocolate treats** – Dessert-lovers will see a resurgence of chocolate in mainstream dining. Tiny desserts such as chocolate truffles on a smaller dish will become the new trend.

The National Conference Center (NCC), located in Northern Virginia 12 miles from Dulles International Airport and 35 miles from Washington, D.C., is one of the largest and most comprehensive conference centers in the nation. With 917 guest rooms and over 250,000 square feet of meeting space, NCC has become a hub for productive meetings and is on the GSA schedule. NCC is also home to West Belmont Place, Northern Virginia's largest ballroom with 16,500 square feet for holding an elegant wedding or accommodating a large trade show or special event. For information call 800-640-2684 or visit www.conferencecenter.com, or www.westbelmontplace.com.

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