



Give Me Flavour

Forget ordinary: consumers want complex, rich flavours

I remember the first time I went to a Thai restaurant. I also remember the first time I tried making Pad Thai at home. And the second and the third attempts. I still can't say I have it quite right.

What's interesting is that trying new ethnic restaurants is still one of the main ways Canadians get their first taste of new dishes and flavours, in addition to word of mouth from friends or neighbours.

Restaurants, in fact, are where most flavours probably get their start. Petar Dukic, marketing manager – flavour division at Mississauga, Ont.-based McCormick Canada, says ethnic restaurants are one of the most significant factors influencing flavour trends. “[Food processing] follows closely behind foodservice,” he says. “It might take a longer time, but it copies what is happening in restaurants.”

And restaurants tend to mirror what's happening in the population. As immigration changes the landscape in Canada, new restaurants crop up to serve those markets. (According to predictions from a Statistics Canada report that came out earlier this year, one out of every five people in Canada could be a member of a visible minority by 2017. And roughly one-half of all visible minorities will likely belong to two groups: South Asian or Chinese.)

So what is happening out there in the world of flavours? Or better yet, what's hot right now? “Everything,” says Doris Valade, president of Burlington, Ont.-based Malabar Super Spice Co. Ltd. “The general consumer now is so much more aware of ethnic flavours that we're seeing requests for you name it, they're asking for it – and it's selling.”

Among some of the popular flavours, says Valade: savory (“we're getting requests for fuller flavours rather than just



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heat”), Thai flavours and smoked heat. She adds that people are asking for such things as garam masala and curry powders – whose composition will differ depending where they're derived from. In general citrus flavours are also doing well. In fact, some of the flavours Malabar launched in the last two years include citrus: Orange Ginger and Maple, Lemon Dill, Chili Lime.

Another trend she's noticed is that more and more processors want to put a flavour on whatever they're making. Recently Malabar had a request from a Canadian producer to come up with 24 different flavours for french fries.

Dukic says what's hot right now includes: Mediterranean-type flavours, including North African, and hot and spicy. Thai, Malaysian and Asian influences are also strong. Consumers are also becoming more specific in their tastes. For

instance, it isn't just Italian they're looking for, but Sicilian or Tuscan. Or it isn't just Indian, but Punjabi or Goan.

It's easy to see why consumers have become so much more complex in their tastes. We can get ordinary “10 ways to Sunday in just about every category known to man,” says Jake McCall, CEO of Toronto-based SecondSight Innovation. Even Valade says Malabar's standard beef marinade and some of the basic barbecue flavours don't sell as much. But add a bit of punch to barbecue, spicy or chipotle, and it changes everything.

McCall suspects the big reason why consumers want more complex flavours is also because they can get them. “[Consumers are] bored, they're jaded and technology can deliver it...greater flavour and textural complexity are critically important because they deliver more of an experience.”

deanna.rosolen@food.rogers.com