



Getting 'real' on the menu

Chefs, operators shun artificial ingredients when developing menus.

As Americans voice growing concerns about the foods that appear on their plates, foodservice operators are finding that what's been removed from a dish can be as important to their customers as what goes into it.

In an effort to address consumers' reservations about "artificial" ingredients, an increasing number of restaurateurs are providing patrons with information that helps them make more educated purchasing decisions when ordering snacks, appetizers, main dishes and desserts.

But the clean food movement can also require some adjustments on the part of the operator, experts say. "Chefs are now tasked to find and partner with suppliers that offer these ingredients, which is difficult," says Arlene Spiegel of Arlene Spiegel & Associates, a restaurant consultancy in New York.

Nevertheless, an increasing number of suppliers are working to make clean food alternatives available to operators while still maintaining a high level of comfort, taste and quality.

"Desserts provide one of the greatest opportunities to showcase a restaurant's commitment to clean and local ingredients, especially in the fruit, ice cream and chocolate categories," Spiegel says. "There is a resurgence of cobblers, crumbles, tarts, turnovers and fruit pies on even the most highbrow menus."

"These old-fashioned favorites provide opportunities to share the name of the indigenous ingredients in their products, i.e. the name of the apple orchard from Washington State or the cranberry bog from Wisconsin. Guests really enjoy the local and seasonal connection." ■