

Health Concerns, Convenience Top Priorities For Shoppers, Dinners

PITTSBURGH (Allegheny Co.)— With numerous responsibilities tugging them in different directions, American consumers want to simplify mealtime either by buying prepared foods or dining out. But the food should not only be convenient, it has to be healthy, too.

"Consumers are expecting restaurants and supermarkets to do the menu planning for them and to provide balanced, healthy meals," said Dee Coutelle of Noble & Associates, a firm specializing in food marketing, advertising and product development. "They are tired of preparing the same old thing just because it's easy. They are looking for more balance and moderation in their diets."

DIVERSITY CAN BE HEALTHFUL

As a result, what Coutelle projects we will be seeing more of in the restaurants are ethnic, exotic, fun — but healthy — foods.

"I expect we will see more menu items with fresh cheeses and other dairy products, pasta, fish, turkey and game birds," said Coutelle. "And fusion cuisine—cooking that combines Mexican and Oriental foods, for example—will become more popular as we search for variety in the diet consumed outside the home."

As an example, Coutelle said that cheeses will show up more at

the breakfast table. "Breakfast, whether eaten at home or at a restaurant, is going to expand its range and borrow from the lunch and dinner menus. Breakfast sandwiches of fruits and cheeses, stir fry "hash" of leftovers topped with cheese and cheesy cornmeal grits are just some of the ways the food-service industry is going to use dairy products to wake up breakfast," said Coutelle.

OTHER THRIVING MARKETS

Other areas of growth that Coutelle projects are more emphasis on dairy products in special children's menus, including child-size appetizers, entrees and desserts; chocolate desserts (Coutelle says consumers will still indulge in their favorite desserts and justify them by choosing healthy, lower calorie entrees); and non-alcoholic drinks.

And when consumers choose to stop by the grocery store instead of the restaurant, they will still be looking for convenience and balance, especially in the dairy case. Brian Dowling, spokesperson for Safeway, Inc., says that his company is already responding to shifting consumer needs in the more than 1,100 stores it owns throughout the United States and Canada.

"We definitely see a growing trend for the supermarkets to play

a larger role in providing convenient, balanced prepared foods," said Dowling. "In some cases, trained chefs are being hired to develop new products for the deli sections. And by monitoring trends in delis across the country, we can now roll out new deli products quickly as tastes change."

Many grocery chains are expanding their private label lines of whole dairy products with lower fat milks, cheeses, cottage cheeses, yogurts, cultured pro-

ducts and dairy desserts. Private label and name brand products in the refrigerated section, like fresh pastas and cream sauces, are addressing the growing demand for convenient, fast and nutritious food.

THE QUICKER THE BETTER

In addition to higher demand for prepared foods, Dowling said that Safeway has noticed increased demand for frozen and microwaveable foods and for more and varied produce. "In the

last three to four years, we have doubled the number of stores with salad bars and have increased the number of selections, including dairy products, in the salad bar area," said Dowling.

And according to Coutelle, it won't be long before concession stands at the theaters catch up with restaurants, supermarkets, specialty shops and delis in providing expanded menus and ready-to-eat foods for the consumers' convenience.

Wool Tomorrow And Beyond

DENVER, Colo.— From drip dry to wash and wear to ease of care pretty much describes the textile industry's fabric trends over the past 50 years. However, times and trends have changed, and consumers are increasingly turning back to a fiber that has proven its durability for centuries -- wool.


"Wool is becoming increasingly popular for a lot of reasons," said Karl Mueller, one of three speakers at a wool symposium held at the American Sheep Industry Association's annual convention last week in Orlando, Fla. "It's an ideal blending fiber and consumers everywhere are more sophisticated and are clearly expressing their preference for quality textile products made from

natural fibers or blends of natural fibers with synthetics."

In a recent survey, Mueller said natural fibers, including wool, scored much higher than synthetics in several categories including: feel - 49 vs. 16 percent; warmth - 48 vs. 14 percent; look - 42 vs. 24 percent; and durability - 40 vs. 26 percent.

Mueller said that the American Wool Council, a division of ASI, has a number of projects underway to better position wool in the immediate future. They include expanding the wool selling season through the development of trans-seasonal fabrics that appeal to the customer eight months out of 12; developing lighter and loftier fabrics in all wool and wool blends;

working on "all weather" sweaters; demonstrating to the military the advantages of "all wool" or "wool blend" products; the advantages of wool for meeting new upholstery and interior safety standards adopted in California; working with overseas mills on the introduction of U.S. American wool; work with domestic mills to educate them that many fabrics currently made with imported wool could be replaced with domestic wool; work with a major worsted spinner on introduction of a cross-dye process that would allow dyeing 100-percent garments in two difference colors in one dye bath; and work with a chemical fiber company on blending wool with a new "high tech" fiber for commercial safety applications.



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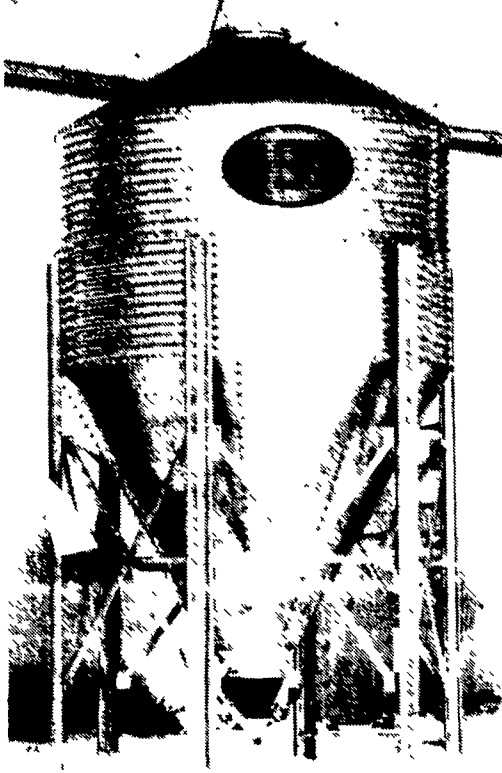
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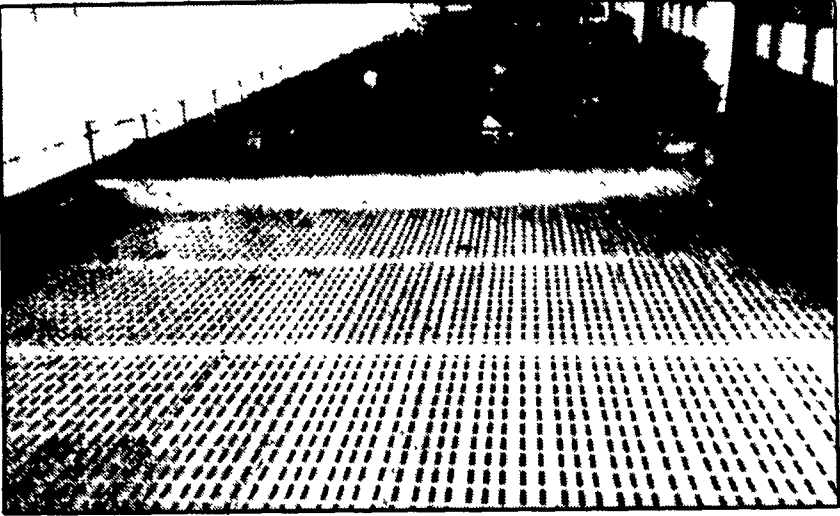
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