2026
FALL/WINTER
EDITION

SERVE WHAT'S NEXT



A guide on the latest trends and solutions for the busy holiday season.



Prepare for a SUCCESSFUL Fall & Winter Season

As fall and winter bring cooler weather, holiday celebrations, and a greater appetite for seasonal indulgence, consumers look for menu items that feel craveable and worth the spend. This guide will help you maximize the season as shoppers and diners eat out more frequently. Inside, you'll find:

1. Practical strategies to protect profitability while navigating an economy marked by increasingly divided consumer spending habits.
2. Ideas to improve pantry efficiency, helping you minimize waste, reduce inventory costs, and maximize the value of every ingredient.
3. Seasonal trends that can be transformed into creative menu offerings that are simple to execute and operationally efficient.

Use these insights as inspiration for LTOs, menu refreshes, or easy flavor enhancements that fit seamlessly into existing operations. By leveraging Exclusive Brand products, operators can create impactful menu solutions while helping drive stronger profit margins.

How to Navigate the K-SHAPED ECONOMY

Consumer spending is increasingly divided, with higher-income households continuing to spend while many others face inflation and debt pressures. In foodservice, success depends on balancing margin protection with strategies that appeal to both.



Protect the Core

When your revenue is unpredictable, your cost control must be flawless. Optimize your back-of-house to absorb market pressure.

Cross-Utilization of Ingredients: Use ingredients across multiple menu items to reduce waste and inventory costs.

Precision Labor Scheduling: Use your POS data to track transaction volumes by the hour. Cut floor labor during slower periods and leverage cross-trained staff who can switch between FOH and BOH roles.

Tech-Driven Footprint: Shift low-value tasks away from labor. Implement QR-code ordering and digital platforms to improve efficiency and order accuracy.





Capture the Top Arm

Wealthier guests still have disposable income but demand high perceived value. Give them reasons to spend more per visit.

Tiered Menu Upgrades: Keep base dishes reasonably priced but offer high-margin add-ons. Examples include adding premium proteins or turning an entrée into a "premium combo."

Experiences Over Discounts: Higher-income diners are insulated from inflation but value exclusivity. Introduce limited-time tasting menus, chef's table nights, or wine-pairing dinners.

High-Margin Mocktails: Beverage sales are dropping as consumers cut alcohol. Offer fancy non-alcoholic drinks which carry massive margins and appeal to big spenders and health-conscious guests.



Target the Bottom Arm

Do not run broad, margin-killing discounts. Instead, engineer value that drives traffic without lowering your profitability.

Smart Menu Engineering: Highlight high-margin menu items by placing them in high-visibility positions, such as the top right corner and the beginning or end of menu sections.

Targeted Digital Loyalty: Use your loyalty app or email list to send targeted offers during slow dayparts or to guests who haven't visited in 30 days.

"Appetizer Economy" Combos: Bundle shareable appetizers, sides, and a drink into a value combo that feels like a deal while utilizing lower-cost ingredients.

Source: Datassential, Cleveland Research, and Business Insider

USE THE RULE OF 3 TO

STREAMLINE YOUR INVENTORY

Every ingredient on your shelf should be used in at least three different menu items. This minimizes food waste, lowers inventory costs, and gives you better bulk-purchasing leverage.



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Ready-To-Serve Soups



1. **Autumn Pasta Sauce:** Transform creamy soups into pasta sauces by adding roasted vegetables or herbs.
2. **Seasonal Chowder Bar:** Use hearty soups as the base and offer toppings like bacon, shredded cheese, or pulled chicken. Create multiple variations while minimizing labor.
3. **Comfort Bowl Platform:** Pour soup over mashed potatoes, rice, or stuffing. Top with pot roast, turkey, or meatballs. Creates a variety of seasonal bowls using a common base ingredient.

Frozen Vegetable Blends



1. **Roasted Vegetable Flatbread:** Toss vegetables with maple glaze or garlic to top flatbreads or focaccia.
2. **Harvest Pot Pie Station:** Use frozen winter vegetables, turkey, and gravy as a pot pie filling. Serve as hand pies, bowl meals, or over biscuits.
3. **Creamy Winter Vegetable Soup:** Blend vegetables into a soup base and use for soup of the day, sauces, or as a casserole binder.

Dehydrated Mashed Potatoes



1. **Shepherd's Pie Menu:** Start with one mashed potato base and create multiple variations: traditional beef, BBQ brisket, harvest vegetables
2. **Thanksgiving Bowl Program:** Layer mashed potatoes with roasted turkey, stuffing, gravy, and cranberry sauce to create a seasonal LTO.
3. **Loaded Potatoes:** Use mashed potatoes as a creamy base and top with bacon, cheddar, caramelized onions, or pulled pork.



Keep Up With the HOTTEST Seasonal Trends

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NOSTALGIA & COMFORT

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TREND 01

TURKEY GRAVY HAS SEEN A
1028% growth
SOURCE: DATASSENTIAL MENU TRENDS, 2026

NOSTALGIA and COMFORT

Comfort continues to be a powerful driver, especially during the holidays when consumers look for dishes that feel familiar and satisfying. But today's comfort food is not simply about recreating the classics. Operators have an opportunity to **refresh nostalgic favorites** with updated ingredients, global influences, and premium touches that make them feel new while still delivering the warmth diners expect.

For Thanksgiving, this trend comes to life through **reimagined sides, hearty entrées, and seasonal specials** that build on familiar flavors like roasted turkey, mashed potatoes, stuffing, gravy, cranberry, and warm spices. A classic comfort dish can become more menu-worthy with unexpected sauces, international flavors, crispy toppings, or handheld formats that make it easier to execute and more appealing.

Want to post about this trend?
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GOLDEN SPICED MASHED POTATOES RECIPE
featuring Katy's Kitchen Turmeric



TIPS TO INTEGRATE THIS TREND:

- Modernize classics with global sauces, premium toppings, or new formats.
- Use holiday LTOs to tap into seasonal cravings and upselling opportunities.
- Simplify execution with speed-scratch components and cross-utilized ingredients.

NOSTALGIC INSPIRATION

Reimagine Thanksgiving favorites with products from Bountiful Harvest and Katy's Kitchen by creating elevated sides, satisfying entrées, and seasonal specials inspired by comforting, familiar flavors.

Convenience is reshaping holiday dining, as **over half of consumers skip cooking in favor of meal bundles, restaurant takeout, or catering.**

SOURCE: CIRCANA, NOV. 2025



TREND
02

STICKY TOFFEE PUDDING IS UP
70% *ON MENUS OVER THE PAST 4 YEARS*
SOURCE: DATASSENTIAL SOCIAL LISTENING PLATFORM, 2026

Indulgence

Holiday dining creates a strong **permission-to-indulge moment**. During Christmas consumers are more willing to treat themselves with rich, craveable dishes that feel celebratory and worth the spend. Indulgence is less about excess alone and more about **delivering a rewarding experience** through bold flavors, premium ingredients, and memorable presentation.

Operators can lean into this trend with comfort-driven center-of-the-plate items, loaded sides, decadent desserts, and festive LTOs that signal value through quality and flavor. **Rich cheeses, slow-cooked meats, and decadent desserts** can help transform everyday menus into holiday-worthy specials that encourage trade-up and repeat visits.

Want to post about this trend?
Download content here.



STICKY TOFFEE PUDDING RECIPE
featuring Bountiful Harvest Dates

Click to share this recipe on your socials.

CREATE A HOLIDAY CHARCUTERIE BOARD FEATURING COBBLESTREET MKT® MEATS & CHEESES.



TIPS TO INTEGRATE THIS TREND:

- Use premium cues like rich sauces, slow-cooked proteins, and specialty cheeses.
- Drive trade-up with loaded sides, add-ons, bundles, or limited-time upgrades.
- Position indulgent items as celebratory, shareable, or worth the splurge.

Indulgent Inspiration

Tap into holiday demand with hearty entrées and indulgent desserts that deliver comfort and familiarity. Use Prairie Creek meats and Brickfire Bakery's ready-to-eat offerings to create festive menu features with ease.



TREND 03

BURNT HONEY IS UP

160% ON MENUS OVER THE PAST 4 YEARS. SOURCE: 2026, DATASSENTIAL

Want to post about this trend? Download content here.

The Great TEXTURE BOOM

Texture is becoming a key way for menu items to feel more **exciting, premium, and shareable**. Diners are responding to foods that deliver a full sensory experience, from crispy, crunchy, and creamy to bubbly, crackly, chewy, and smooth. This **"sensory maximalism"** gives operators a practical way to add interest to familiar dishes without completely reinventing the menu.

New Year's Eve is an ideal occasion to showcase texture-forward items because guests are looking for food that feels festive and memorable. Crispy garnishes, toasted breadcrumbs, puffed grains, fried toppings, crunchy coatings, creamy dips, and layered desserts can add drama and craveability. Texture adds visual appeal and menu buzzwords like crispy, toasted, brûléed, and loaded.

Want to post about this trend? Download content here.

CLOUD CITRUS SPRITZ RECIPE

featuring Rejuv Orange Juice



Click to share these recipe on your socials.

TIPS TO INTEGRATE THIS TREND:

- Add contrast with crispy toppings, creamy sauces, crunchy coatings, or layered builds.
- Use craveable descriptors like crispy, toasted, whipped, brûléed, or loaded.
- Choose textures that hold up for takeout with sturdy coatings or separate toppings.



BURNT HONEY PECAN TART RECIPE

featuring Katy's Kitchen Honey

TEXTURE *Inspiration*

Enhance your New Year's menu with texture-forward hors d'oeuvres that delight the senses. Intros bake-and-serve appetizers and Pierport breaded seafood provide an easy-to-execute foundation for standout seasonal offerings.



TREND 04

48% *of consumers are interested in age, gender, or life stage-specific health benefits from foods or beverages.*

SOURCE: DATASSENTIAL FUNCTIONAL FOODS & BEVERAGES, 2026 REPORT

BETTER *for* YOU

As consumers reset after the holidays, healthier choices gain momentum across late winter menus. **Nutrition-forward does not have to mean restrictive or bland.** Diners are looking for meals that feel nourishing, flavorful, and satisfying, especially options that emphasize protein, fiber, vegetables, and whole grains while still delivering comfort and craveability.

For Lent, this trend creates opportunities for seafood, plant-forward entrées, hearty soups, grain bowls, vegetable-forward sides, and lighter sauces that support wellness-minded choices. **GLP-1 usage is also reinforcing demand for smaller portions, nutrient-dense meals, and protein-forward messaging.** Operators can meet this demand by positioning nutritious items around balance, satiety, and fresh flavor rather than sacrifice.

Want to post about this trend? Download content here.

CHOOSE FROM A WIDE VARIETY OF HIGH FIBER DRY BEANS FROM BOUNTIFUL HARVEST.



TIPS TO INTEGRATE THIS TREND:

- Highlight protein and fiber content of healthy dishes in your menu.
- Offer satisfying lighter portions, seafood, and nutrient-dense sides.
- Use herbs, spices, and seasonal produce to keep items craveable.



BOUNTIFUL HARVEST EDAMAME AND SWEET POTATO WITH PIERPORT SALMON

Nutritious Inspiration

Capitalize on the New Year's focus on wellness by featuring balanced dishes and health-forward menu callouts. Bring these offerings to life with Pierport Seafood and Cobblestreet MKT heat-and-serve soups.



EXCLUSIVE BRAND ITEMS Featured in this Guide:



Katy's Kitchen Gravy



Bountiful Harvest
Green Beans



Katy's Kitchen
Cherry Pie Filling



Bountiful Harvest
Cranberry Sauce



Bountiful Harvest
Sweet Potatoes



Brickfire Bakery
Cornbread Muffins



Prairie Creek
Pork Chops



Bountiful Harvest
Asparagus



Fair Meadow
Butter



Brickfire Bakery
Dinner Rolls



Brickfire Bakery
Chocolate Overload Cake



Ridgeline
Hot Chocolate



Cobblestreet MKT
Tomato Bisque Soup



Brickfire Bakery
Sourdough Bread



Pierport
Breaded Shrimp



Katy's Kitchen
Pecans



ProPak Wooden
Toothpicks



Intros Brie & Jam Fillo Wrapped
Appetizer



Rejuv
Orange Juice



Pierport Cod



Pierport Salmon



Bountiful Harvest
Lentils



Cobblestreet MKT
White Chicken Chili with Beans



Bountiful Harvest
Jasmine Rice

2026
Fall/Winter Calendar

Drive stronger holiday profits with Exclusive Brands solutions designed to help operators maximize margins.

Oktoberfest — Sept 19



Bavarian Pretzels are a staple for this German feast.

Halloween — Oct 31



Americans consume roughly 11 million pizzas on Halloween night.

Thanksgiving — Nov 26



Convenient ready-to-use pie fillings simplify BOH.

Christmas Eve — Dec 24



Prime rib, pot roast, and short ribs are ready for any celebration.

New Year's Eve — Dec 31



Make an impression with ready-to-serve hors d'oeuvres.

Beginning of Lent — Feb 10

PIERPORT SEAFOOD

Tilapia & Shrimp are great options for Lent.



Valentine's Day | Super Bowl — Feb 14



Whipped topping adds the perfect finishing touch to any romantic dessert.



Nearly 1.48 billion wings are consumed during the Super Bowl.



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