

# Trend Watch

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## TOP TAKEAWAYS



### Bitter and Sour Take Over Menus

Salty, sweet and savory are flavor profiles everyone is familiar with and enjoys, but bitter and sour tastes are becoming increasingly popular. That's because, contrary to popular belief, bitter and sour notes actually enhance the overall taste and give a dish more depth of flavor. Barbecue is just one cuisine where bitter and sour notes really add to a dish's overall flavor. John Csukor, president and CEO of KOR Food Innovation, a culinary and marketing agency, points out that barbecue is full of sour and bitter notes. The vinegar that is popularly used in barbecue helps break down the meat during the slow-cooking process, and, along with the bitter char and smoke, gives the end product more flavor and rounds out the sweet and savory flavors.<sup>1</sup>

In today's world, younger generations are more accepting and accustomed to bitter and sour notes, due to the excess of ethnic cuisine they've been exposed to. Sour and bitter notes have been used in international cuisines for decades – Southeast Asian cuisine is a perfect example.<sup>2</sup> The Chinese have used rice vinegar to achieve this flavor balance; in Korea, kimchi brings out both sour and bitter profiles; and Thai cooking has used lime and tamarind.<sup>3</sup> But you don't have to travel the world to see the popularity of bitter and sour flavors. The exploding popularity of kale in the U.S. is an example that people crave bitter greens, not just for the health benefits, but for the flavor that comes along with it.<sup>4</sup>

Today, chefs are looking to add that missing element to their dish, the extra pizzazz that really brings customers back for more – and sour and bitter flavors achieve that. Pork, one of the most versatile proteins, along with components that bring out the sour and bitter flavors, can easily be transformed into a multi-dimensional, complex dish. From pickling just about any kind of vegetable to adding lime and lemon to get that sour note, sour and bitter flavors are the perfect way to round out a menu.

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**Cochinita**

Yucatan-style pulled pork, habanero salsa, pickled red onions

Taco Joint, Chicago, IL



**Low & Slow Ribs**

Competition rub, cider vinegar mop, homemade pickles

Swine, Miami FL



**Bacon-Wrapped Chicken Thigh**

Lemon date sauce

Odys and Penelope, Los Angeles, CA

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## DATA TO NOTE



### Restaurant Growth Is on the Climb in 2016

A new year brings a fresh start, and 2016 is already having a positive impact on restaurant sales. 2015 ended on a high note as well; the NPD Group reported that restaurant and foodservice establishments had made up for the lost visits the recession caused.<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly, Quick-Service Restaurants were the strongest-performing category in 2015, representing 79% of all foodservice visits.<sup>6</sup> Not only did QSRs represent the most visits, but they, along with Fast Casuals, saw an 8% increase last year.<sup>7</sup> It's hard to ignore that Fast Casual/QSR is the most popular format that consumers are drawn to, especially Millennials. The quick but delicious food at a lower price point is what draws Millennials in.

Restaurant sales aren't the only thing on the rise in 2016 either. Recently, the USDA has reported that there were nearly 62 million pounds of pork bellies in cold storage last month.<sup>8</sup> To put that in perspective for bacon lovers across the country, that number is up 14% from December and up almost 13% from a year ago.<sup>9</sup> With an overflow of pork bellies in supply for foodservice operators, consumers can expect bacon and pork belly to be on menus for months to come. This data suggests that the pork producers have finally recovered from the swine flu that hit production hard in 2014.<sup>10</sup>

The start of 2016 has brought good news for the overall restaurant industry and pork lovers. More consumers have the desire to eat out and spend money in foodservice establishments. Pork bellies are high in supply, and operators will be able to cater to the consumer demand for bacon across the country.



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## PORK IN THE NEWS



### Comfort Food Takes a Creative Turn

Food is constantly evoking memories and has a way to affect our mood, feelings and happiness. Salads make us feel lighter and happier, while chicken pot pie brings us feelings of warmth and comfort. The best memories oftentimes revolve around food, and a particular smell or taste can bring us back to any moment in time. When the weather turns dark and gray – or it’s been a long week – consumers can always count on comfort food to make them feel good. Of course the traditional comfort foods – casseroles, chili, pizza, mac ‘n’ cheese – will always be solid choices, but recently chefs have been putting creative twists on comfort foods. These new twists still deliver the warmth and nostalgia, but bring a punch of flavor and a surprising delight to consumers. Flavor & The Menu is calling out three new and exciting trends in comfort foods – hashes, chilaquiles and congee.<sup>11</sup> These new takes on comfort food are great building blocks to pile flavorful ingredients on.

Not surprisingly, these three new platforms are all centered on breakfast foods – only solidifying the explosion of popularity of breakfast and brunch around the country. These items may be “breakfast foods” but that’s not stopping chefs from delivering these dishes at all hours of the day. Let’s take a look at how chefs are using these three comfort categories to deliver innovative dishes to their guests.

#### 1. Hashes

Hashes have been a breakfast staple for years – this dish is traditionally a base of potatoes with vegetables, cheese and eggs layered on top. Chefs are playing around with all sorts of new ingredients: sweet potatoes, root vegetables and polenta instead of the standard red potatoes as a base, and pork belly and pork shoulder instead of bacon or diced sausage. These different bases and protein offerings have the ability to take the hash from breakfast and move it onto the dinner menu.

#### 2. Chilaquiles

Mexican cuisine has exploded on the breakfast menu – starting with the breakfast burrito and breakfast taco, and now moving to chilaquiles. This Mexican dish is traditionally made up of a fried, crispy tortilla topped with salsa, pulled chicken or pork, avocado, cheese and a fried egg. This saucy, satisfying dish is easily adaptable – interchanging salsas, different cuts of protein and playing around with different cheeses allow for chefs to show off their creative culinary skills.

#### 3. Congee

What once was considered “peasant food,” congee, or rice porridge, is now making its way onto menus of all different cuisines. Now, this isn’t the traditional porridge you may be thinking of. This porridge is cooked in a savory broth and can be topped with an endless array of toppings. Think pork belly, short ribs, poached eggs, kimchi or Sriracha. This trend is largely driven by Millennials and Gen Z and is a highly sought-after comfort food in the college and university setting.

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## OUT-OF-THE-BOX THINKING



### Consumers Are Demanding New Comfort Foods

From coast to coast, consumers are always on the search for the best comfort food around. It doesn't matter if you want something for breakfast or dinner, comfort foods can be found on all menus throughout the day. Check out how the new comfort food trends are showing up in restaurants all over.



#### PORK BUBBLE AND SQUEAK

Pork shoulder, sweet potatoes and Brussels sprouts served with mustard cream sauce

Hash, Chicago, IL



#### PORK BELLY HASH

Confit onions, corn, potatoes and fried egg

Searsucker, Austin, TX



#### BRAISED PORK CHILAQUILES

Fried egg, lime, cilantro, queso fresco

The Bristol, Chicago, IL



#### CHORIZO-POTATO CHILAQUILES

Tortilla chips, cilantro, crema, salsa verde and queso fresco

Brasa, Minneapolis, MN