

# THE FLAVOR IS KEE

UNLOCKING MENU POTENTIAL



## COMFORT FOOD, REVISITED: A MODERN TWIST

Operators continue to face the “new normal” challenges: rising food costs, shrinking menus, labor shortages and consumers who are craving satisfying yet increasingly adventurous food. While comforting food is still very much in demand, there’s a noticeable shift in what qualifies as comfort food today, and (spoiler alert!) it goes far beyond basic meatloaf or biscuits and gravy.

KEE INSIGHT

# 42%

of consumers reported eating more comfort foods over the past 2 years, and two-thirds of consumers said they eat comfort food three or more days per week.<sup>1</sup>

## COMFORT FOOD STILL REIGNS SUPREME...

Consumers still long for food and beverages that are familiar, even nostalgic. ...BUT IT'S GROWING UP

Why the shift away from standard pizza, burgers, and tacos, especially when they're so good? The answer is multi-faceted. Think of this trend as comfort food “in flux”, mainly because of ever-evolving demographics.



COMFORT, WITH REDEFINED BOUNDARIES.

Consumers—especially younger generations—are exploring new cuisines with their tastebuds, often exploring regional cuisines that lead to fusion flavors like “swicy” (sweet and spicy) or “swalty” (sweet and salty).<sup>2</sup>



YOUNGER GENERATIONS.

As kids, Generation Z grew up feasting on global food like ramen, pho and dumplings. Today they're young adults with increasing financial independence, and that's the food that makes them feel warm and fuzzy.



DIVERSITY.

As the world becomes increasingly connected and consumers' palates become more sophisticated, there's more opportunity to explore, appreciate and savor the comfort food of other cultures and countries. The population is diversifying as well; today, almost 38% of the US population is Ethnic, or Non-White.<sup>3</sup>

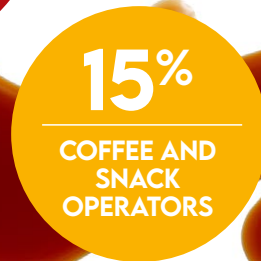


NEARLY 40% OF CONSUMERS SAY THEIR LAST GLOBAL DISH — OUTSIDE OF ITALIAN, MEXICAN AND CHINESE — WAS ASIAN-INFLUENCED.<sup>4</sup>

Read on to learn about the new horizons of modern comfort food and what it means for menus.

## THE QUEST FOR *comfort*

Because people associate happiness with food, operators have been adding more comforting options to their menus since early 2020.<sup>5</sup>



## *modern* COMFORT AT WORK

The most popularly menued comfort foods, 57% of which are global!<sup>6</sup>



+97.6% over 4 years



+57.8% over 4 years



+44.8% over 4 years



+39.0% over 4 years



+37.0% over 4 years



+31.1% over 4 years



+29.7% over 4 years

**CHEF CHRIS KIMURA**Corporate Chef,  
Lee Kum Kee

## CHEF TALK

**Q: What would be your best advice for modernizing comfort?**

Chef Chris: Depending on your concept, offering a memorable experience or something overly indulgent is a good way to stand out from the pack. Also, try to look at food from a global perspective; doing so expands your toolbox. Consumers' taste buds are constantly changing and craving new flavors, so updating familiar dishes with at least one new flavor element is also a great way to modernize a menu.

**Q: How can Asian flavors play a part in comfort food?**

Chef Chris: According to Datassential, Chinese is the 3rd most popular global cuisine for millennials and 2nd most popular with Gen Z. This familiarity allows us to present approachable flavors that can play to nostalgia, as well as put a fresh spin on existing concepts.

**Q: What is your favorite comfort food, and why?**

Chef Chris: Right now it's Japanese ramen, with its magical long-cooked stock and next-level noodle texture. And with so many varieties and styles, there are no hard guardrails as to what defines it. During the pandemic, many non-ramen restaurants offered ramen as a way to stay afloat, which triggered new ideas like duck ramen from a French-style restaurant, or shellfish-based ramen from a restaurant specializing in seafood.

**Q: How are you incorporating Lee Kum Kee products into comfort food?**

Chef Chris: We're seeing a lot of interest in our Sauce for Orange Chicken and Black Pepper Sauce, both nostalgic flavors derived from classic Chinese American stir-fried dishes. We use that familiarity to play with mainstream concepts, like Black Pepper Sauce on a patty melt, or loaded steak fries. Imagine Sauce for Orange Chicken on a fried chicken sandwich or glazed on a smoked pork shoulder. It really works!



