

TRENDS

TO KNOW

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GET CREATIVE WITH

COMFORT FOOD



THE TREND

Comfort foods are perennial favorites among consumers. They often induce nostalgia, making them all the more comforting. When it comes to comfort foods, though, regionality plays a role, and some of the fastest-growing comfort foods on menus are regional items like Detroit-style pizza (pictured left), which has gone up 11 points in awareness over the past 2 years (Datassentia's Consumer Preferences Platform). More familiar global items have also transitioned into American comfort foods, such as elote (Mexican-style corn, often topped with cotija cheese) and birria tacos. Operators are also getting creative with well-loved comfort foods like mac & cheese by offering plant-based twists on it or allowing customers to build their own as part of a mac & cheese bar (the latter concept is up 56% on menus over the past 12 months).

DAIRY REPORT

Cheese is a quintessential element of most comfort foods – think pizza, burgers, grilled cheese, mac & cheese, etc. To up the ante, consider leveraging trending cheeses, such as burrata, cotija, or chevre/goat cheese. Cheese also plays a key role in global comfort foods like Mexican elote and Canadian poutine, as well as regional U.S. items like Detroit-style pizza and grandma-style pizza. For a twist, operators and manufacturers are also swapping plant-based cheeses into comfort foods, tying into the larger plant-based eating trend – over the past 4 years, vegan cheese has grown 155% on menus.

MENU INSPIRATION

ELOTE BURGER

Honey-Jam Café

| Downers Grove, IL (HQ)

Roasted corn and poblano elote blend, cotija cheese, egg over medium, Flamin' Hot Cheetos, and lime aioli.

FOUR CHEESE MAC & CHEESE WITH HONEY PEPPER CHICKEN TENDERS

Applebee's | Glendale, CA (HQ)

A sweet-and-savory take on comfort food, our four-cheese penne mac & cheese is topped with applewood-smoked bacon and crispy chicken tenders tossed in honey-pepper sauce.

THE JALAPENO POPPA DETROIT-STYLE PIZZA

Via 313 | Austin, TX (HQ)

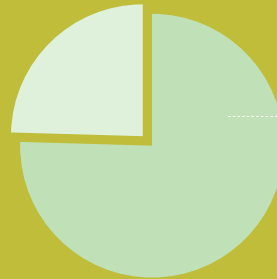
This pizza packs a punch with fresh jalapenos, whipped cream cheese, sriracha, hot honey, and crispy bacon.

WAFFLE FRY POUTINE

Mad Mex | Columbus, OH (HQ)

Crispy waffle fries topped with beef birria gravy, cheddar cheese curds, and scallions.

DATA FILE



83%

OF CONSUMERS LOVE OR LIKE
MAC & CHEESE

Datassential Consumer Preferences Platform

TREND STAGE

UBIQUITY



Comfort foods are comforting for a reason – they're highly familiar to consumers, well-loved, and often induce a sense of nostalgia. To add interest to Ubiquitous comfort foods, leverage trend-forward ingredients (for example, swap mozzarella cheese for scamorza) and consider ways to mash up two comfort foods to create something new (think mac & cheese pizza or globally-inspired birria poutine or loaded fries, for instance). Also consider putting an on-trend, plant-based twist on items like grilled cheese, pizza, and more by swapping in vegan cheese.

Comfort food is, well, comforting, and often nods to nostalgia (think mac & cheese or grilled cheese). Many comfort foods notably serve as vehicles for cheese and other dairy products like milk or cream cheese, but they can be switched up by featuring plant-based alternatives, tying into the larger plant-based eating trend. Also look to regional U.S. comfort foods like Detroit-style or grandma-style pizza as opportunities for leveraging cheese of all kinds.

KEY TAKEAWAY