The Foodservice Trends Report 2026 Q4



Huhtamaki

Health. Safety. Assurance.

Future-proofing packaging for three forces redefining foodservice.

Huhtamaki

Packaging has more work to do.

Foodservice expectations have moved beyond just the meal itself. GLP-1s are changing appetites. Delivery is stretching the distance between kitchen and customer. Food safety is under sharper scrutiny. And customers want more transparency.

For operators, packaging is a critical part of how customers experience your brand.



Three trends.
Three new roles for packaging.

Trend 1

Health

Make smaller meals feel intentional, complete and worth the order.

Trend 2

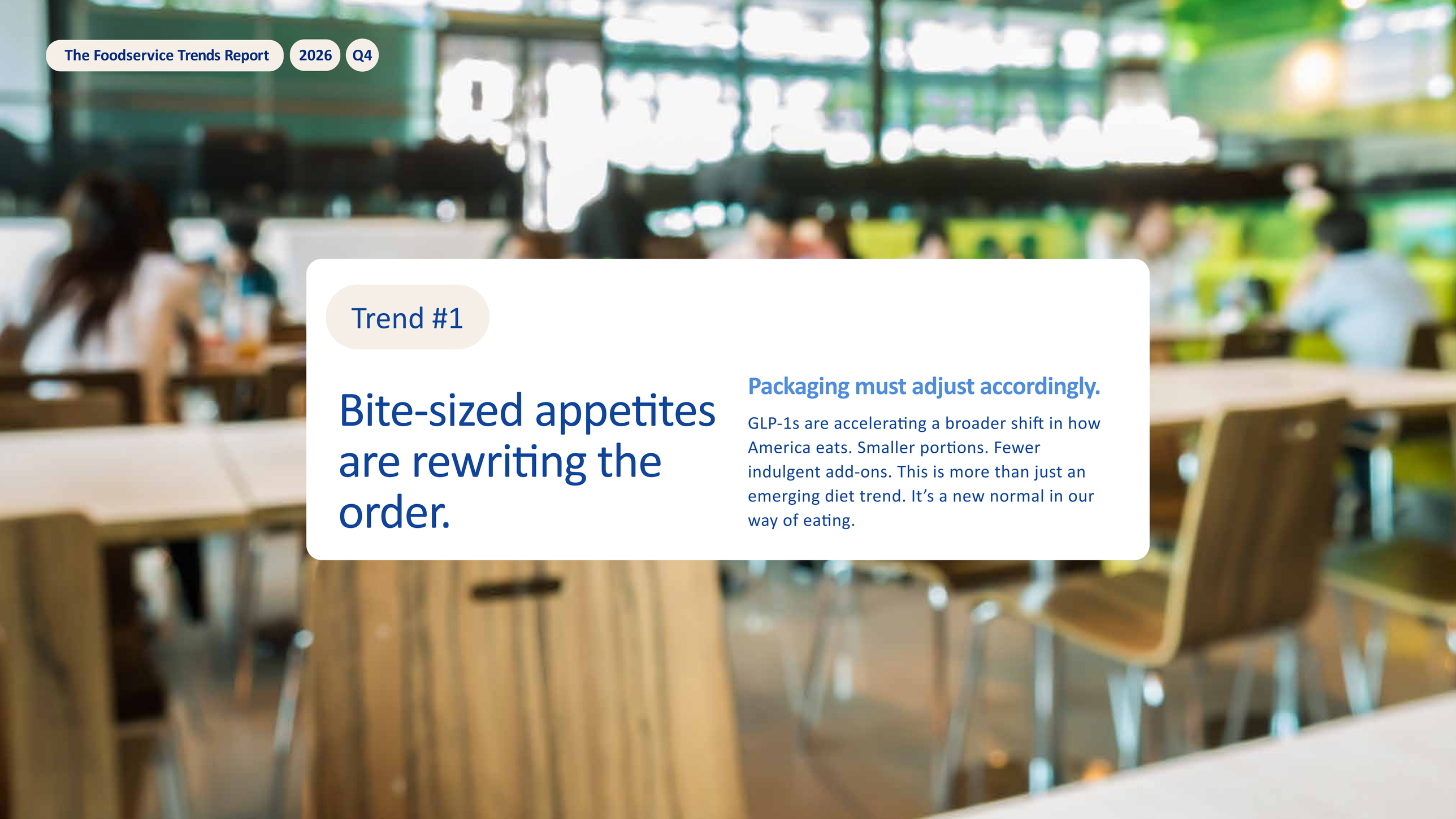
Preservation

Protect quality and stand the test of increased delivery times.

Trend 3

Safety

Make protection a priority every step of the way.



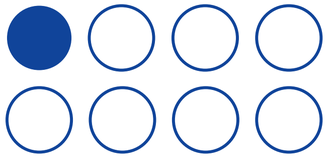
Trend #1

Bite-sized appetites are rewriting the order.

Packaging must adjust accordingly.

GLP-1s are accelerating a broader shift in how America eats. Smaller portions. Fewer indulgent add-ons. This is more than just an emerging diet trend. It’s a new normal in our way of eating.

Appetites are shrinking. Expectations aren’t.



1 in 8

The number of American adults now taking a GLP-1.[1]



59%

Ordering smaller portions or fewer items.[2]

The New Better

More protein, fiber and nutrient-dense choices; less sugar.[2]

Losing Momentum

Sugary, fried and carb-heavy foods losing momentum.[2]

Smaller should not feel lesser.

As portions get smaller, packaging takes on a bigger role in demonstrating value. From format and sizing to consumer-focused communication and presentation, every element needs to work together.

A smaller meal still needs to **FEEL COMPLETE.**

A snack-sized order still needs to **FEEL CONSIDERED.**

A lighter choice still needs to **DELIVER ON VALUE.**



Trend #2

Delivery changed packaging's job description.

Delivery has changed what is expected of packaging. Food that used to sit for five minutes is now sitting for 20–40.[3] Regardless of the increased time and mileage, packaging has to perform.

UP TO 40 MIN
Increased distances mean longer windows before orders are opened.[3]

THE HEAT AND STEAM FACTOR
They can turn a fresh order soggy without the right venting. Packaging design can help manage heat and steam through factors like venting, headspace and internal volume.

Drive times are changing. Experiences can’t.

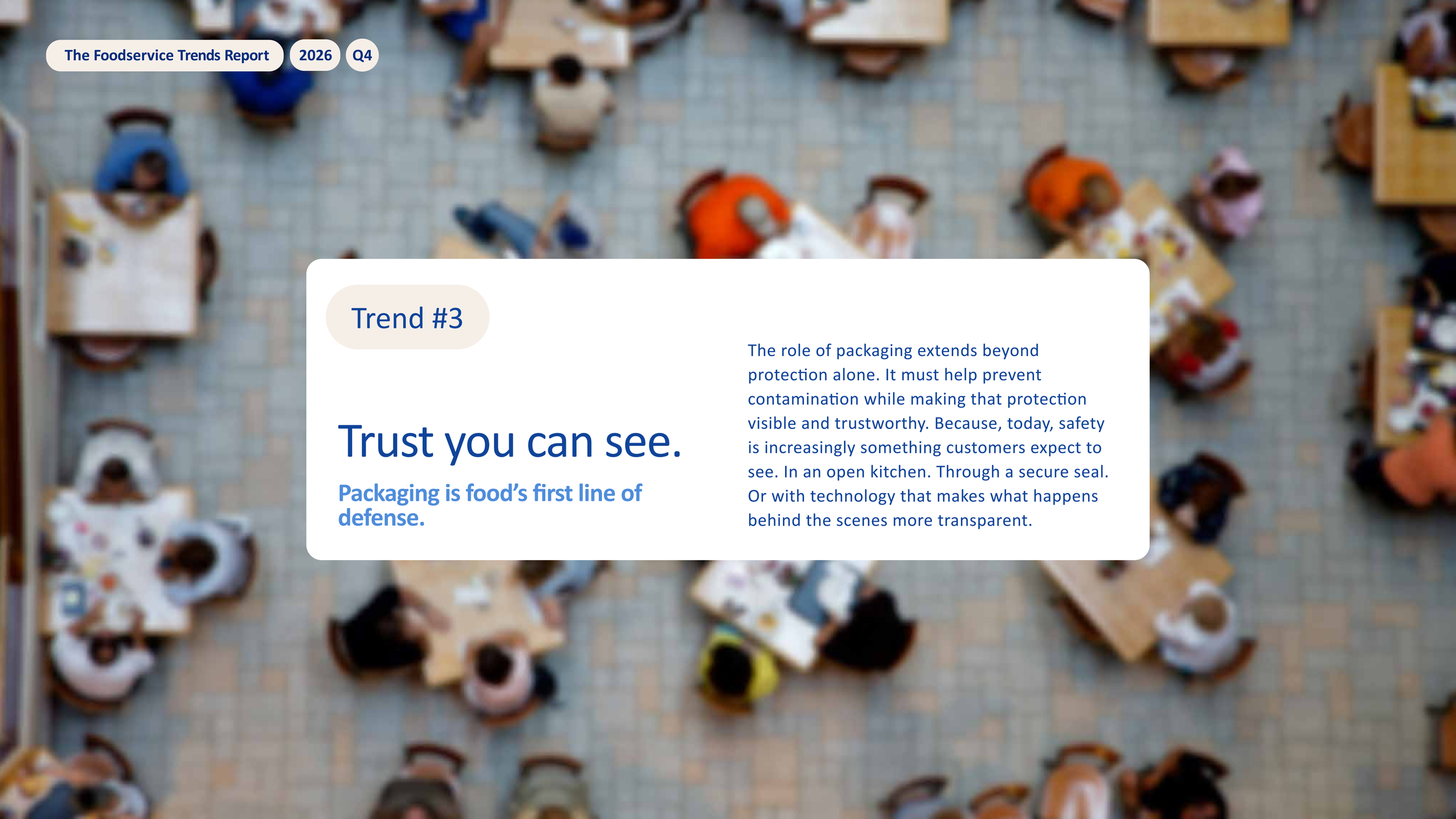
ENGINEERED FOR EVERY TURN
Delivery puts greater demands on structural performance—from sidewall and corner strength to crush resistance.

2–4 COMPARTMENTS
Compartmentalized formats can help keep entrées, sides and sauces separated in transit.



Deliveries are putting packaging to the test.

From holding heat longer to venting steam without sacrificing warmth, delivery demands more from packaging. It must answer with smarter formats, stronger materials and better ventilation that help preserve the experience customers expect.



Trend #3

Trust you can see.

Packaging is food’s first line of defense.

The role of packaging extends beyond protection alone. It must help prevent contamination while making that protection visible and trustworthy. Because, today, safety is increasingly something customers expect to see. In an open kitchen. Through a secure seal. Or with technology that makes what happens behind the scenes more transparent.

Proof doesn’t stop at the package.

It shows up everywhere a customer, parent or student can check your work.

Radical Transparency

Transparency is becoming more tangible. Sourcing information, labels and certifications give consumers more ways to understand their food. Schools are increasing visibility too, through online menu information.[4]

Open Kitchens

Open kitchens and visible preparation are making the process itself more apparent to customers. Schools are doing the same with visible cafeteria areas and public inspection scores.[5]

Leveraging technology as a safeguard.



Digital Engagement

Visibility is becoming part of reassurance. Apps and real-time tracking allow customers to follow their order throughout the delivery journey.[6]



Parent Portals

Digital menus and allergen information give families greater visibility into school meal options.[4]



Predictive Safety

AI and predictive analytics are increasingly being used to identify potential food-safety and supply-chain risks earlier. Much of that technology may be invisible to customers, but it is becoming part of the infrastructure behind safer foodservice.[7]

What operators should audit now.

As foodservice continues to evolve, packaging can’t afford to remain on autopilot. A format audit can help you understand whether or not your current packaging is built for what the menu, customer and channel now demand.

The Audit Checklist

- ☐ **Portion fit:**
  Does the package make smaller meals feel complete?
- ☐ **Delivery performance:**
  Does it hold heat, manage steam and survive movement?
- ☐ **Separation:**
  Does it keep foods, sauces and allergens where they belong?
- ☐ **Tamper evidence:**
  Does protection feel visible and trustworthy?
- ☐ **Material barriers:**
  Does the package guard against grease, moisture and migration?
- ☐ **Customer proof:**
  Does the format support the trust story operators need to tell?

Packaging, solved.

Foodservice is evolving fast. Smaller appetites. Longer journeys. Higher expectations. The next era will be defined by packaging that positively influences the entire eating experience.

Huhtamaki helps operators meet the moment with packaging designed for changing portions, delivery performance and visible protection. Talk to us about what we could solve for you today.



Straight from the source.

This report holds itself to the same standard it asks of packaging – to demonstrate proof, not promises.

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