



# Foodservice Trends Report

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Q3 2024

Snacking Options, New Fall Flavors and the Transformation of C-Stores

**Huhtamaki**

# Snacks on the menu

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Restaurant chains are **adding snacks to their menus hoping to win over customers**. However, demand for specific snacks depends on a multitude of factors – mood, time of day, and ease of travel, which opens up various opportunities for restaurants looking to boost traffic through innovation. And now is the time for these innovations, thanks to changes in people’s daily routines, such as work-from-home employees, who are looking for a pick-me-up during the mid-afternoon, “**a trend that fits well with QSR business models that get diners in and out quickly**,” Rick Camac, Dean of Restaurant and Hospitality Management at the Institute of Culinary Education, wrote in an email.

# Subway jumps into the snacking trend

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Subway recently **stepped into the growing snacking trend by adding snacking options to its Sidekicks menu.** The new Footlong Dippers feature churros, cookies, and pretzels, all for \$3 each. As Subway stated, **“They fit the desire for convenience and craveability at a great price.”** These snacks give customers the option of melted cheese and meats wrapped in soft, lavash-style flatbread, in three options – Pepperoni & Cheese, Chicken & Cheese, and Double Cheese, each served with a choice of one of Subway’s 11 signature dipping sauces. The Footlong Dippers were tested in Grand Rapids, Michigan, with a “tremendous guest response” and are now available nationwide. In the test, guests ordered the Dippers as a snack or with a sub order. **Subway reported selling more than 3.5 million in the first two weeks and 30 million Sidekicks in total since January.**

# McDonald's tackles the afternoon slump

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McDonald's specialty restaurant concept, **CosMc's**, which launched last year, has now opened in San Antonio, Texas, marking CosMc's fifth location. **CosMc's was created to solve what McDonald's calls the "3pm slump."** CEO Chris Kempczinski explains, "One area of focus has been identifying ways to participate in attractive and fast-growing categories. **We homed in on specialty beverages and coffee...** It's a space we believe we have the right to win," he said. The San Antonio CosMc's has also added Sprite Moonsplash with Sprite, citrus, and sweet vanilla flavors served with dried blueberries and a lemon wheel over ice to its menu to entice more customers. But that's not all; other beverage innovations include the Sour Cherry Energy Burst, Churro Cold Brew Frappé, Hazelnut Mocha Cold Brew, Popping Pear Slush, and Sour Tango Lemonade.

# Panera takes inspiration from the little treat trend

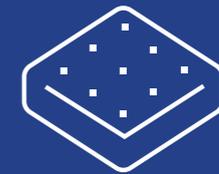
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The Little Treat culture is a real thing – **a tiny treat to give you a little emotional boost** throughout the day. It’s become somewhat of a social meme with people often joking about rewarding themselves with a “little treat” no matter the accomplishment. And Panera is jumping in on the craze by amping it up with its “Big Treat Menu.” However, Panera thinks customers deserve to treat themselves regardless of their to-do item. **“Be it after finishing a mundane task, after a long conference call, an afternoon walk around the block, a little break** – for whatever reason – **the trend emphasizes why sometimes we just want a ‘Little Treat,’**” the company shared in a statement provided to *Food & Wine*. That’s why Panera has created the new, limited-time CinnaTops, just one of the over-the-top items on the viral-inspired menu. The item takes a frosted cinnamon roll and tops it with one of three choices: Candy Cookie, Choco Chipper Cookie, or Fudgy Brownie. But if customers would rather have a little protein in their sugary breakfast, the “Big Treat Menu” has just the item, the CinnaScramble, a breakfast sandwich filled with scrambled eggs and American cheese stacked between cinnamon rolls.

# Crumbl comes together with edible cookie dough

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In January, **Crumbl launched its first non-cookie baked item with cinnamon squares.** Then in April, the company introduced smaller cookies for snacking, which are now available every week for what are called “Mini Mondays.” These additions are part of Crumbl’s plan to diversify its weekly offerings. But now Crumbl is getting into the snacking space even further by launching edible “cookie dough bits.” They come in an 8-ounce package in Crumbl’s signature pink color and consist of semi-sweet chocolate chip bits and are kept in freezers in the front of the company’s store. This marks **Crumbl’s entry into the fast-growing edible cookie dough category, worth around \$12.3 billion** and **estimated to continue its annual growth rate of 5.7% through 2033.**

# The new flavors of fall

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New research shows that **people are ready to add new flavors to their palates during the fall**. Around 45% of people surveyed revealed that they're enjoying the fall tastes of cinnamon, salted caramel, maple, and candy apple, in addition to the traditional fall classic pumpkin spice. But that's not to say pumpkin-related items are out of favor, as such items are up 33% and **demand for pumpkin is expected to continue**. And since many of these flavors are seen as fall fan favorites, research shows **30% of Americans are more eager for fall to start than are sad to see summer ending** (17%). "There is a trend of starting events earlier than ever. A large part of this is to create some excitement and to get consumers spending," GlobalData analyst Neil Saunders told CNN.

# The changing tastes of comfort food

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Cracker Barrel Old Country Store® wants **to make apple this fall's main flavor** by adding a variety of new apple-based options to its menu, inspired by its famous fried apples. Guests can now enjoy four brand-new dishes, including the Fried Apple French Toast Bake, Southern Apple Cobbler, Granny Smith Apple Mimosa, and Granny Smith Apple Tea. But that's not all – a new savory Hashbrown Casserole Shepherd's Pie is now available, giving guests more craveable comfort food options this fall season. “As autumn approaches, **guests are seeking flavors beyond the standard pumpkin spice** and we know they're ready for warm comfort food to accompany cooler temperatures outside,” said Cracker Barrel Vice President of Marketing Communications Julia Perry. “Cracker Barrel's fall menu is equipped to meet both of those needs. Our new Fried Apple French Toast Bake, inspired by our signature fried apples, and savory Hashbrown Casserole Shepherd's Pie, a new twist on our beloved hashbrown casserole, provides guests the delicious flavor and comfort they're craving more than ever this season.”

# Dairy Queen returns with fall classics and surprises

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Dairy Queen has revealed its **Fall Blizzard Menu**, which includes lots of pumpkin and seasonal favorites. The Fall Blizzard Menu will see the Pumpkin Pie Blizzard Treat, a fall fan favorite, making its return. And the newest item on DQ's fall menu is the Caramel Java Chip Blizzard Treat, which includes coffee, choco-espresso crunch pieces, and caramel blended with DQ's world-famous soft serve. Customers also have the option of the Oreo Fudge Brownie Blizzard Treat, which is made with Oreo pieces, brownies, and cocoa fudge with a soft serve base. Plus, the Salted Caramel Truffle Blizzard Treat is another fall classic making its return – blended with soft serve, the frozen dessert features salted caramel truffles, toffee pieces, choco chunks, and cocoa fudge. “Although temperatures may not call for flannels just yet, **the new Fall Blizzard Menu gives fans the chance to enjoy seasonal flavors** with the Pumpkin Pie Blizzard Treat and the return of the highly requested French Silk Pie Blizzard Treat – straight out of the DQ Freezer,” said DQ about its new menu.

# Pinkberry® goes Apple Green for fall

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It's almost fall, and Pinkberry® is **bringing the flavors that define the season** by introducing its new Green Apple frozen yogurt in restaurants around America. It'll be featured in combination with honey granola, caramel, and cinnamon. “**Apples are an iconic fall flavor** and we are excited to introduce this new Green Apple flavor as summer winds down and we usher in fall,” said Melissa Hubbell, Vice President of Marketing for Kahala Brands™, parent company of Pinkberry. “Refreshing frozen yogurt and the tartness of green apple combined with the crunch of sweet honey granola, cozy caramel drizzled on top, and a dusting of cinnamon **creates a cool autumn treat and delectable flavor that our customers are sure to love.**”

# Krispy Kreme brings back fall classics and more

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“It’s late summer, and we’re all ready for pumpkin spice, somehow. So, **we’re bringing back the classics you’re craving**,” Dave Skena, the Global Chief Brand Officer at Krispy Kreme, shared in a statement provided to *Food & Wine*. And Krispy Kreme isn’t disappointing with all of **its limited releases and new doughnut flavors**. In the last few months alone, it’s launched Mini Dots, an Olympic-themed doughnut, and even opened its first shop in France. What’s more, Krispy Kreme is bringing back Pumpkin Spice season with Pumpkin Spice Cake Doughnut and its Pumpkin Spice Latte, a fan favorite. It’s “the perfect combination of crumbly cake and pumpkin spice flavor,” Krispy Kreme explained. Meanwhile, the Pumpkin Spice Latte is “made fresh-to-order, available hot, iced or frozen, and topped with whipped cream and pumpkin spice seasoning.”

# The transforming landscape of convenience stores as foodservice

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Convenience stores are looking **to entice more customers by going all in on quick-serve and made-to-order meals**, and according to a **Convenience Store News (CSN)** report, foodservice stood out for the convenience store sector in 2023 with **prepared food sales rising 13.5%, reaching \$58.7 billion**. The report also found **foodservice sales comprised 20% of the total in-store sales** for the first time in 2023 and **are expected to top 28% this year**. Almost 7 in 10 consumers said that they'd bought prepared foods from convenience stores in the last month, with **42% of consumers claiming food quality being a big factor**, and **40% saying that freshness is a top priority**. "The landscape of convenience stores is undergoing a significant transformation," said Vontier President and CEO Mark Morelli. "Our research underscores the **growing consumer demand for convenience and efficiency** like mobile ordering in their day-to-day lives. New technologies and services are raising the bar on the convenience store experience, making it more than a stop on the journey but a destination in itself for everything from an amazing meal and a car wash to EV charging."

# 7-Eleven expands its focus on fresh

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7-Eleven is expanding its menu with **four new items and three beverage options**, all under **its 7-Select private-label brand**. This includes chicken nuggets, taquitos, and breakfast pizza, while adding to its beverage lineup with fresh, new juices and delicious tea. Plus, 7-Eleven has partnered with two major snack brands for limited-time flavor options – a cherry Slurpee-flavored Twinkie and a blue raspberry Slurpee-infused Drumstick frozen dessert. All this is **part of 7-Eleven’s long-term growth strategy** to focus on fresh food, proprietary beverages, and private-label items. What’s more, you’ll also be able to find these options at the company’s Speedway and Stripes banners. 7-Eleven also said **it would be innovating the foodservice at many of its more than 3,000 Speedway locations** – adding hot food, more in-store baked goods, and commissary food, by the end of the year.

# Naf Naf grows its business with Love's

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“Love’s has played a pivotal role as a key partner in our growing network, extending our brand’s reach to thousands of hungry new Naf Naf fans through their travel stops,” said Greg Willman, CEO of Naf Naf Grill, renowned for its authentic Middle Eastern cuisine. Recently, **it’s announced three new locations within Love’s Travel Stops** in Greenville, Virginia; Barstow, California; and a Tennessee location at a later date. The expansion to more locations within Love’s stores comes after Naf Naf “**discerned a growing demand among truck drivers and other travelers** for fresher, healthier, and trendier food options, particularly within the Middle Eastern cuisine category,” Naf Naf said. “Broadening our collaboration with Naf Naf amplifies the positive momentum we’ve experienced since joining forces. Their team consistently provides exceptional support across various areas, from design to operations,” said Nick Bouse, Director of Food Service for Love’s.

# QuickChek offers meal discounts this summer

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**QuickChek is unveiling new value-priced food options**, a two-for-\$5 mix-and-match breakfast menu with Sausage, Egg & Cheese English Muffins; Bacon, Egg & Cheese English Muffins; Sausage, Egg & Cheese Croissants; and a variety of Empanadas. “A sub-option for every taste. Cold drinks bursting with flavor at unbeatable prices,” the Whitehouse Station, New Jersey-based convenience store chain said. “Mix and match breakfast selections to start your day.” Also, **new additions you’ll find on the menu are burrito bowls** starting under \$6, allowing customers to build their own rice and bean bowls with Latin rice, grilled chicken, steak, or breakfast burritos. Plus, there’s the return of Meatball Marinara and spicy chicken, which is available in subs, wraps, salads, mac and cheese, burrito bowls, and more. Lastly, QuickChek has added new refreshers – black tea-based beverages with mango or strawberry Bursting Boba bubbles.

# Pilot continues its push for foodservice innovation

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Pilot has **rolled out several new hot and cold food items at its travel centers**. Now you can find mac and cheese bowls, hot wings, a spicy pizza, and a new salad on its menu. It's also relaunching its Pilot Big Dog all-beef hot dog, continuing **a wave of foodservice innovation seen across the convenience store industry** so far this year. "Drivers can count on us for delicious and convenient food that doesn't just fill them up but enhances the travel experience and brings joy to their journey," Jamie King, Vice President of Food and Deli Operations for Pilot, said. That's because **Pilot continues to launch made-to-order items, adding more fresh ingredients and value-based offerings hoping to compete with restaurants**. What's more, it's investing **\$1 billion into its New Horizons remodeling project** by adding an updated foodservice section to many of its travel centers. Locations with this new counter offer a variety of options, such as roasted chicken, meatloaf, and steak burgers, as well as sides like mashed potatoes and gravy.

# Huhtamaki as a foodservice provider

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It's important to stay on top of the trends that are important to your customers. That's why Huhtamaki North America stays at the forefront of food service innovations, to help your business navigate the ever-changing landscape, like the implementation of snacking trends, seasonal menu innovations, and c-store foodservice expansions. We're a trusted innovation partner and work with customers to properly package food at any time of the day – quickly and efficiently! At Huhtamaki, our ambition is to be the first choice for sustainable packaging solutions. We can help you make the most sustainable food packaging choices for your business and, more importantly, your consumers. Together, we can make a difference where it matters by redesigning the future of sustainable packaging. As a true partner in innovation, we can help you make the most sustainable food packaging choices for any occasion.

Visit <https://www.huhtamaki.com/en-us/north-america/foodservice/> for more information.

# Resources

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# Resources

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