




BREAKFAST

# Up And At 'Em

Breakfast-inspired foods are becoming increasingly important in micro markets and vending machines to satisfy round-the-clock hunger at work

*By Nick Montano, Editor*





**L**ong considered the most important meal of the day, breakfast is also a meal that's enjoyed at all times, whether it's on the go, sitting down in an eatery, at home or at work.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and its ensuing lockdowns, essential workers and first responders drove demand for ready-to-eat breakfast selections, and vending machines and micro markets became go-to destinations for workers. Meanwhile, workers sheltering at home and freed from their commutes transitioned from on-the-go breakfast items to more substantial fare, embracing what Whole Foods has called the "epic breakfast every day" trend.

Another defining trend of 2020: indulgence. Aligned with that trend, this year's list of most-ordered breakfast foods, according to Statista, showed huge growth for sweet items like acai bowls (up 353% year over year) and frozen mocha beverages (+336%); following were chorizo burritos (up 304%), potato pancakes (+264%) and strawberry banana smoothies (+216%).

A recent study conducted by the Harris Poll and commissioned by General Mills Foodservice found that consumers are eating more breakfast foods than normal during the pandemic and not just in the morning hours. Nearly a quarter reported eating more breakfast foods during the COVID-19 pandemic than they normally would (24%) with items such as eggs (72%), cereal and pancakes (both 51%) and bakery items such as donuts (36%), cinnamon rolls (34%) and muffins (33%) among the top favorite items. Further, nearly four in five Americans (79%) have eaten breakfast foods outside of the traditional breakfast meal in the past year.

The nationwide poll, conducted between Feb. 11 and 16, surveyed more than 2,000 adults, ages 18 and over, to learn how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their eating habits at home, work or dining in public.

"The recent poll shows that people are eating more breakfast foods during the pandemic and enjoying them for lunch, dinner and even dessert," said Mark Harmon, who analyzes consumer insights for General Mills Foodservice. "We also learned that consumers are eager to return to restaurants to enjoy their favorite breakfast and brunch foods."

For operators of micro markets and vending in workplace venues, these trends signal that the breakfast boom will continue as more people return to work.

Results from General Mills' poll suggested that consumers who are eating more breakfast foods during the pandemic over the past year are doing so because they feel they have more freedom in what and when they eat. Poll participants said they have more time in their schedules (52%), they've been craving their favorite breakfast foods (37%), they want to eat something fun that brings them joy (33%) or breakfast favorites remind them of childhood (24%).

"Consumers' love of breakfast is strong, giving chefs and foodservice operations the chance to reimagine breakfast," said Harmon, who added that breakfast often has an impulsive nature that can be activated with new and different menu items. "For instance, consumers may not have breakfast for dinner in their regular rotation of eating, but they may be tempted to splurge on it for a memorable experience," he observed.

The General Mills study offers other helpful findings. Consumers have a deep affection for breakfast, for instance, with three in five Americans (62%) saying it is their favorite

meal of the day and over half (56%) saying they love breakfast food more now than they did a year ago. And three-quarters of survey respondents (79%) have eaten breakfast foods for meals other than breakfast in the past year with more than half (59%) saying they have eaten breakfast foods for dinner. Additionally, half have enjoyed breakfast foods for lunch and one-fifth have eaten breakfast items for dessert. Lastly, more than half (66%) said they love creative twists on breakfast menu items.



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**Mark Harmon, General Mills Foodservice**

## CLASSIC AND ARTISAN

Employees back at work should expect more offerings at their micro markets and vending machines, and breakfast options are no exception. Accordingly, more of the industry's food suppliers are offering appealing breakfast selections.

Founded in 1955, E.A. Sween Co. manufactures a wide range of breakfast sandwiches for the Deli Express and Market Sandwich lines. Sandwiches ship frozen and have a 14-day refrigerated shelf life once thawed. Market Sandwich items are packaged in a paper bag with a clear window for product visibility. Items in both lines can be purchased from a refrigeration unit and heated in the package in the microwave, making them perfect for markets or vending.

"Eating on the go has changed throughout the pandemic," said EA





Several types of breakfast sandwiches are offered by EA Sween's Deli Express line.

EA Sween

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Abby Ostlund, EA Sween

Sween marketing manager Abby Ostlund. “At the onset during lockdowns, we saw a shift away from eating on the go as people were stuck at home and not commuting to and from an office. As things have evolved over the past year and a half we have started to shift back to normal where consumers are on the go and looking for fast prepackaged food they feel safe eating.”

As more operators seek sales data to help them decide which products to include in their plan-o-grams, Eden Prairie, MN-based EA Sween can provide Nielsen information regarding top-selling varieties, best-product mixes and fastest-growing varieties, among other rank categories.

“We use Nielsen data across the board to understand overall category performance, competitive performance, trends, growth areas, new opportunities and best-selling items,” Ostlund said. “We also conduct our

consumer research and utilize research from several outside sources to better understand consumer behaviors, buying behavior, industry trends and category trends.”

Because many food suppliers are unable to deliver products on time and the shortage of fresh foods in various markets, EA Sween's sales have taken off over the past year.

### KETO SANDWICH

Keto is now America's favorite diet. See for yourself by searching for the “most popular diet trends” on Google and you'll likely find that Americans are more interested in keto than any other diet. The ketogenic diet, high in fat and low in carbs, however, can be challenging to follow. With restrictions on what one is permitted to eat and what they cannot eat, keto meal and snack options may be limited.

But now there's a convenient keto option in vending and micro markets from Cheesewich, a family-owned company based in Hodgkins, IL. The original breadless sandwich snack, vacuumed packed, consists of two slices of cheese with salami. Available cheeses include colby jack, pepper jack, cheddar and provolone. Cheesewich products are enjoying brisk sales, according to the company's marketing manager, Sarah Nesci, who reported a 30% sales increase year over year.

The five-year-old company's new Breakfast Taco, which began shipping

Cheesewich's keto-friendly Breakfast Taco is made with turkey bacon, colby jack cheese, an egg patty and flour tortilla.

Cheesewich



Grab-and-go breakfast burritos and sandwiches from Alpha Foods are made with meatless sausage, plant egg and dairy-free cheese.

Alpha Foods

in in September, is made with turkey bacon, colby jack cheese, an egg patty and flour tortilla. This keto breakfast sandwich needs only 25 seconds in a microwave to heat. Also available is the Uncured Turkey Baconwich, made by wrapping all-natural uncured turkey bacon around mozzarella cheese. These two products possess low-moisture content and use hearty string cheeses.

### PLANT FORWARD

More and more convenience customers are interested in healthy, plant-based alternatives to start the day, according to data from Label Insight, a NielsonIQ company. To see which breakfast foods increased in popularity during the pandemic, the CPG data source analyzed online searches. In the breakfast meal and sandwich categories, search volume augmented for product features like “healthy,” “veggie,” “ketogenic,” “low carb” and “gluten-free.” In the cereal category, such characteristics as “organic,” “paleo,” “sugar free” and “high fiber” rose. Searches for frozen breakfast sandwiches and meals soared 311% in 2020.

Positioning with the plant-based and vegan movements, Peet's Coffee together with Beyond Meat and Just Egg launched the Everything plant-based sandwich, which began selling at Peet's stores this past spring. Last year, Starbucks Corp. made its first move into vegan meat with its vegetarian Impossible Breakfast Sandwich. And one year ago, convenience store chain Wawa rolled out its Beyond

