

EUROPEAN FOOD TRENDS REPORT

Hacking Food: Redefining What We Eat

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Hacking Food: Redefining What We Eat

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Table of Contents

- 03 **Summary**
- 05 **Food Revolution: Tech Surpasses Romance**
Food Trend Map: Alternative Proteins, Delivery, and Transparency
- 15 **Beyond Food: Science versus Romance**
- 18 Food & Sustainability
 - > *Lost on Earth: Confusing Decision Dilemmas*
 - > *Tech Provides Clarity: New Transparency*
 - > *Feed the World: Food Security*
 - > *Going Vegan: Plant-based Protein instead of Meat & Co.*
 - > *Cellular Agriculture: Meat and Fish from the Laboratory*
 - > *GMO: Food Safety and Food Security*
- 55 Food & Well-being
 - > *Eat Yourself Fit: Food Keeps You Healthy*
 - > *Eat Yourself Well: Food Makes You Happy*
 - > *Eat Yourself Social: Food Creates Community*
- 76 Food & Service
 - > *Ready To Eat: The Five Food Distribution Channels*
 - > *Eight Food Delivery Models: Of Virtual Restaurants and Ghost Kitchens*
- 87 **Food Follows Function – Key Take-Aways**
 - > *Back End Trumps Front End*
 - > *Save the Planet*
 - > *Plant-based & Cell-based*
 - > *Gene Technology Causing Controversy*
 - > *High Sobriety*
 - > *The Kitchen Is Disappearing*

Summary

Farmers' markets, allotment gardens, homemade – at present, our longing for authenticity and naturalness determines how we eat. But we will have to take leave of these nostalgic ideas, even if doing so hurts. First-world romance will not help us feed ten billion people by 2050. Instead, we have to look at the global food system as a whole, change our (eating) habits, and accept that we cannot escape a sweeping process of technisation. There are three causes: environment, health, and everyday stress.

Many people are becoming more aware of the impact of our consumer and eating habits on the **environment, climate, and animal welfare**. Because it can no longer be denied: the climate crisis affects the production of food, while our diet is exacerbating this crisis. Experts are already proposing a «planetary health diet». For Europeans, this means a drastic reduction in the consumption of meat and sugar, more legumes, nuts, fruit and vegetables. Sustainability also means less food waste, more ecological packaging solutions, and more circular economy. To this must be added regulations relating to health, the environment, and consumer information.

It is fitting then that **health** has a high priority and is becoming increasingly important. Physical and mental well-being have become a lifestyle, and the right diet is more important than ever before. Consumers want to use the ideal nutrient combination and biohacking to eliminate feeling unwell and to get rid of digestive problems, tiredness, a lack of fitness and to optimise their mental powers. Consumer behaviour among the younger generations in particular is changing, for example with regard to intoxicants: less alcohol, fewer cigarettes, more cannabis that is not only smoked, but also eaten and drunk. The market for such easy-to-consume «drinkables» is booming, as they perfectly suit the well-being mindset of the younger generations.

Fast consumption fits the patterns of **everyday stress**. Consumers want efficient meals, and the food market is reacting. The entire food service sector, from fast-food outlets to fine-dining restaurants, is caught up in the supply frenzy. Online ordering is convenient, and demand is growing. The delivery market is booming and attracting many investors. Online delivery providers (ODPs) are the new players on the market and are changing the industry. For a long time now, delivery menus have not only been offered by traditional restaurants, but also by high-performance kitchens without a dining room that organise their meal deliveries most efficiently.

Even though not all players will survive in this new and competitive market, they all have one thing in common: without **technology**, they would not exist. The 39 food experts interviewed for this study agree that scientific innovations offer new solutions that go far beyond convenience. For them, tech topics head the list at all levels of the value chain: from new sources of protein – such as plant-based meat alternatives or meat grown from stem cells in the laboratory – and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to more automation, networking and augmented reality retail.

Historically speaking, our diet is unique. Avocado, papaya, strawberries, and curry are available during all seasons, ready-made food is available whenever you wish, around the clock, there is meat on our plates every day – this was unthinkable just a generation ago, and it is likely to be unthinkable again soon. Our food system is increasingly coming under pressure, from production to distribution to consumers. These developments are challenging politics, science, industry and sales as well as consumers to change our way of looking at things.

Food Follows Function – food has to fulfil two functions. It should protect the health of humankind as well as the health of our planet. To handle this balancing act, we need brave experiments, radical innovations and tech disruptions that skilfully combine human, artificial and emotional intelligence. This is the only way to secure both: Earth's biodiversity and the survival of humankind.

DISCLAIMER

Futures Studies is speculative. It tries to name and make phenomena visible that are not (yet) visible to most people. Their perception of the familiar obscures the view of the new. Futures Studies does not want to make precise forecasts, but to explore future possibilities, carry out thought experiments and stimulate the imagination with stories about the future.

Futures Studies cannot rely on empirical data; it does not exist for the future. Radical innovations are difficult to identify at the beginning and their potential can only be speculated on. Most plans and projections for the future therefore describe slow, gradual change. This generally captures the short-term development quite well – what will happen tomorrow in most cases differs very little from what happens today. In the long run, however, breaks, distortions and disruptions will determine the direction of development. «First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, and then you win.» (Mahatma Gandhi). Statements about the future are ultimately always speculative, we are aware of that. In order not to disturb the reading flow, however, they are not always formulated in a relativizing way in this study.

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