

5 key trends transforming the foodservice industry – and what that means for food safety

With 2020 taking us into a new decade, the team of food safety experts and environmental health consultants at Navitas Group highlight five key food-related trends and their implications for food safety.

1 Veganism becomes mainstream – According to the Vegan Society, in 2018 the UK launched more vegan products than any other nation. Between 2014 and 2019 the number of vegans in Great Britain quadrupled to more than 600,000 or 1.16% of the population – and is growing. Preparing vegan dishes clearly requires the strict separation of utensils and preparation areas – between vegetarian and vegan as well as meat and meat-free – and also being clear about the definition of what constitutes a vegan ingredient and what might not. Honey is an obvious one here – it is not considered vegan. However, there are also ingredients like beeswax on citrus fruits to be aware of and an ingredient called Shellac or E904 widely used in the food industry to give a gloss to fruit and vegetables.

2 Street food is big business – Street food has been one of the major food trends of the last couple of years and, before the current coronavirus pandemic, dedicated festivals, markets and individual street food trading units were popping up all over the country. It is a trend that has inspired a new generation of would-be chefs and foodpreneurs, as well as more established restaurant businesses. But whether part of a festival or on the high street, and however basic they might be, remember that these food stalls are still subject to inspection by local authority environmental health officers and need a Food Hygiene Rating.

As street food's popularity grows and more people get involved there will inevitably be some who succumb to the temptation to cut corners. But, while street food might be produced in cramped conditions in all manner of locations, there can be no excuses for not storing, preparing and cooking it safely.

3 The rise of dark kitchens – Dark kitchens, commercial kitchens that make food purely for the home delivery market, have really taken off since Deliveroo and Uber Eats expanded their focus from delivering food for takeaways, to also creating kitchens where food brands can prepare meals for delivery.

The fact that MacDonald's has recently opened its first delivery kitchen in west London tells you all you need to know about our appetite for delivered food and the vibrancy of this sector of the industry.

Dark kitchens are, of course, still subject to all the usual Food Standards Agency regulations and Food Hygiene Rating checks from local authorities.

However, the fact that they are not public-facing takeaways or restaurants risks a potential

lack of everyday scrutiny from customers. With that in mind, there needs to be greater transparency around Food Hygiene Ratings making it mandatory for brands operating from dark kitchens to display their rating online or at the point of ordering. This is the only way consumers can make informed decisions and reassure themselves that the food they are ordering has been produced to the highest standards.

4 The 'allergen emergency' – We are still over a year away from the mandatory introduction of new rules around full ingredients labelling for foods made on site and pre-packed for direct sale, designed to ensure consistency in how allergens are labelled. However, that does not mean food businesses can put this to the back of their minds.

The 72% increase in children admitted to hospital with severe allergic reactions in a five year period reported by the Natasha Allergy Research Foundation recently, has been dubbed an 'allergy emergency' and while the causes are unclear food businesses need to step up to the plate here.

In 2020 businesses need to double down on allergen management, allergen labelling and ensuring all staff are allergen aware and trained. Our own research found that some 83% of those who look out for allergen information expect kitchens to have up to date technology and systems in place to minimise the risk posed from allergens. This is so important because it only takes a single slip-up to potentially put customers in danger, with potentially life-threatening consequences.

5 A bad taste from food waste – Food waste is becoming increasingly unacceptable. It's not just a growing 'waste not, want not' mind-set; food waste is also viewed as morally wrong given the imbalance of food availability across the globe and environmentally irresponsible in terms of the resources squandered in getting food from farm to fork. An up-to-date approach to food safety can help reduce the staggering 920,000 tonnes of food thrown away by the hospitality sector every year.

Checking temperatures during cooking and service prevents food being thrown away because kitchen staff cannot be certain that it has been cooked and stored safely.

Food spoilage and waste can also be minimised by using devices to constantly monitor the temperatures in a kitchen's appliances. In the event of a fridge or freezer failure this technology can help avoid hundreds and even thousands of pounds worth of food waste.

As with allergen management, the signs are that consumers (and also the Government) is going to expect food businesses to do more to reduce the amount of food they waste.

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