

Probiotics, new cuts of steak, sugar substitutes and edible cannabis products are just some of the food trends predicted by industry experts for 2019. And a restaurant known to have bugs is usually a restaurant that's sure to close, given most people's reaction to all things creepy and crawly. However, if culinary prognosticators are to be believed, insects may soon be infesting them, making that be found on menus across the land. Oklahoma State University's Robert M. Kerr Food & Agricultural Products Center in its listing of the top food trends for 2019 included "Buggy Cuisine" among its choices. The Food & Agricultural Products Center (FAPC) is part of the university's Division of Agricultural Science and Natural Resources and works to supply technical and business information to support food and agricultural products and processing in the state. "Chefs are looking for new ways to incorporate protein in dishes as food costs continue to rise," the FAPC stated in a news release. "Insects are crawling to the top of the popularity list as a sensible choice for a protein substitute." Eating insects is not unheard of in many cultures, from South America to Africa to Asia. However, in the United States, insect consumption is usually more of a novelty, from downing the worm at the bottom of bottles of certain brands of tequila to partaking in such carnival midway fare as scorpion-topped pizza and flavored crickets that have sold at recent Tulsa State Fairs. The FAPC suggests that insects could be ground into powders that could be used to flavor everything from breads and pastries to cocktails. The FAPC's list of top 10 food trends for 2019 also includes:

- A focus on U.S. regional flavors: From tried-and-true barbecue sauces and flavorful potato recipes with a twist, food developers are becoming inspired by Kansas City barbecue, Southern Appalachian pimento cheese, Made in Oklahoma salsas and other areas from sea to shining sea. Consumers will see a growing number of their favorite products influenced by local, regional and global tastes.
- Gut-healthy options: Consumers are seeking foods, such as probiotics, that support healthy immune systems.
- Meat and more: More environmentally sustainable meat and

protein alternatives using plant and laboratory-created proteins. For those who still appreciate a good old-fashioned steak, cuts like the Vegas Strip Steak, merlot cut and bavette are making their way into select steak restaurants across the country. • Waste not, want not:

Finding ways to reduce food wastes by utilizing all elements of a given product, including vegetables. • More transparency on food sources: Information on genetically modified products, the seal of fair trade, producers who have grown products and the good treatment of

animals all will be factors influencing consumers. • Convenience cooking: The continued rise of meal subscription kits will lead to new technologies in 2019. These systems will allow consumers to order delivery or subscription services without the touch of a button; all

consumers have to do is talk to their voice systems connected to mobile devices to order every item on their grocery list. • So-called "super powders": Maca root, cocoa, tumeric and other herbs and rhizomes used for their flavor and healthy properties

in powder form. They can be used in smoothies, nutrition bars, soups and baked goods. • Sugar substitutes: Replacing refined sugars with sweeteners drawn from fruit, roots and vegetable derivatives, such as honey, stevia, coconut sugar, agave syrup, corn syrup, rice syrup

and birch sap. • Puffed and popped foods: In the coming year, pasta, seaweed and rice will be on the list of foods that food scientists will transform

into a puffed, crispy or popped version. Some of the FAPCA's predictions are shared by other groups that are in the trend-predicting business, such as the reduction of refined sugar; an increase in plant-based proteins that will mimic the taste and texture

of beef and pork; and transparency in how foods are sourced, from information on

genetically modified ingredients to fair-trade policies and ethical treatment of livestock. Other prognosticators envision

a whole bunch of other trends, from the use of cannabis by products such

as CBD (cannabidiol) in foods to deliver its therapeutic qualities better; the lowly cabbage

becoming the retro vegetable of the year, as cauliflower was a year or so

ago; the rise in popularity of Middle Eastern flavors, such as za'atar; and the

expansion of nondairy “milks” made from such ingredients as oats. San Francisco-based restaurant and hospitality consulting firm AF&Co. recently released its 2019 Hospitality Trend Report, which predicts that the food of the Republic of Georgia will be the trendiest cuisine of the year, with khachapuri, the country’s traditional dish of bread and cheese topped with an egg, as the dish of the year. Interestingly enough, Tulsa has been ahead of this particular trend since 2015, when The Bramble added its take on this deluxe comfort food to its menu, where it has become one of the restaurant’s staple dishes. James D. Watts Jr. 918-581-8478 james.watts@tulsaworld.com Twitter: watzworld Stay up-to-date on what's

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