

FOOD FORECAST



2026

Phew! What a year 2025 was for the foodservice industry, between continued labor challenges, the impacts of tariffs and inflation, the growth of global ingredients from cuisines like Korean and West African, the rise of AI in operations, ongoing climate pressures on supply

chain, more demand for delivery and more fractionalized marketplaces, and fast-moving tech adoption across contactless ordering and digital payments. What emerged from the constraints and challenges is a renewed focus on domestic sourcing, smarter menu engineering, and an appetite for bold flavors that justify premium positioning.

The year ahead will build on that momentum. The operators who will thrive aren't just surviving challenges—they're turning them into opportunities, reimagining what's possible on the plate.

It's our job at Baldor to equip our chef customers—all 16,000 of them, from Maine to Virginia, Michelin-starred white-tablecloth to quirky new quick serve—with the ingredients they need to be on the cutting edge of trends, flavor, and profitability. Today our product catalog includes more than 6,000 items across the gamut of produce, grocery, bakery, dairy, meat, poultry, and seafood. With our acquisition of Golden Meat Co. last year, we've also increased our selection of premium portioned meats, saving operators time and money on sourcing butchery talent. Meanwhile, our expert Merchandising team is always traveling the globe looking for what's new and what's next, trying to stay ahead of the curve while employing the highest sourcing standards.

Their work has informed this list of trends we expect to pop in the next 12 months. We hope that 2026 will be a delicious year for you.

2026 FOOD FORECAST

Our Directors of Merchandising are available for comment on any of the below topics.



RED MEAT RESURGENCE

After years of alternative proteins dominating headlines, red meat is back at the center of the plate. At Baldor, we've seen a 28% YOY increase in lamb sales, alongside growing demand for dry-aged beef and heritage pork. Among trending cuts are **hanger steaks** and **flank steaks**, with 19% YOY growth for **beef patties**. "Every menu has a smashburger now," says Mark Pastore, Vice President of Business Development.

Strong demand caused beef prices to surge in 2025, complicated further by fewer

domestic cattle due to drought and high prices for young calves. While this tight market is expected to continue well into 2026, our direct relationships with our suppliers via Golden Meat Co. mean Baldor is well-positioned to have high-quality cuts available at the best possible prices.

And Mark expects the red meat renaissance to continue: "The next chapter? High-quality, whole-muscle beef, and slower grinds to create a burger that lets the meat shine."

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE



The next generation of agricultural leaders is here, and women are at the forefront. "On family farms, we're increasingly seeing daughters stepping up and taking leadership roles,"

says Heather Hart, Senior Category Manager, Fruit. We're proud to partner with the growing network of farms with prominent female leadership, including Hudson River Fruit, Meadows & More, Perry & Sons, Lady Moon Farms, Bay Baby Produce, Kitchen Garden Farm, and Hepworth Farms.

PORTIONED TO PERFECTION

"Our chef customers are increasingly looking for value-added and pre-cut produce," says Matthew Rendine, Director of Merchandising, Produce. It isn't about cutting corners—it's strategic efficiency. With costs rising and skilled labor scarce, smart operators are embracing products that preserve quality while streamlining prep—kitchen staples such as **julienned red onions** and **matchstick carrots** from our Fresh Cuts division (which preps hundreds of fruit and veg items in the Bronx); perfectly-portioned **6-ounce filet mignon steaks** from our butchery arm Golden Meat Co.; and **pre-sliced Scottish salmon** from our seafood purveyor Pierless Fish. "Pre-portioned items are the way of the future," says Mark Pastore, Vice President of Business Development.





AFRO-CARIBBEAN FLAVORS

The vibrant, complex flavors of the African diaspora and Caribbean islands are claiming their rightful place on menus. Think beyond jerk seasoning: **Scotch bonnet peppers**, **okra**, **oxtail**, and **tamarind** are showing up in everything from fine dining tasting menus to fast-casual concepts, offering depth, heat, and aromatic complexity that resonate with diners seeking bold, globally inspired flavors. It helps that restaurants like Chef Kwame Onwuachi's Dōgon and Tatiana, Chef Paul Carmichael's Kawaba, and Chef India Doris's Markette have gotten their due on "best restaurants" lists, introducing more consumers to these great flavors.

DEEPENING DOMESTIC

Between tariff impacts and supply chain vulnerabilities, chefs are doubling down on ingredients grown and produced in the U.S. "A lot of chefs are keeping their dollar in the country," says Kevin Lindgren, Director of Golden Meat Co., where he sources premium American beef from trusted partners like Niman Ranch and DemKota Ranch.

While Baldor has always been committed to sourcing locally and domestically whenever possible, we're looking at even more domestic alternatives to import products to meet demand, including **SarVecchio Cheese**, a Parmesan-style version from Wisconsin's Sartori Cheese company, and **Harvest Moon**, a Mimolette-inspired cheese produced by 5 Spoke Creamery in New York's Hudson Valley. "Domestic cheesemakers have stepped up, crafting high-quality aged options without the import premium," says Emily Murphy, Director of Merchandising, Specialty.



YUZU GROWS UP

The sour trend shows no signs of slowing. “If anything, it’s accelerating,” says Suzy Kang, Category Manager, Grocery. Last year, we noted unprecedented growth in **yuzu**, and that has continued, with triple-digit sales increases over the last few years. Now we’re seeing advancements from the first wave of 100% juice, puree, and infused sparkling waters, with openness to yuzu being incorporated in more sophisticated ways such as YUZUCO’s **Green Tea Yuzu-Ade**, in a Japanese-inspired Arnold Palmer; **yuzu kosho**, a fermented condiment of green chili, yuzu and salt; and Feel Good Booch’s **Jasmine, Yuzu, Apple, Honey Kombucha**. Plus, we’ve seen 209% growth in **green yuzu**. We’re also seeing the trend is spilling over into **sudachi**—the smaller, more intensely aromatic Japanese citrus that offers the same sour-bright-floral flavor profiles with even more punch. With **sudachi juice** sales up 469% YOY, chefs are discovering its versatility in everything from ceviche to vinaigrettes to desserts.



BOTANICALS BLOSSOM

We’re seeing floral and botanical ingredients move beyond garnish territory into starring roles. Floral syrup flavors like **lavender** and **elderflower** are being incorporated into specialty lattes and desserts—such as rose-cardamom tiramisu or elderflower-prosecco granita. Meanwhile edible flowers such as **Bachelor’s buttons** and **borage flowers** are becoming functional ingredients that contribute taste and aroma to refined dishes and cocktails.

HYBRID PASTRY

The cronut may have launched the hybrid pastry movement over a decade ago, but today’s innovations show the category’s continued evolution. “There’s a real appetite for innovative formats that push technique forward while still feeling playful and familiar,” says Ashley Hickey, Category Manager, Bakery. Dominique Ansel’s Papa d’Amour bakery has introduced croissant bao filled with red bean paste. Meanwhile, cruffins (croissant dough baked into a muffin shape) and croissant cubes are appearing across bakery cases, catering programs, and fine dining menus.



BREEDING FOR SERVICE

Plant breeders are developing new fruit and vegetable varieties specifically for restaurant efficiency. In partnership with Norwich Meadows Farm, Cornell University breeder Michael Mazourek—the man who brought us the **Honeynut squash**, **Koginut squash**, and **Habanada pepper**—has released the **Sweet Bea squash**. It has the same sweet, rich flavor but is four times larger, a more practical size for food service. Mazourek has also introduced the **Red Gemelli Mazinna pepper**, the so-called “Jimmy Nardello 2.0” with more uniformity (think less rolled up and wrinkly) for ease of cut-

ting. These aren’t GMOs—they’re the result of traditional selective breeding aimed at solving real kitchen problems.





PROPER NAME GRAPES

Move aside, wine—table grapes are ready for their proper noun glow-up. Just as heirloom tomatoes and apple varieties became menu darlings, specific grape varieties are gaining traction in the culinary world. **Cotton Candy** may have been the first mover here, but consider this your official introduction to **Candy Snap**, **Gum Drops**, **Moon Drops** and **Tear Drops** grapes—prized for their exceptional sweetness and unique shapes that stand out in dishes and on cheeseboards.



SNACKING TOMATOES

The snacking tomato category is exploding. Sunset brand has driven this trend forward: When CEO and President Paul Mastronardi took over his family tomato business, he admittedly wasn't much of a fan of the red "fruit."

So he tasked his team with innovating to make a tomato he'd want to eat. The result has been a selection of tiny, intensely flavored varieties like **Flavor Bombs**, **Lolli Bombs**, **Honey Bombs**, **Sugar Bombs**, **Umami Bombs**, **Bahama Bombs** and **Sunset Sprinkles** that are joining sweet Sungolds in popularity with chefs and consumers. Their natural sweetness and pop-in-your-mouth appeal make them perfect for salads, grain bowls, and standalone snacking. Chefs appreciate their consistent sizing for plating and their concentrated flavor.



NOSTALGIC DINING

Shrimp cocktail, duck à l'orange, frog legs, twice-baked potatoes, and steak Diane are making triumphant returns to menus. Is this the 1970s or 1980s? No, but “what’s old is new again,” says Emily Murphy, Director of Merchandising, Specialty, who suggests that the trend is owed to diners craving approachable luxury and dishes with proven staying power. Restaurants like The Eighty Six and Wild Cherry in NYC are delivering nostalgic foods in environments with banquette seating, plates emblazoned with the restaurant name, retro bar carts and tableside preparations. These aren’t ironic throwbacks but thoughtful revivals that respect the original while showcasing contemporary ingredient quality and refined skills.

THE BALDOR HOT LIST

Based on year-over-year sales data, these are the products seeing the most significant growth in recent months.

PRODUCT	% GROWTH
Sudachi Juice	469%
Cilantro Macho	384%
Green Yuzu	209%
Ceremonial Matcha Powder	181%
Bachelor’s Buttons	151%
Zero Acre Cooking Oil	139%
Flavor Bombs Cherry Tomatoes	82%
Duck Breasts	65%
Sourdough Bread Loaves	55%
Cottage Cheese	50%
Coconut Water	48%



Explore the latest and greatest additions to our catalog.

ABOUT BALDOR SPECIALTY FOODS



Baldor Specialty Foods is one of the largest importers and distributors of fresh produce and specialty foods in Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions. With a focus on local, peak season and small farms, Baldor curates a selection of more than 6,000 items—including produce, meat, poultry, fish, dairy and specialty items—and manages more than 16,000 major restaurant, food service, retail and corporate accounts from Portland, ME to Richmond VA. Beginning as Balducci’s fruit stand in Greenwich Village in 1946, Baldor maintains its original promise—curate and deliver the best and freshest foods in the world. With quality you can trust and service that delivers, Baldor seeks to provide great specialty foods and logistics that give their customers an edge. To learn more, go to www.baldorfood.com.