



2026 TRENDS

Food

TREND 1

Consolidation and Strategic Breakups

TREND 2

GLP-1 Drugs Reshape Demand

TREND 3

Economic Pressures Drive Value

TREND 4

Wellness Grows with Uneven Access

TREND 5

Functional Ingredients Gain Traction

As the food industry enters 2026, growth is no longer driven by a single consumer mindset. Companies are navigating a market defined by diverging behaviors that exist at the same time. Some consumers are investing more deeply in wellness and preventative nutrition, while others are pulling back, prioritizing affordability and convenience. Access is increasingly shaping how people eat, whether it's tied to income, insurance coverage, or premium food options.

These contrasts are influencing every layer of the industry. Portfolio strategies now reflect both consolidation and separation. Wellness innovation continues, but participation skews toward higher-income households. New health technologies such as GLP-1 medications are reshaping demand, though uneven coverage introduces uncertainty around long-term impact. Even ingredient trends reflect this divide, as functional foods gain traction alongside sustained demand for traditional proteins.

Together, these dynamics are pushing food companies to operate across multiple market conditions at once. The following trends outline how structural change and evolving consumer expectations are shaping food strategies heading into 2026.



TREND 1

Consolidation and Strategic Breakups

Mergers and acquisitions remain active across the food industry, but they are increasingly occurring alongside a countertrend of large multinationals breaking into smaller discrete companies. Large-scale deals continue to reshape how brands [participate across categories](#). Mars's [acquisition of Kellanova for \\$35.9 billion](#) expands the company beyond confectionery into broader snacking segments, enabling greater participation in adjacent categories. The deal also [strengthens Mars's ability](#) to respond to demand for healthier, higher-value food options.



Multinationals are also acquiring emerging brands to capture momentum in better-for-you segments. [PepsiCo's \\$1.2 billion acquisition of Siete Foods](#) reflects this approach, as the brand's grain-free tortillas and related products emphasize reduced salt, sugar, and saturated fat. Hershey also sought to broaden its portfolio through the [acquisition of organic salty snack brand Lesser Evil](#). These moves allow larger companies to tap into fast-growing niches without extended internal development.

At the same time, brands are focusing on complexity reduction as a strategic priority. Kraft Heinz plans to separate its sauces and spreads business from its grocery portfolio, forming [two publicly traded companies](#) to sharpen focus on distinct consumer needs. Keurig Dr. Pepper has announced plans to separate its coffee and beverage units following its [\\$18 billion acquisition of JDE Peet's](#). [Unilever's planned spin-off](#) of The Magnum Ice Cream Company further illustrates how portfolios are being restructured to create more agile businesses with more streamlined category focus.

For food companies, this trend underscores the importance of clarity in brand identity. Growth is coming from focused portfolios and close alignment with specific consumer expectations rather than broad strategies.



TREND 2

GLP-1 Drugs Reshape Demand

GLP-1 weight-loss medications are reshaping food consumption patterns, though their long-term impact remains uneven and closely tied to access. Adoption continues to rise, with [23% of U.S. households](#) currently using GLP-1 drugs and projections that these households will represent 35% of all food and beverage units sold by 2030.



The effects of this trend on spending are already becoming visible. Households with at least one GLP-1 user [reduced grocery spending by approximately 6%](#) within six months, with high-income households cutting spending by nearly 9%. Caloric intake also declines, with GLP-1 users consuming roughly [700 fewer calories per day](#) and showing the largest reductions in processed and sugary foods.

Recent insurance decisions complicate the accessibility of these medications. [Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts](#), for instance, will no longer cover GLP-1 drugs for weight loss for employers with fewer than 100 employees, while larger employers may opt in at additional cost. Harvard Pilgrim Health Care also plans to end coverage for most commercial plans as of January 1, and Medicare does not cover GLP-1s for weight loss, with some [state Medicaid programs](#) rolling back coverage.

The implications of these decisions create a planning challenge for food companies rather than a shift in a single direction. Brands must prepare for reduced consumption among some consumers while maintaining relevance for those without access. Smaller portions and nutrient-dense formulations will be increasingly important as companies navigate uncertain adoption patterns.



TREND 3

Economic Pressures Drive Value

Economic pressure continues to shape food purchasing behavior, reinforcing more traditional recession-style patterns. After a [1.1% increase](#) from August to September 2025, the Producer Price Index for All Foods stood 4.2% above year-ago levels. In response, consumers are moving to private label offerings and actively seeking deals across channels.



Retailers are leaning into this shift to meet consumer demand. [Amazon](#) launched a private-label grocery line emphasizing affordability, with many items priced under \$5 and more than 1,000 products spanning meat, produce, dairy, and snacks. In foodservice, Buyers Edge Platform reports that [appetizer orders increased 20%](#) year over year, while main and dessert orders remained flat or declined, reflecting desires to reduce check size through appetizer portions linked with promotions.

[Convenience stores](#) are also benefiting from value-driven behavior. As menu prices rise, [c-store food offerings](#) become more appealing due to affordability and flexibility. Expectations for c-store quality, however, are rising alongside usage. [70% of consumers](#) say they expect convenience stores to offer healthier options, increasing pressure to improve nutritional messaging rather than relying solely on price.

As price pressures force consumers to reassess spending on food, higher-quality store brands will appeal to their desire for value. Grocers that further invest in their private label products while leaning on brands for more niche and trend setting portfolios can build [stronger consumer relationships](#) in 2026.



TREND 4

Wellness Grows with Uneven Access

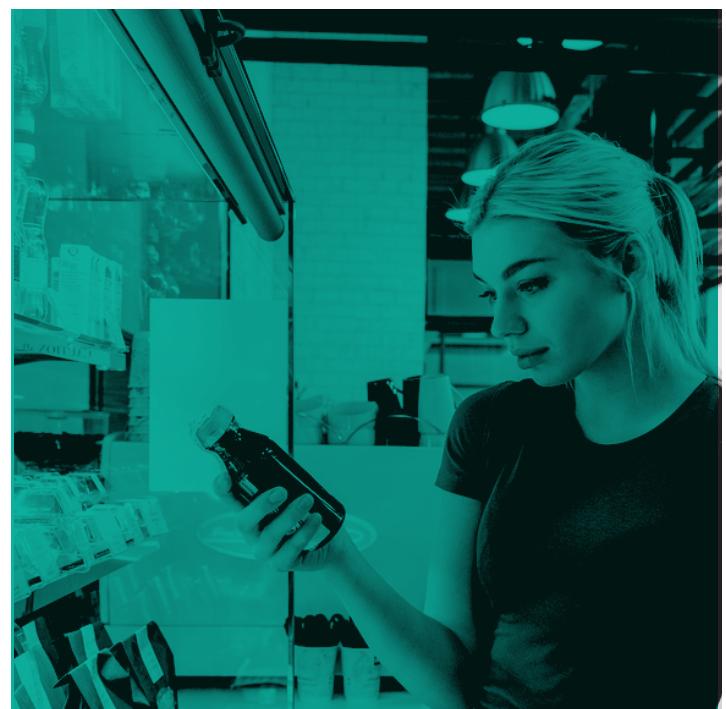
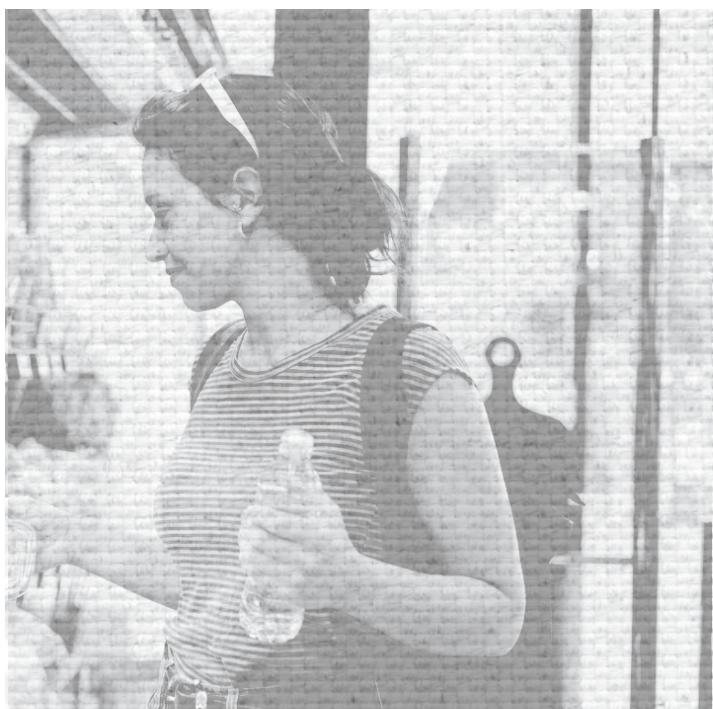


Wellness remains a growth driver, but participation is increasingly shaped by income and access. The global health and wellness food market is projected to grow from [\\$938.6 billion in 2023 to \\$2.18 trillion by 2032](#), representing a CAGR of 9.8% from 2024 to 2032. Despite this momentum, economic pressures [limit participation for lower-income consumers](#), who are often constrained by the cost of fresh produce and healthier food options.

Protein continues to anchor wellness demand, with [75% of consumers](#) adding more protein to their diets. [Danone's launch of Silk Protein](#) illustrates how brands are responding with new plant-based offerings that fit into daily routines. At the same time, [marketing](#) and social media are rapidly shaping consumer perception of protein, increasing the importance of aligning claims with credible research and product quality.

Fiber is also emerging as a complementary priority, one that may [overtake protein](#) as the next major health trend due to widespread nutritional gaps. [90% of women and 97% of men](#) in the U.S. aren't meeting daily fiber requirements, but awareness of these needs is growing. Trends like "[fibermaxxing](#)" are gaining traction, prompting brands to expand fiber-rich offerings.

As protein and fiber take center stage among wellness interests, food companies must focus on precision. Wellness innovation remains viable, but success depends on understanding which consumers can participate and tailoring products and messaging accordingly.



TREND 5

Functional Ingredients Gain Traction

Innovation on the ingredient level is becoming a primary tool for delivering sustainability and differentiation. Brands are reformulating products to add nutritional benefits, [shifting away from an earlier model](#) where taste and low cost dominated success.

Gut health continues to serve as an entry point into functional foods, with fermentation and fiber-rich ingredients gaining attention as consumers connect digestive health with overall well-being. Within this landscape, mushrooms have emerged as a leading signal of how functional ingredients are moving into mainstream food formats.

The global mushroom market was valued at [\\$65.6 billion in 2024 and is projected to reach \\$156.3 billion by 2033](#), growing at a CAGR of 10.2% from 2025 to 2033. Mushrooms provide plant-based protein, delivering approximately [3.3 grams per 100 grams](#). This composition maintains a lower resource footprint than animal proteins, appealing to environmentally conscious consumers.

Innovation in products spans multiple categories, including mushroom coffee, jerky, chocolate, and meat alternatives. [Functional formats](#) such as mushroom shots and adaptogenic drinks are gaining traction for perceived mental health benefits. [Lion's mane](#), in particular, has been popularized for its associations with cognitive support and improved focus.

At the same time, traditional proteins remain strong. [Beef sales](#) continue to perform, and [chicken consumption](#) is increasing, reinforcing that functional ingredients are supplementing rather than displacing established eating habits. For companies, the opportunity lies in integrating functional ingredients alongside familiar products, balancing innovation with continuity in 2026.



Looking Ahead

Heading into 2026, food companies face a market shaped by contrast rather than consistency. Growth opportunities exist across GLP-1 medications, wellness, value, and functional innovation, but they are distributed unevenly across consumer segments. Strategic success will depend on managing these parallel realities by scaling where demand is strong and simplifying where focus is needed to build a portfolio that can perform across shifting consumption patterns.

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