



THE SCOOP

SERVING UP FOODSERVICE INSPIRATION

THE HOTTEST
APPS
TO ACCELERATE
SALES





SWEET-INTEL



FOR STARTER SUCCESS

There's no better way to kick off a meal than to indulge in appetizers. These appetite-stimulating starters are so popular that 90% of operators offer them on their menu.¹

However, this category has been strongly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with 14% fewer items featured on menus.²

Therefore, it's increasingly critical for operators to select unique and appealing dishes to encourage orders. In this issue of The Scoop, we'll explore ideas that will help you do just that.

DON'T JUST WING IT



PLEASE THE CROWD

Among the most popular appetizer items, chicken wings boast a 32% share of app orders.¹ Wings are on 44% of menus, including establishments like pizza chains and family diners.² And while there have been some recent price fluctuations, they're not going anywhere. In fact, they're such a favorite that chefs can experiment with creating unique sauce flavors, adding sweet, spicy, savory, and everything in between.

THE FOLLOWING ARE TRENDING FLAVORS AND SAUCES TO CONSIDER.²

Mango Habanero	Lemon Pepper
Garlic Sauce	Maple
Soy Sauce	



IT'S ALL ABOUT THE SAUCE

Want a great way to provide new options while keeping costs down? Refresh appetizers already on your menu with new sauces and toppings. This delivers new and exciting culinary experiences for your guests without introducing entirely new menu items. Amp up staples like french fries or soft pretzels with a dipping sauce bar, or build your brand with signature sauces exclusive to your establishment. Trending favorites include global flavors like Korean BBQ, harissa, and tzatziki.²

42%

of consumers say they look forward to the signature sauces served at a particular restaurant.²

HIT THE SPOT WITH CHEESE

Want an easy way to please the crowds? Just say cheese. A perennial favorite, cheese boasts 79.3% penetration on appetizer menus.² One of the hottest categories is charcuterie boards. Make yours memorable by pairing local cheeses with candied nuts and preserves made fresh in house.

Another growing category? Cheese curds! On fried appetizer menus, curds have seen a four-year growth of 76%.¹ Unique dipping sauces help them stand out.

And finally, consider cheese dips. These have a wide appeal with lots of possibilities, such as the tangy whipped goat cheese in our [Candied Fall Squash](#) recipe, created by Chef Michael Ponzio.





CHEF'S CORNER

For each edition of The Scoop from ASR Group™, we bring you exclusive insights from Eleonora Lahud, research chef from ASR Group.



CHEF MICHAEL PONZIO | Executive Chef at Union League Club of Chicago

This month, we welcome a special guest to the Chef's Corner — Chef Michael Ponzio. Executive Chef at Union League Club of Chicago, Chef Ponzio learned to cook from his Italian grandmother. He went on to receive a formal education in culinary arts from Kendall College in Chicago. He and Eleonora recently caught up to discuss how operators can put their best foot forward with an enticing appetizer menu.

WHAT INSPIRES YOUR APPROACH TO APPETIZERS?

Ponzio: For me, food is about getting to know the people I'm cooking it for. I love being able to connect with people like that. Seasons have a huge impact on what I do. The seasonality of food and the ingredients can help enhance experiences. That really drives the creativity of what I'm doing, but the reason I do it is being able to be a part of people's experiences. Some of our best memories are formed around food. It gets me thinking, and gets my creative juices flowing.

Lahud: It's the first taste you have at the table. Having the perfect appetizer begins your journey of the whole meal, and opens the door of the beautiful meal that your customer is expecting.

Ponzio: You're right, *the appetizer determines the pace of the rest of the meal*. I always say the first and the last course are most important. The first course sets the standard of what's to come, and the last course saves the day.

WHAT ROLE DO SUGARS AND SWEETENERS PLAY IN CREATING DELICIOUS APPETIZERS?

Lahud: Sugar is a staple, and often we can use those staples in our kitchens and make it the star ingredient. In our test kitchens, when we do savory, we're always so impressed with how much flavor we can bring out with light or dark brown sugar. Bacon, for example, is amazing to pair with ingredients like sugar.

Ponzio: That's a great point about bacon. Now, more than ever, people are looking at the ingredients we're using, down to the type of sugar, flour, or salt. You can also add different types of sweetness, adding layers to vegetables that are already sweet.

WHAT IS TRENDING RIGHT NOW IN APPETIZERS?

Ponzio: Barbecue is becoming stronger. People want to see items that have a little kiss of smoke to them. Rethinking classics is certainly trending. I recently made a deviled egg appetizer bruléed with sugar, and it was cool, fun, and different. People loved it because it was an old classic they might have had growing up, but we took a twist on it with texture and the flavors inside.

Lahud: We also see trends with tapas. People want to go out and not put all of their eggs in one basket – they want to try several dishes.





SWEETLY DISTINCT



SALES-BUILDING IDEAS FROM ASR GROUP

Keep sales hot while staying conscientious. These trends & insights will keep you on top.

Earth-Friendly Takeout

Takeout and delivery have increased dramatically during the COVID-19 pandemic, and they're here to stay. Unfortunately, most takeout containers are made from plastics or contain chemicals known as PFAS. Consider going green. [Tellus® Products](#) by ASR Group offers compostable tableware made from upcycled sugarcane fibers and other U.S.-grown plant fibers, including hardwood. They contain no added PFAS.



Join the Meatless Trend

With menu growth of 99% over four years, meatless options are taking off.² Forty-one percent of millennials enjoy trying new plant-based foods and beverages at restaurants.¹ One plant-based alternative to add to the appetizer menu: cauliflower wings. Cauliflower wings are a hot take on a classic that can be easily paired with any flavor sauce. It's just one of the ways chefs can get creative by putting a spin on traditional foods. Another twist on a familiar favorite: Try dusting brown sugar over sweet potato fries.



Don't forget brunch

Though traditionally more prevalent at evening meals, appetizers can be a great option to boost check averages at brunch. Stimulate appetites with both sweet and savory choices to round out guests' brunch experience. On the savory side, experiment with flights of bacon or deviled eggs. [Sugared donut bites](#) or beignets served with an array of sweet dipping sauces make a sweet and shareable brunchtime treat. Or deliver the ultimate sweet and savory brunch combo with [Mini Chicken and Waffles Topped with Turbinado Syrup](#).





FEATURED RECIPE

BROWN SUGAR BACON JALAPEÑO POPPERS

*Created by Chef Michael Ponzio
Executive Chef at Union League Club of Chicago*

With a mix of spicy, smoky, and a hint of sweetness, you can't go wrong with this recipe.

HOW TO MAKE:

Ingredients:

- ½ cup Pimento Cheese
- ½ cup Cream Cheese
- 2 Garlic Cloves, Roasted
- 6 Jalapeños, Halved Lengthwise
- 8 pieces Bacon
- ½ cup Domino® or C&H® Dark Brown Sugar
- 1 Tbsp Water

Instructions:

1. Mix the pimento cheese, cream cheese, and roasted garlic until well mixed.
2. Stuff each pepper half with the cream cheese mixture, and wrap with bacon.
3. Place the peppers in a 375-degree oven for 8 minutes.
4. Combine the brown sugar and water, and place the mixture on top of each pepper. Then place the peppers back in the oven for an additional 10 minutes until the bacon is crispy.



FEATURED PRODUCT



This month's featured product is a secret ingredient to amplify flavor on your appetizer menu. To create tastes that are deep and rich, choose Domino® or C&H® Dark Brown Sugar. The robust molasses notes make this sugar ideal for full-bodied and savory recipes. Use it to add boldness and color to homemade sauces and marinades. It caramelizes beautifully when heated and adds complex dark and spicy notes to breads and baked goods.

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