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## Marvelous Mushrooms

As consumers focus on health and value, mushrooms are becoming an all-important addition to the foodservice industry.

BY CAROL BAREUTHER, R.D.

**M**ushrooms are indeed mushrooming in their inclusion on restaurant menus. According to information from food from 2008, a market research firm based in Windsor, IL, as supplied by the San Jose, CA-based Mushroom Cooked, 77 percent of the Top 200 restaurant chains now have mushrooms on their menus. Bart Minor, Mushroom Council president, says, "These references highlight mushroom's versatility and cross every foodservice segment from Italian to Mexican and from every part of the menu from burgers and pizzas to entrees and salads."

"This trend looks like it is here to stay. Specialty mushrooms were ranked among the Top 10 fastest produce items by 2,094 American Culinary Federation-member chefs from across the nation in the Washington, DC-based National Restaurant Association's 2008 "What's Hot, What's Not" survey."

What's driving this trend? David S. Schacter, Fred Bechtel, general manager of National Mushroom Farms, headquartered in Avondale, PA, points out, "Mushrooms have several what we call the 'five' taste after salty, sweet, sour and bitter. Umami is most often described as a savory, brothy, rich or meaty taste sensation. Other foods such as aged cheese and meat also have umami. That's what makes a Mushroom Cheddar Cheese Burger so popular, a combination three foods with savory taste."

Another factor is cost. Bechtel adds, "We're seeing operators use more mushrooms and less meat. In other words, they're reducing or replacing the protein in a dish with mushrooms. Mushrooms provide great plate cover and presentation while lowering food costs, and they're vital to foodservice operators today."

### WHAT'S HOT

According to Mike Reed, director of sales for the western region for Monterey Mushrooms Inc., in Gilroy, CA, the mainstay



Many varieties of mushrooms can be included in an Asian Mushroom Stir-Fry.

in foodservice applications is the white button mushroom. It's definitely the most popular and highest volume seller."

Kevin Demerott, national sales manager for National Mushroom Farms LP, headquartered in West Square, PA, adds, "Some foodservice operators are looking for something new and different for value. As a result, they are using specialty mushrooms like Cremini, mushroom-like Cremini and Portobello."

More chefs are looking for an enhancement. "Like the mushroom and other specialty mushrooms, regional and organic foods are hot. You might see more white mushrooms in the menu, many times with firm tasting them that is not."

According to the National Mushroom Council, mushrooms are casual dining chains and fast-food chains. In California, CA, and are especially items with an Asian twist. Many operators in the market are using mushrooms in their menus.

Shitakes are found on fine-dining menus too. For example, chef Gary Dordick at Pappas & Pappas in Atlanta, GA, often uses them in a Warm Baby Spinach and Watercress Salad with Sautéed Ricotta and Caramelized Shitake Mushrooms. In Seattle, WA, chef Tom Douglas at El Gaucho uses a highly regarded Alsatian King Salmon with a fragrant Shitake Relish.

Tracy Lofgren, of North One 10 in

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