

January 23, 2017

3 FUTURE-FACING FOOD TRENDS FROM BITTEN LA

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE OF FOOD LOOK LIKE? THE FOUNDER OF BITTEN SHARES SOME OF THE BIG TRENDS SHIFTING THE SPACE...

Towards the end of 2016, [Bitten](#) held its third main-stage conference, tapping, for the first time, into the robust and unique Los Angeles food scene. For the event, Bitten, whose mission is to engage a creative audience outside of the food space by looking at food through the lens of creativity, art, trends, technology, innovation and culture, gathered 17 speakers to give their thoughts on the future of food. Attendees learned that black garlic, purple sweet potatoes, and Jackfruit will be popping up more and more on restaurant menus and in CPG products before they go super mainstream, and [cannabis cooking is going high end](#) with chef-designed pop up dinners around the country, going mainstream with everything from frozen meals to macrons. [One food trend from Korea](#) has lonely urbanites tuning in to livestreams of other lonely urbanites to watch them eat MASSIVE meals while chatting with viewers. But some of the takeaways and trends discussed during the day looked forward at the changes and innovations shaping what will come next in the food space.

Today, Bitten's founder Naz Riahi is looking [back to the talks](#) and considering some of the big takeaways:

1. Food Innovation Is Facing Our Food Anxiety:

According to trend forecaster Maude Standish, we're currently experiencing the [Axis of the Food Anxiety Matrix](#): "every single person is trying to figure what the heck is going on with food," what buzzwords like organic and non-GMO really mean, and how it all relates to what they should be eating. Obesity is up, hunger is an issue, and food scares are common. There's an uncertainty about the present nature of food, and its future, which means that lots of innovators are asking "what if" to solve some of the biggest problems in food today. The meatless burger—which looks, smells, and even bleeds like a real burger—was invented to figure out how we can make the plants around us taste more like the meat we prefer, and decrease the earth-impacts that meat-eating creates. Soylent is asking what would happen if food was all about optimizing our bodies functions, removing the experience (scent, community, etc.) of food and focusing on healthy convenience and affordability. Food and science fiction are colliding as the future of food as we know it grows more uncertain, and new ways of fueling ourselves might take over.

2. Ugly Food Can Save the Planet:

One way to combat food insecurity is through reduction of food waste, which is also a hot topic of environmentalism. Ben Simon, the CEO of Imperfect Produce, [reports that](#) the world is currently starting to talk about food waste in a serious way—with the Pope, President Obama, and John Oliver all weighing in on the issue. Currently 40 percent of America's food is wasted, while 50 million people don't know where their next meal is coming from—that means "there's a food recovery revolution waiting to happen." All across the country, startups are tackling this issue by partnering with farmers, restaurants, and consumers. Donating surplus foods and encouraging the resale of ugly fruits and vegetables are major components of the effort, and Imperfect Produce is one innovator in the space, delivering boxes of un-pretty fruits and veggies to subscribers for a fraction of the grocery store cost.

3. There's No Such Thing as An Overnight Trend:

Karen Caplan, President and CEO of Frieda's Specialty Produce—a company responsible for introducing American consumers to fresh mushrooms and kiwis (among other things)—traced the trajectory of the kale trend and taught us that while we may think some foods are an overnight phenomenon, [it takes about two decades for something to become a trend](#). It might seem as if kale was “suddenly everywhere, [but] it actually took about 18-years to reach the point it has today. The *LA Times* published a poem about it in 1996, niche interest in kale chips grew in the early 2000s, and in 2013 *Bon Appetit* declared it The Year of Kale—now, kale is on the menu at McDonald's." Dragonfruit is another example of the “20-year overnight success.” (Freya Estrella the founder of Ludlow Cocktails, also reminded attendees that [an “overnight” success takes FIVE YEARS](#).) Which means that there is no such thing as an “overnight trend”—and tracking the small shifts in food is an important part of staying ahead of the curve. Keeping an eye on chefs is key—they're the experimenters, and today, they're even growing their own ingredients to start trends themselves.

Naz Riahi is the founder of Bitten, a conference series that positions food as a pillar of pop culture and an insights and ideas firm that works with major brands within and outside of food to ignite creativity within teams, tap into culture for ideas, and connect with their community in a more meaningful way.

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