

Key Trend 2024: Gen X Eating

A relatively small but financially powerful demographic, Gen X's tastes, preferences and purchasing power are set to influence future food product development. We highlight key opportunities across categories including meals, desserts, sauces and condiments, ingredients and packaging

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Executive summary

Gen X, sometimes called the 'forgotten generation', is a financially powerful cohort aged 44 to 59 in 2024. While they make up less than a fifth of the US and UK populations, their buying power far exceeds their size – making them a key target for new product development. This report calls out the biggest areas of opportunity, while Gen X Eating Habits: Brand Strategies offers retail and marketing insight.

Key trends include:

- **Clean convenience:** balancing the demands of work, life and family, Gen X want shortcuts to help create quick but nutritious meals. Innovators are focusing on natural and additive-free options with short ingredients lists
- **Conscious consumption:** packaging and products that minimise waste and maximise resources speak to Gen X demand for more sustainable, value-led products
- **Preventative wellness:** increasingly concerned with ageing and its potential health complications, Gen X will look to embrace functional foods designed for wellbeing support and disease prevention
- **Globally inspired flavour exploration:** Gen Xers are increasingly expanding their palates with more adventurous global flavours
- **Prestige eats:** moving into midlife, Gen Xers are more likely to be able to reward themselves or splash out on specialty items. Innovators are creating products that marry quality and consciousness

Category applications included in this report: **meals, desserts, sauces and condiments, ingredients and packaging**



Gen X makes up more than a third of all grocery store food buyers in the US and represents £20 of every £100 spent in UK restaurants

Analysis

More financially comfortable than other demographic groups, Gen X represent a huge, but largely overlooked, opportunity for food brands.

Simultaneously juggling family, professional and social lives, Gen X are moving through midlife with a full plate.

When it comes to food, products that help them quickly and easily get fresh, flavourful and nutritionally dense meals on the table represent a key opportunity. Clean convenience, including value-added products that are free from preservatives and artificial ingredients, will emerge as key trend for this busy but increasingly health-conscious demographic. Creative solutions to help households be more resourceful and sustainable will also rise, as living costs and environmental concerns put pressure on consumers. Ageing and its associated health concerns will drive Gen X towards functional products that support longevity, health, energy and everything from common health issues and diseases to menopause. And at-home products with premium flavours and ingredients will deliver an occasional treat, reflecting Gen X's more comfortable position as they enter their peak earning years.

What does this mean for you?

Tap into Gen X's brand loyalty and spending power, with products that cater to their transitional life stage and emerging health needs.



@thomasinamiers

Clean convenience

Convenience is top of mind for Gen X, many of whom are juggling careers as well as caregiving for children and ageing parents. However, when it comes to feeding themselves and their families, they are unwilling to compromise on health, seeking nutritionally dense, whole-food-focused options with clean labels.

The majority (64%) of US Gen X say they are more likely to prepare food at home versus ordering delivery or opting for a fresh-prepared product – and when it comes to cooking, they are more interested than ever before in clean products. Some 82% of Americans believe clean labels are important, and almost as many are willing to pay more for products they perceive to be healthier. Across Asia, nearly 60% say clean labels are important and that the designation has a fair to great deal of influence on buying decisions.

When it comes to clean, additive free is a key priority for Gen X. Innovators are creating value-added fresh and frozen solutions and pantry staples including pre-portioned, pre-seasoned or ready-to-cook ingredients with short, simple ingredient lists and a focus on clean preservative- and artificial-ingredient-free formulas and natural ingredients like whole grains, vegetables and healthy fats.

Atlantic Sea Farms' frozen Sea-Veggie Burgers are made with kelp and green chickpeas for plant-based protein, fibre, B vitamins, calcium, iron, iodine, antioxidants and potassium and come in two clean, nature-forward flavours: Basil Pesto or Ginger Sesame. Pantry basics, including grains, beans, pasta or jarred sauces, are also getting a clean upgrade. BeanVivo Organics' sides include Baja Black Beans, Coconut Curry Chickpeas, Refried Pinto and Three Bean Vegan Chilli, with heart-healthy avocado oil and no preservatives.

Curated samplers of fresh produce, like Homesweet Homegrown's Chilli Pepper Box, will also help home chefs bring easy, fresh variety to meal times. Boxes include a tasting guide, history of each pepper and recipes.



The clean label trend is evolving from natural and additive-free requirements to also being minimally processed, having a short ingredients list and providing transparency in the supply chain. Clearspring's (UK) range of 300 plant-based organic products, including snacks, condiments and sauces, dry goods and tofus, are made with no artificial additives, MSG, colourings, preservatives or added refined sugars

How you can action this for 2024

Make mealtimes easier, tastier and more healthful with value-added prepared products or fresh ingredient bundles that are natural and healthy.

Meals:

- Help this busy cohort streamline home cooking without sacrificing quality and health
- Create natural, additive-free but value-added staples that are pre-portioned, seasoned and ready to slot into home cooking. Focus on a short ingredients lists, and a transparent supply chain
- Use nature-forward flavour profiles to reinforce a product's health halo
- Explore processes and techniques like low-temperature pasteurisation or snap freezing to preserve ingredients' taste and nutritional value

Ingredients:

- Consider variety boxes of fresh produce with accompanying recipes to help Gen X explore new flavours and ingredients without the effort
- Utilise local ingredients not only for their lower eco impact but to add a freshness to product ranges

Packaging:

- 4 Communicate details about ingredients' origins and preservation techniques on



Sauces Papillon (France) uses low-temperature pasteurisation, a technique that preserves taste and nutrition with minimal processing, for its line of ready-to-eat pasta sauces made with local, seasonal veggies



Spatula Foods' (Canada) meal kits include flash frozen, chef-prepared, healthy ingredients that simply need to be pan heated for 10 mins. Options range from Spicy Korean Gochujang Chicken to Creamy Basil Pesto Bucatini



Homesweet Homegrown is a USDA certified organic chilli pepper farm in the US which offers a curated sampler box of fresh chilli peppers from around the world with a tasting guide, storage tips, and recipes



Maine-based Atlantic Sea Farms' flavour-forward, pre-shaped, heat-and-eat Sea-Veggie burger patties are made with umami-rich, sustainably sourced kelp and include flavours like Ginger Sesame or Basil Pesto



True Story Foods' (US) fully heat-and-eat, all-natural Kurobuta pork sausages in Organic Apple & Wildflower Honey or Chile Relleno, made with all-natural, free range, antibiotic-free pork, poblano peppers and cotija cheese

Conscious consumption

Environmental sustainability and value for money are rising concerns for Gen X. Products that extend value by minimising waste answer both concerns.

Innovators are tapping the financial, practical and environmental benefits of reducing waste with smarter, streamlined packaging, and food made from upcycled 'waste' to meet rising Gen X concerns.

Concentrated and waterless formulas, updated bulk offerings, refillable and reusable packaging and home compostables that cut down on single-use plastic and provide the added benefit of cost savings for consumers and producers are key opportunities.

Additionally, products and strategies to help Gen X minimise waste at home are on the rise, and could include seasonings to recast common household waste items such as vegetable peels, seeds or veg scraps into crunchy snacks, sauces or kits to transform leftovers into something new, or pack sizes with enough ingredients to make two meals in one.

Innovators are also tackling food waste at the industrial level through the creative use of byproducts. Where possible, companies are further extending the appeal of these solutions by calling out the added nutritional benefits of upcycled ingredients. For example, The Supplant Company offers chocolates and shortbreads which are sweetened with sugars made from the fibre-rich parts of the plants that farmers normally throw out. Compared with refined sugars, Supplant sugars are lower in calories, trigger a lower glycemic response and are prebiotic.



Row 7 (US) has designed home-compostable, plant-based packaging for its produce which in turn can be composted to feed one of its seed varieties

How you can action this for 2024

Meet Gen X's demand for sustainability, value and waste prevention with products that maximise resources.

Meals:

- Consider Nextovers: larger format products that serve as one meal but come packaged with extra ingredients that can make another meal the next day. For example, Sara Dickerman's cookbook *Secrets of Second Meals* suggests making more meatballs than are needed, for use in spaghetti one night and a meatball frittata the next

Ingredients:

- Explore strategies for upcycling industrial waste or byproducts; highlight nutritional benefits where applicable

Sauces and condiments:

- Develop seasonings for common household waste items like vegetable peels, seeds or veg scraps or create flavour-forward simmer sauces that can be used to transform leftover meat or veggies into stews or curries

Packaging:

- Consider packaging that can be composted or used to grow, store or prepare another product



Food writer Zaynab Issa (US) turns potato peels into a crunchy, salty topping for mash



Singapore-based restaurant Kausmo upcycles prawn heads into a flavourful seasoning oil



Abokichi's fermented Instant Miso Soups are made with sakekasu, the nutrient-rich byproduct of sake making



Brewer's Chocolate Chip Sea Salt Cookies are made with upcycled brewer's gains



The Supplant Company replaces refined sugars with sugars from upcycled plant fibres

Preventative wellness

As they transition through middle age, Gen X will embrace products that help them prevent age-related health issues. Innovators are focusing on functional foods and ingredients that support longevity and immunity, as well as those which prevent common conditions and diseases.

In the US, 59% of Gen Xers seek foods with heart and cardiovascular benefits, and 36% for cancer protection or prevention. Innovators are putting supportive ingredients, such as heart-healthy fibre, into tasty, accessible formats to make daily consumption more appealing and likely.

Functional, gut-healthy and adaptogenic products that support physical and mental wellbeing are also on the rise. In particular, performance nutrition products and products with healthy ageing claims that target people 40 and older are promising stress management, improved sleep quality and better mobility. A new functional milk beverage, 5-Star Custom, from Meiji (Japan) contains indigestible dietary fibre and GABA and may provide stress relief, improve memory function and suppress a rise in blood sugar levels. In China, Danone (France) released its Ganmai set of three healthy ageing products with nutrients to provide gut, immune, joint and brain health to help consumers slow the progression of age-related health conditions.

As representational wellness moves into the mainstream, products supporting hormone health and menopause, or those which tap into traditional medicinal healing practices, will also be better represented. Bossa Bars were created specifically to help control sugar cravings, boost weight loss and improve energy levels during the menopause; while Hong Kong-based Remedy Me incorporates elements of TCM into its soups and salads.



Hong Kong-based 'modern apothecary' Remedy Me is working with traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) experts to offer on-the-go soups and salad bowls created in accordance with TCM principles

How you can action this for 2024

Create functional and preventative health solutions that are grounded in accessible food formats, natural ingredients and research-backed insights.

Meals and snacks:

- Gen X's dietary priorities are evolving beyond extractive claims like 'fat free' to include demand for products with additive functional benefits
- Create targeted products that alleviate symptoms of, or help prevent, specific diseases or conditions
- Incorporate elements from the Mediterranean diet, ingredients from Blue Zones, TCM or Ayurveda into everyday snacks. Be clear about functionality and don't over-promise
- Design products that help manage common symptoms including sugar cravings, weight gain and low energy for Gen X entering menopause

Ingredients:

- Tap into natural herbs and ingredients like gynostemma to support longevity
- Rethink texture and format when delivering ingredients such as fibre, ie easy-to-dose 'sprinkles' that are made with grains, nuts and dried fruits

Packaging:

8



Rachelle Robinett

Rachelle Robinett's (NY) Immortality Herb Snack Bars contain gynostemma, used for its energy promoting benefits



Naturya's (UK) overnight oats tout cholesterol controlling ingredients like beta glucan, copper and vit C for immunity and skin support, and manganese to fight fatigue



Costa Rican brand Blue Zones of Nicoya's products are made with ingredients from Nicoya-Guanacaste, a pocket where people have a longer than usual life expectancy, known as a Blue Zone



Step One Food's (US) anytime sprinkle packet is a ground granola made from almonds, cranberries, walnuts and oats that delivers whole food fibre, omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants, and plant sterols



@bossabarsformenopause

Bossa (US) menopausal bars include coconut-sourced MCT oil, pea protein, flaxseeds, cacao nibs, maca and a half day's worth of veggies

WGSN

- Use packaging to make prevention feel accessible rather than pharmaceutical

Globally inspired flavour exploration

While Gen X generally have more conservative tastes than their Millennial and Gen Z counterparts, desire for flavour twists inspired by global culinary cultures is on the rise.

While younger generations more actively seek out new-to-them ingredients, dishes and cuisines making the rounds on social media, Gen X are open to flavour exploration and unfamiliar culinary influences, with more than a third (34%) of US Gen X saying they had eaten a globally influenced food – beyond mainstream Chinese, Italian or Mexican – within a given week in 2021.

Innovators are using culturally relative comfort foods like rice porridge, rotisserie chicken, pizza, noodles or french fries as canvases to introduce a broader variety of global ingredients, with sauces, spices, toppings and flavour additions adding excitement.

Rising culinary influences such as Japanese, West African and Korean, as well as fusion products that put a spin on a culturally familiar touchstone, are key opportunities. Take the lead from brands and chefs respectfully drawing inspiration from global classics and bringing these meals to new markets as ‘inspired by’ products, like UK chef Yotam Ottolenghi’s West African-inspired spatchcocked chicken.



Yotam Ottolenghi’s West African-spiced spatchcocked chicken features yaji, a peanut spice rub traditionally used to make suya skewers, a popular street food in West Africa

How you can action this for 2024

Create inviting and approachable dishes that introduce flavour and culinary exploration by merging the familiar and the unfamiliar.

Meals:

- Make exploration approachable. Rather than calling out specific ingredients (ie achiote chicken), introduce unfamiliar cuisines with inspired-by products (ie Mexican-style chicken with achiote, lime and chilli)
- Partner with chefs to develop globally inspired fusion meals based on comfort classics from around the world

Desserts:

- Reimagine Gen X's childhood desserts with global ingredients and sophisticated flavour profiles

Packaging:

- Be a partner in culinary exploration; provide an introduction to unfamiliar global cuisines, and detail what to expect in terms of flavour



The Tamale Company (US) sells homemade frozen tamales in a family dinner set which includes three flavours; chicken tomatillo, ancho chilli pork, and black bean and corn



Korean-style porridge (tarakjuk) with chestnut, Jerusalem artichoke chips and grated macadamia nuts at Hong Kong restaurant Hansik Goo



Patina Bar (Singapore) tops french fries with a heap of Indonesian-style rendang, a coconut-laced dry curry



Pollo Norte's (Portland) Mexican rotisserie chicken seasoned with achiote, sea salt, lime and chilli ups the ante on prepared rotisserie chicken offerings



Blog Just One Cookbook shares a recipe for sponge cakes in Japanese-inspired flavours including matcha, black sesame, chestnut, purin (crème caramel) or almond jelly

Prestige eats

Gen X are in their peak earning years, and while prestige eats aren't exclusively tied to cost, foods that reflect Gen X's more comfortable mid-life successes, or status-conscious products built to impress, represent a rising opportunity for those looking to treat themselves, their families or their guests.

Moving into midlife, Gen X are more likely to be able to reward themselves or splash out on specialty items. In the UK and US, they are the biggest spenders by generational group, and homeowners, which represent a majority of the cohort in both countries, saw their wealth grow further throughout the pandemic housing boom.

For food products, quality and consciousness will be key attributes, reflecting the group's relatively traditional relationship to luxury but increasing demand for socially and environmentally sustainable goods.

Products sourced from transparent supply chains; made with heritage, time-consuming, knowledge-intensive or restaurant-style processes; and those with ingredients like ancient grains, seasonal vegetables and locally or regeneratively sourced meat and seafood are key opportunities. Look to traditional influencers, including professionally trained chefs, newspaper critics or heritage brands like Italy's Afeltra, for product inspiration. The pasta-maker, which exports internationally, uses high-quality organic durum wheat semolina and water from the Lattari Mountains of Gagnano for its range. The use of traditional bronze extruding machines gives pasta a rough, porous texture to better absorb sauce, while low and slow drying processes offer a resilient springy, premium al dente texture.

Packaged products made with small amounts of overtly luxury ingredients like truffle, Champagne or caviar also represent a growing opportunity – a trend we highlight in affordable gourmet.



Mercado Famous' 2oz. single-servings of Iberico Ham are sourced from free-range, 100% pure-bred, acorn-fed black Iberian pigs raised traditionally in Salamanca, Spain. Each ham is cured for 48 months, sliced, vacuum sealed and ready to eat. Celebrity Gen X influencer Gwyneth Paltrow highlights the brand on her lifestyle website, Goop

How you can action this for 2024

Help Gen X treat themselves with prestige products that reflect evolving perspectives on luxury and sustainability.

Ingredients:

- Position consciousness as a luxury. Highlight supply chain transparency and showcase sustainable ingredients. Consider partnering with chefs to promote lesser-known and sustainable premium ingredients, such as uni
- Keep labels clean. For Gen X, premium products will be free from preservatives and artificial colours or ingredients

Baked goods and desserts:

- Create at-home indulgences like heat-and-eat, bakery-style breads and pastries
- Lean on rich, classic flavours and nature-forward ingredients such as dark chocolate, organic fresh, local and seasonal fruits

Condiments, dips and sauces

- Create transformative condiments that stretch small amounts of luxury ingredients and which can be drizzled over or scooped onto dishes to elevate them into something special



Italian pasta brand Afeltra uses traditional bronze extruding machines, a process that allows pasta to absorb more sauce



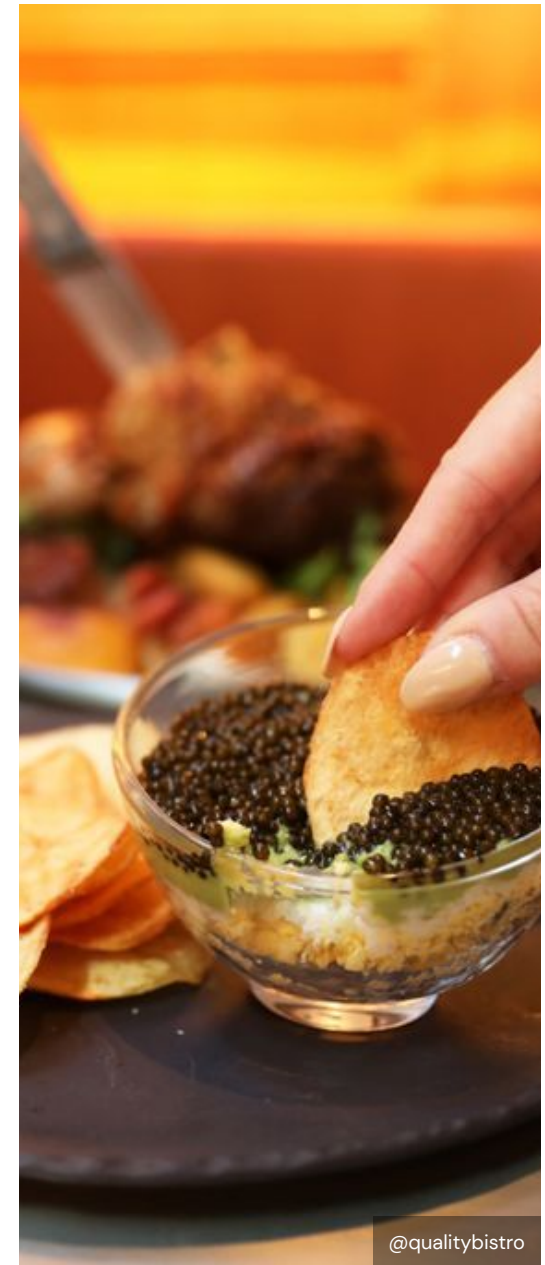
US-based Wildgrain's bake-from-frozen slow fermented bread loaves are delivered directly to the door and can be heated in the oven for a bakery-fresh, warming treat any time



A yuzu sorbet paired with local strawberries, honeycomb and shiso at Roganic Hong Kong, which develops its sustainable menu in line with the local seasons



Nordur Salt's umami-rich fermented Garum, for use in sauces, braises, or pasta dishes, is made with Icelandic mackerel and Arctic Sea salt that's hand-harvested using a 260-year-old geothermal process



The six-layer caviar dip at NYC Quality Bistro includes onion, chopped egg and avocado mousse and is served with potato chips for a hi-lo, playfully indulgent bite

Action points

1

Balance convenience with health and quality

Busy Gen X are becoming more health-conscious. Assure quality and convenience with streamlined solutions that don't skimp on nutrition, natural ingredients and freshness. Create functional foods for condition-specific issues and preventative health solutions

2

Focus on familiar adventurism

While some Gen X are more comfortable eating within cultural norms and flavours, many are open to experimentation. Offer culinary experiences that merge familiar favourites with something new

3

Stretch resources

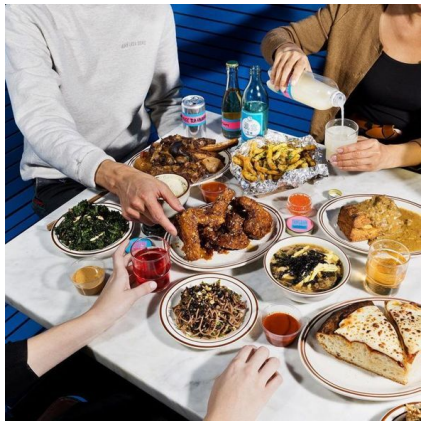
Gen X families want to stretch their budgets and resources. Create products that encourage upcycling, repurposing and reusing, or help transform leftovers into hero products

4

Premiumise where appropriate

Satisfy Gen X's desire to indulge with quality products that speak to midlife status. Go beyond traditional luxury to include consciousness as a key ingredient

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