

82% of operators agree that clean labels will influence their future purchase decisions.

—*Technomic Operator Survey*

CLEAN SWEEP

A growing movement offers rewards for operators

The “clean” food movement is changing menus and restaurants’ relationships with their customers. Nearly nine in 10 consumers want restaurants to be transparent about what’s in their food.* The National Restaurant Association cited natural ingredients/minimally processed food as one of the top five food trends for 2016.

“Clean food is all about food quality,” says Jared Koch, founder and CEO of Clean Plates, a company devoted to helping consumers eat healthy, sustainable food. “It’s about eating more nutrient dense foods and less chemicals.” Koch sees an increasing number of chefs and their suppliers embracing the movement. Clean labeled products can be a solution for restaurants that choose not to make everything from scratch.

The desire for healthy food and restaurant transparency spans demographic groups but it is Millennials, moms and “health-first progressive diners”** who are driving the movement. “It’s more of a psychographic than a demographic,” explains Koch. “Once you become aware about the quality of your food, it



matters more to you.”

“Health-first progressives” spend more per occasion than any other eater group. Operators are taking notice. Panera Bread promotes its “clean” soup menu. Chipotle offers “food with integrity,” free from GMO ingredients. Jason’s Deli serves more than a dozen certified organic ingredients and products. Healthy and clean food-focused restaurants such as sweetgreen, Freshii, Zoe’s Kitchen and LYFE Kitchen are on a fast-growth path.

“People are seeking cleaner options,” says Chef Kim Buchanan, culinary director at LYFE Kitchen. Now operating in six states, they offer naturally flavored, fresh food served quickly at

an affordable price to health-conscious customers. “We emphasize quality, accessibility, and approachability,” says Buchanan. On the menu, calorie count and sodium amounts follow each meal description. Complete nutrition information can be found on their website. Flavor profiles respect the taste of the food itself. “What people eat affects them physically and emotionally. We provide information so customers can make a decision they feel good about.”

Chefs can get started by working with suppliers to source ingredients and

products they need. Buchanan says training and education are key when moving toward a clean menu. Staff needs to be trained so they can educate curious customers on how food is sourced, handled and prepared. They should be able to explain what “clean” means.

Clean food and transparency build trust. Restaurants that share the same values as their customers are being rewarded with growing sales and customer loyalty. “Customers see the value in great tasting, quality food,” says Buchanan. Staying ahead of the clean movement provides a trio of benefits. It is good for customers, good for business and good for the planet.