

What's hot on food truck menus

Portable, customizable, innovative dishes top food truck menus

April 26, 2012 | By [Sonya Moore](#)

Customizable carry-and-go foods are the items appearing most on food truck menus in 2011, as are high-end condiments or flavorings to dress up basic dishes, according to data compiled by research firm Datassential.

Sandwiches ranked number one as most listed on food truck menus in the entrée category, followed closely by Mexican items.

Mexican food ranked high mostly because food trucks have combined Mexican entrées, such as tacos, with other food and cuisine types to create portable versions for consumers. One example of this trend is the Kogi BBQ truck based out of Los Angeles, which made its name serving Korean barbecue tacos.

Other top-ranking entrée items such as hot dogs, sausages and burgers highlighted the importance of portability for food trucks. Fries topped the list for popular appetizers and sides, followed by protein and condiments. The limited-service nature of a food truck makes every item count, according to Jana Mann, director of menu trends for research firm Datassential, which surveys food truck menus each year.

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Portable foods are popular on food truck menus. (Photo: Christina House)

Top items and terms listed on food trucks menus

Terms listed by percentage of instances on menus

Entrées	
Sandwiches	23.0%
Mexican	22.7%
Burgers	6.5%
Combo meals	5.7%
Hot Dogs/Sausages	5.0%

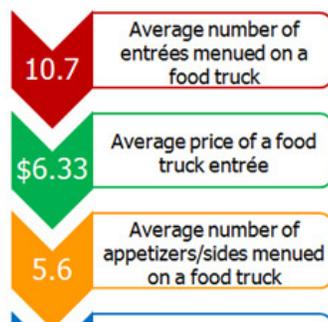
Appetizers/Sides	
Fries	13.5%
Proteins	9.9%
Condiments	9.5%
Vegetables	8.6%
Deli Salads	6.2%

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Data provided by Datassentials MenuTrends - Food Trucks, October 2011

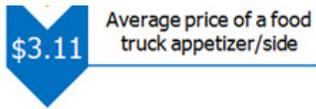
Note: Surveyed menus from 500 food trucks from across the United States.

"I think that like fine-dining chefs and innovators, [food truck operators] are thinking about everything they put on their menus," Mann said. "Everything needs to be a standout and differentiated from their competition, and convince consumers to choose a food truck over other eating choices."



While words like fries and burgers might sound like the usual when it comes to limited-service styles, their versatility as dish components are crucial for food trucks, especially when taking into account that the third most listed item for appetizers and sides is condiments.

Mann said that food truck operators are viewing condiments as an essential part of the menu, rather than as an afterthought, mixing and matching flavors and ingredients to "show off their entrées."



Average price of a food truck appetizer/side

Source: Datassentials - Food Trucks, October 2011
Note: Surveyed menus from 500 food trucks from across the United States.

Datassential's report cited examples such as peach-mint sauce and pineapple-poblano salsa. For fries, menu examples included high-end items such as duck fat-garlic fries and gourmet cheese fries as well.

"A lot of the [food truck] owners are chef-trained so they're familiar with a lot of the exciting and premium sophisticated

ingredients," Mann said.

Datassential also found that innovative and premium ingredients also were echoed in entrées, in particular with the use of ethnic ingredients and flavors not typically found in restaurant chains.

Going back to the example of the burger, ingredients such as high-end proteins and toppings like bacon-tomato jam and macaroni and cheese were cited. Specialty sausage trucks put their own twist on sausages with ingredients such as lamb, curried chicken and duck.

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