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## How Coronavirus is Shifting Food Themes

**T**he pandemic has a huge, unpredicted impact on food, and the biggest single change has come from the shifting of millions of eating occasions into the home. As lockdown went into force across the world, restaurants, bars, cafés, and institutions which served food all closed, increasing the amount of food consumed at home and, consequently, the amount of food needed to be bought at retail. However, the pandemic has also changed how we buy, what we spend on and where we eat – witness the increase in online shopping, the increased concern with health (and avoiding underlying health conditions), greater emphasis on mental wellbeing, and the impact of the global recession on food spending and choices.

### The Strategic Themes in Food and Nutrition

Reflecting the fact that the food and nutrition industry is changing continuously, in 2019 *Euromonitor International* conducted extensive global research through its analysts and clients to determine the strategic themes reshaping the global market. These are:

- **Consumer Segmentation in the Era of Eating Occasions** - Breaking down the eating occasion – the who, where, when, what, and why that define how consumers interact with food.
- **Plant-Based Eating and Alternative Proteins** - As consumers have sought more sustainable and ethical meat and animal products, alternatives have sprung up to meet demand.

- **Sustainable Eating and the Environmental Cost of Food** - Environmental concerns over the future of the planet have forced consumers to change their perspective on food.
- **Mindful Eating and The New Food Beliefs** - Consumers have been closely scrutinizing ingredient labels with a view towards less processing, balance, and fashionable and niche ingredients.
- **Food Tech and The Digital Economy** - Technology is changing the fundamental relationship between consumers and their food on many different frontiers.
- **Food Provenance and the Country of Origin Effect** - Globalization has opened people to cuisines from but a reactionary movement harkens back to local food identities.
- **Functional Food and the Regulatory Environment** - People increasingly demand functionality from their food. Functional claims are under focus – both by consumers and regulatory authorities.

Within each theme, a series of hot topics were identified – for example, the theme Plant-Based Eating and Alternative Proteins includes the hot topics Animal Welfare, Dairy Alternatives, Edible Insects, Lab-Cultured Meat, and Meat Analogs.



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### Assessing the Impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The impact of COVID-19 on these Strategic Themes has been assessed via the following framework: The hot topics (the building blocks of the themes) are reviewed to see if the impact of the pandemic has accelerated them, maintained/supported them (without accelerating), has had no impact, has decelerated them, or has paused them entirely. The balance then determines whether the overall Strategic Theme has been accelerated or decelerated.

### Looking Ahead

Attempting to forecast future impact on the Strategic Themes is a difficult endeavor. Initial hopes for a vaccine and roll out in 2020 have faded, and even if this was achieved, questions remain regarding reinfection and risk. What is more certain is that the economic impact is – and will continue to be – negative. To what exact degree is as yet unclear but the world has entered a recession and those themes/hot topics influenced by consumer spending power will continue to be affected for some time.

It is also likely that health will remain front of mind for as long the virus threat persists, meaning the themes/hot topics related to health will continue to be spurred by COVID-19. A less-certain area is that of consumer mobility, with several hot topics directly affected. Governments around the world are walking a tightrope between encouraging people back to work/spurring economies and ensuring that the spread of the virus is contained. What can certainly be said is that, across the Strategic Themes in Food and Nutrition, the impact of COVID-19 has been an overall acceleration, with the majority of the hot topics that make up the themes becoming more important to consumers throughout 2020.■

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