Protein has been a major buzzword in the foodservice industry over the past few years. From the rise of protein-centered restaurant concepts to the growth of high-protein meals on menus, the industry is increasingly inundated with this healthy staple. Some argue that protein is the most important nutrient at breakfast, giving diners an energizing and filling morning boost. But protein needn’t come from only animal meat. Opportunities exist to experiment with a plethora of non-meat protein options and protein fusions (i.e., the blending of multiple proteins such as peanut butter and soy in smoothies) at breakfast, attracting both vegetarians and meat eaters alike.

### Breakfast Non-Meat Protein Purchasing Behavior

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Restaurant Type</th>
<th>Percentage Wanting More Non-Meat Proteins</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quick Service</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast Casual</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midscale</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Casual Dining</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine Dining</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About half of the breakfast consumers surveyed (49%) want to see more chain restaurants offer non-meat proteins on the menu. More than half (56%) say that quick-service restaurants should add more non-meat proteins, while 41% say the same for fast-casual restaurants. We have seen some recent innovations in this area, as evidenced by the recently tested egg-white breakfast bowl at McDonald’s and the new white eggs with tofu breakfast dish at Il Fornaio.
Taste/flavor is generally the top attribute that drives purchase decisions for restaurant goers, regardless of daypart. When analyzing consumer responses regarding why they select a non-meat protein for breakfast, the finding was unsurprising: most consumers cite an appealing taste/flavor as the leading reason behind their purchase (57%). A greater perception of health compared to meat (37%) and a perception of a high nutritional value (34%) rounded out the top three responses.

Factors such as dietary preferences (12%), a better cost/value equation (6%) and food allergy concerns (6%) did not rank nearly as high, according to respondents. Therefore, flavor and perceptions about health and nutritional benefits are the true drivers behind why restaurant consumers would choose eggs, yogurt or other non-meat protein offerings for breakfast.

To gauge the frequency with which restaurant goers order non-meat proteins for breakfast, we asked consumers to indicate how often they order these types of items—always, most times, sometimes, rarely or never—as either a main course/center-of-the-plate choice or as a side.

### How often do you order a non-meat protein as the following during a breakfast restaurant occasion?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Most Times</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As a center-of-the-plate item</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a side item</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Findings pointed to moderate order frequency; for both mealparts, consumers were most likely to say that they order non-meat proteins “sometimes.” More than a third (38%) revealed that they sometimes order these types of proteins as an entrée, while 42% said that they sometimes order them as a side. Only 12% indicated that they “always” order non-meat proteins as their meal, and just 9% said that they always order them as a side.

These responses are not surprising, given the earlier findings that uncovered purchase drivers. Consumers are not gravitating to non-meat proteins out of dietary necessity or price concerns, but rather, they choose these items based on flavor or health perception. Since flavor preferences evolve and ideas about health are constantly shifting, it makes sense that order frequency of foods that are tied to these less-restrictive needstates would be generally flexible.

**Which non-meat proteins would you consider ordering occasionally (at least once every 90 days) at a restaurant for breakfast?** Select all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-meat Proteins</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eggs</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yogurt</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nut Offerings (e.g., peanut butter, nut butters)</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protein Bars</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protein Shakes</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beans</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grains and Grain-Based Proteins (e.g., quinoa, seitan)</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant-Based Proteins (e.g., tofu, tempeh)</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 1,000 consumers aged 18+ who eat breakfast away from home on weekdays or weekends
Breakfast consumers typically choose eggs (87% overall), yogurt (58% overall) or nut-based items (38% overall) when selecting a non-meat protein in the morning. The oldest adult consumers are most likely to choose eggs, while the youngest adult consumers are more likely to opt for protein sources such as yogurt, nuts and nut butters, and protein bars and shakes for breakfast.

**Eggs**

Eggs are often viewed as the quintessential ingredient on breakfast menus, perhaps because of their high protein content and adaptability. They are regularly featured as a center-of-the-plate protein at breakfast—such as scrambled with toast, in a breakfast handheld or as an omelet. But eggs also play a much larger role on morning menus, serving as a fundamental ingredient in breakfast baked goods, sauces and condiments, and even starch-heavy entrées like French toast. Leading egg preparations with corresponding MenuMonitor incidence include:

**Scrambled**—Having 739 mentions on breakfast menus, scrambled eggs can be cooked on low heat without any added ingredients, although many operators mix water, milk or crème fraîche into the egg mixture to help make the eggs soft and fluffy. Cheeses, meats, veggies and spices are popular additions to scrambled eggs.

**Poached**—With 540 breakfast menu mentions, this preparation gently simmers eggs in slightly salted water just below the boiling point so that the egg white cooks while the delicate yolk remains soft. Poached eggs are used in breakfast specialties like eggs Benedict and eggs Florentine.

**Fried**—Having 125 mentions at breakfast, fried eggs can be cooked either on one side or both and for varying lengths of time; fried eggs are also commonly served as a topping for steaks, ham and breakfast burgers and sandwiches.

**Baked**—Having 187 breakfast menu mentions, baked eggs are cooked in an oven and served atop roasted potatoes or toast, or as part of a breakfast casserole or quiche, as opposed to cooked on a stovetop.
Although eggs from hens are most commonly used at restaurants, other fowl eggs—including duck, goose, guinea fowl and quail—are also excellent sources of protein. Duck eggs, in particular, are a good alternative to chicken eggs, offering a slightly larger size, richer taste and fluffier appearance when cooked.

For as many types of preparation methods that exist, there are even more ingredients and flavors that pair well with eggs. Looking at the top ingredients in egg breakfast entrees, it is no surprise that cheese leads the list. Eggs can match well with a broad spectrum of cheeses—from a milder mozzarella to a more pungent Gorgonzola. Hash browns also made the list as a heavier, potato-based starch that balances well with lighter, protein-packed eggs. Beyond cheese and potato, the remainder of the list is comprised of vegetables and pork products, many of which are standard ingredients in omelets, quiches and casseroles.

### Soy Products

Soy products are growing on breakfast menus as optional meat alternatives with a 5.1% increase in mentions from last year. Although our consumer data shows that plant-based proteins are not top of mind during breakfast, when looking at the breakdown by attribute, we see some major variances. For example, consideration for purchasing these non-meat proteins at breakfast decreases with age, proving that today’s youth may be driving the growth of more soy products at breakfast. In addition, Asian diners—more than consumers of any other ethnicity—are significantly more likely to consider ordering plant-based proteins for breakfast.
SOY
Soybeans are legumes ranging in size from as small as a pea to as large as a cherry. They come in various combinations of red, yellow, green, brown and black, and are recognized for their high nutritional value—low in carbohydrates and high in protein. In fact, soy protein is considered the most economical source of protein in the world. These beans are also known for their bland flavor, which makes soy a highly adaptable ingredient. Soy chorizo, dubbed soyrizo, is also popular on menus, namely at independent restaurants. Some of the other ways in which we’re seeing soy on the menu at breakfast are:

- In soy milk
- As a topping for porridge
- As a stand-alone side dish
- As a mix-in for Mexican egg dishes

TOFU
Invented in China, tofu is made from curdled soy milk, a liquid extracted from ground, cooked soybeans. The resulting curds are drained, pressed and formed into either soft or firm patties. Tofu is high in protein and low in calories and fat. It has a bland, slightly nutty flavor that allows it to be a kitchen chameleon, taking on the flavor of the food in which it is cooked. It can be sliced, diced or mashed and used in a variety of dishes. On breakfast menus, tofu grew 3.1% from 2014 and we’re especially seeing tofu especially take off in egg scrambles.

Potential Marinades for Tofu

- Soy Sauce/Tamari
- Vinegar (rice, balsamic)
- Flavored Oil (sesame, olive)
- Ginger
- Garlic
- Citrus Juice
- Hot Sauce
- Worcestershire Sauce
- Barbecue Sauce
- Honey
- Peanut Sauce
- Adobo Sauce
- Dried Herbs (dill, oregano, dill)
- Fresh Herbs (cilantro, basil, parsley)
TEMPEH
Like tofu, tempeh is also made from soybeans. Originating in Indonesia, tempeh typically comes in the form of a patty and is packed with protein, fiber and other nutrients. It’s also fermented, which makes it easier to digest. It’s known to have a richer and nuttier taste than tofu and is more textured. Tempeh can be steamed, grilled or incorporated into a breakfast stew.

To appeal to non-vegetarian customers, operators should serve the protein with bold flavors. Marinating tofu in aromatic spices or serving tempeh on a breakfast sandwich with roasted peppers and ethnic sauces could attract meat-eating diners.

Other Beans & Lentils
Beans and lentils play an important role during at-home and foodservice dining occasions for many reasons: they are an inexpensive ingredient, come in many varieties and can feature numerous preparations, are an essential component in vegetarian and vegan diets, and serve as a filling entrée component or side. Some legumes impacting breakfast menus are:

• Chickpea — Also called garbanzo beans, chickpeas have a firm texture and a mild, nutlike flavor. They are commonly used in Mediterranean cuisines but can also be featured in morning meals such as breakfast bowls with eggs, veggies and cheeses

• Navy Beans — Navy beans are used for making baked beans, which are a central component of a full English breakfast; the numerous British-style pub concepts in the U.S. have helped to introduce baked beans at breakfast to American diners

• Black Beans — Featuring a sweet flavor, black beans are frequently found in Tex-Mex breakfast dishes such as huevos rancheros and breakfast tacos and burritos
• **Pinto Beans**—Like black beans, pinto beans are commonly served with Tex-Mex-style breakfasts and in egg scrambles; they are also used for refried preparations

• **Lentils**—These tiny, lens-shaped legumes are a good source of protein, carbohydrates and fiber. Though not typically found in breakfast dishes, some operators are finding ways to incorporate lentils into morning meals, such as serving them inside a breakfast burrito, or offering lentils whole or puréed under an egg

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### Seeds

Seeds are prevalently used on today’s breakfast menus for many reasons. These protein-packed items help curb hunger, add crunch to a dish and are loaded with nutrients such as fiber, calcium and Omega-3. While the nutty flavors of seeds vary, many operators opt to enhance the taste profile of seeds by toasting them or adding salt. And because seeds are so small in size, they are easy to mix in or use as a topping.

Seeds sprouting on breakfast menus include:

• **Poppy Seeds**—These small seeds have a crunchy texture and are typically used as a filling or topping for coffee cakes and muffins

• **Chia Seeds**—Considered a superfood, chia seeds are packed with energy and can be used in everything from granolas and cereals, to yogurts and smoothies, breakfast puddings and oatmeal

• **Sunflower Seeds**—Available plain or salted, sunflower seeds are used as a topping for oatmeal and in baked goods and breakfast bars

• **Flax Seeds**—In addition to being sprinkled over hot dishes like cooked cereal, these seeds can also be used to add body to baked goods

• **Pumpkin Seeds**—Sometimes referred to as pepitas, pumpkin seeds are commonly used in Mexican cuisine, but also nicely complement dishes like yogurt and granola
FEATURED RECIPE

Smucker’s Chocolate Peanut Butter Iced Coffee

[Serving Size: 1]

Ingredients

- 2 oz. Cold Cafe Bustelo® Espresso
- 1 cup Crushed ice
- 4 oz. Smucker’s® Chocolate Fudge PlateScapers®
- 2 oz. Jif® Peanut Butter
- 1/2 cup Vanilla ice cream
- Whipped cream
- Chocolate shavings

Directions

1. Blend crushed ice, Cafe Bustelo® Espresso, Smucker’s® Chocolate Fudge PlateScapers®, Jif® Peanut Butter and ice cream.

2. Top with whipped cream and drizzle with Smucker’s® Chocolate Fudge PlateScapers®

3. Garnish with chocolate shavings.

Nutrition Facts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per Serving</th>
<th>% Daily Value*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Fat</td>
<td>47g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturated Fat</td>
<td>16g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trans Fat</td>
<td>0g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholesterol</td>
<td>45mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sodium</td>
<td>400mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potassium</td>
<td>45mg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Carbohydrate</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dietary Fiber</td>
<td>8g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugars</td>
<td>77g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protein</td>
<td>22g</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs.

Calories: 2,000, 2,500
**Nuts**

Nuts are not only a key source of protein, but they are also very easy to incorporate onto breakfast menus. The versatile nut can appear whole, chopped or as a spread. Nuts can also be dry-roasted, oil-roasted, salted, smoked, candied or flavored. Some current nut examples at top midscale chains include Denny’s Banana Bread French Toast Slam with complementary glazed pecans, and Bob Evans’ Fruit N Nut Multigrain Sweet & Stacked Hotcakes topped with honey-roasted pecans.

Nuts can enhance a wide-ranging assortment of dishes. A look at some possible nut applications at breakfast includes:

- Spreading almond butter, peanut butter, chocolate-hazelnut butter and other nut butters atop toast, English muffins and baked goods
- Incorporating nut butters into batters for doughnuts and waffles
- Using a peanut butter or other nut drizzle or glaze atop pancakes, waffles and French toast for added richness and craveability
- Topping oatmeal, yogurt and baked goods like cinnamon rolls and muffins with walnuts and pecans to add a bit of crunch

### Top 10 Nuts on Breakfast Menus (number of mentions)

- Walnut (422)
- Almond (421)
- Pecan (345)
- Hazelnut (220)
- Pistachio (34)
- Peanut (29)
- Macadamia (28)
- Cashew (26)
- Pine Nut (12)
- Chestnut (5)

Source: Q2 2015 MenuMonitor, Technomic

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**Protein Shakes & Smoothies**

Protein-enriched beverages have been steadily rising (5%) on breakfast menus at both chains and independents in the last year. Athletes and other nutritious-minded consumers have been drawn to these beverages for years because they are said to help build muscle and support cell growth, among other health benefits. With the protein trend
in full swing, it’s not surprising that protein shakes and smoothies have extended reach beyond post-workout drinks for athletes to become morning meal replacements.

Beyond touting generic protein and protein powder in beverages, many operators are specifying the types of proteins used. Soy protein and whey protein are two of the more popular mix-ins. Other protein supplements on the rise in breakfast protein shakes and smoothies include brewer’s yeast (a byproduct of brewing beer), wheat germ (essentially the embryo of the wheat kernel) and nut butters like peanut and cashew butters. As diners are progressively requesting to know more about the ingredients in their food, expect to increasingly see these protein-source callouts on beverage menus.

**Cereal Grains**

Wheat, corn, oats and rice are the more popular cereal grains on restaurant breakfast menus. All of these grains can be ground into flour and used as the base for bakery items, breakfast wraps, pancakes, French toast, waffles and a plethora of other breakfast staples. As a rich source of vitamins, carbohydrates and protein, cereal grains are often spotlighted in a breakfast dish, but also sometimes take a back seat to other ingredients.

**WHOLE GRAINS**

Two major recent foodservice happenings have pushed whole grains into the forefront of public attention: first, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommended a national diet higher in whole grains, and second, the relatively new National Restaurant Association’s Kids LiveWell program requires whole grains in its meals.
ANCIENT GRAINS
Most ancient grains have been planted, harvested and consumed in the same way for thousands of years. Now, ancient grains are steadily surging in popularity on breakfast menus.

OTHER CEREAL GRAINS

• Polenta—Native to northern Italy, polenta is a mush made from cornmeal. It can be eaten hot or cooled until firm, cut into squares and fried. Although not known for being especially nutritious, corn is fairly high in protein. Because of its heartiness, polenta can take the place of meat in a breakfast dish. Uses of polenta at breakfast include forming it into a cake-like shape and topping it with a dollop of cream or serving it as a base for eggs Benedict.

• Grits—Also a corn-based product (or less frequently oat- or rice-based), grits are a breakfast food common in the South. Grits are a coarsely ground grain that can be cooked with water or milk, usually by boiling or baking, and served as a side dish or as the highlight of a main (often paired with other proteins like shrimp). Some independent operators are using house-milled blends or specialty stone-ground grits to create richer, heartier breakfast fare. Operators are also testing varied ingredients to top their grits, such as pickled kale, pesto or roasted poblano peppers.

• Oats—Oatmeal has recently been getting an upgrade. Some restaurants are elevating oatmeal by pairing oats with other grains like farro and quinoa. In addition, steel-cut oats and organic callouts are underscored at chain restaurants as of late. Porridge—a thick, puddinglike dish typically made of oats cooked in water or milk—is also reviving on menus.

• Seitan—Known as the wheat meat, seitan is made specifically from wheat gluten. It’s high in protein and has a similar texture to meat, making it ideal as a vegetarian replacement for meat in any dish. Because seitan can take on diverse flavors and preparations, it is a good vegetarian option in traditional dishes that feature meat, like breakfast burritos, egg scrambles and side dishes.

Other Ancient Grains to Watch

> Amaranth > Bulgur > Millet > Spelt
> Barley > Farro > Quinoa > Teff
> Buckwheat > Kamut > Sorghum

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GRAINS IN BEVERAGES

Operators are even experimenting with grains in beverages at breakfast. Just as grains add texture, flavor and nutritional content to foods, the same can be said about grain supplements in beverages. Here are some ways in which grains are complementing morning beverages:

...In Tea

- **Brown Rice Tea (Genmaicha)**
  Genmaicha is the Japanese name for green tea combined with roasted brown rice. It has a mild flavor, combining the leafy taste of green tea with the toasted aroma of roasted rice.

...In Water

- **Barley water**
  Barley water is a traditional British herbal tea made by boiling washed pearl barley, straining it, then pouring the hot water over the rind and/or pulp of a lemon and adding fruit juice and sugar to taste.

...In Milk

- **Kefir**
  Originating in Russia, kefir is a fermented milk drink made with kefir grains, a combination of bacteria and yeasts. A natural source of probiotics and protein, the thick yogurt-like drink is made by fermenting milk with kefir grains.

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Yogurt and cottage cheese are two dairy items packed with protein at breakfast. They are usually served as a standalone side or with fruit. Opportunity exists to experiment with both cottage cheese and yogurt in new breakfast formats; for instance, consider using cottage cheese atop toast with a honey drizzle or adding creative flavors to yogurt using jams and jellies.
#1 FLAVOR FORWARD

Meat has one vital, craveable attribute that is lacking in non-meat proteins: flavor from fat. The absence of animal fat in non-meat proteins denotes a relatively bland flavor. Incorporating bold flavors through spices, seasonings, marinades and other craveable ingredients is essential. Promoting the bold flavors featured with grain- and plant-based proteins will help draw more consumers to these menu options.

#2 HEALTH-HALO BUZZWORDS

The plus side to the lack of animal fat in non-meat proteins are the haloed nutritional benefits. Promoting these options as better-for-you will attract consumers looking to maintain a healthy lifestyle, especially women. In addition to having minimal fat, many non-meat proteins are vegan and/or gluten-free. As customers’ dietary restrictions and preferences become increasingly more specific, restaurants need to accommodate diners with more options. Operators should take the opportunity to specifically call out these health-halo buzzwords to attract those looking to avoid specific additives.
HEED TEXTURE

Many non-meat proteins have textures that traditional American palates may not be accustomed to, or do not find appealing, such as tofu’s delicate, spongy mouthfeel or egg yolks’ gooey runniness in poached egg dishes. Finding ways to balance the texture of these items with something more substantial like crunchy nuts or crisp vegetables will be key when presenting these ingredients at breakfast.

A LITTLE GOES A LONG WAY

A common theme among many of these non-meat proteins is that adding a small amount to a breakfast recipe is both simple and impactful. Greek yogurt can be the tangy foundation for a sauce on a breakfast sandwich, nuts can top pancakes and seeds can be mixed into breakfast smoothies. Not only do non-meat proteins add flavor and oftentimes texture, but also an additional and more sustainable protein boost that many diners seek in the morning.

ON-THE-GO BREAKFAST

On-the-go meals are becoming more essential to consumers’ busy lifestyles. Many portable breakfast meals can spotlight non-meat proteins to make them more filling and enhance taste and texture. For items like smoothies, breakfast bars and morning handhelds, opportunities abound for operators to experiment with flavor combinations. Blending multiple non-meat proteins into one dish or beverage—such as featuring peanut butter, seeds and nuts in a breakfast bar—can best demonstrate how operators can maximize protein’s potential at breakfast.