

LexGo! Eat

How will we eat in 2021? Predictions to chew on

BY KIM SEVERSON
New York Times News Service

Predicting food trends is a dubious exercise in any year, but those who dabble in the dark art of culinary prognostication have never faced a landscape harder to read than 2021.

Most forecasters agree that the coronavirus pandemic and the stumbling economy will not deliver a year of frivolous food or “breakout” cuisines. There will be no next-gen Salt Bae or CBD-infused poke bowl doughnut ramen tacos to be optimized for Instagram.

But innovation and a restaurant rebound will come, eventually. The most optimistic believe that the cork will pop out of the bottle by summer. “If we can ride the wave of what’s going to be a crappy winter, it’s going to be like the Roaring Twenties all over again,” said Andrew Freeman, whose hospitality marketing and public relations companies, AF&Co. and Carbonate, issue an annual trend forecast.

Others see a much slower transition, in which home cooking remains popular and cautious diners venture out into a radically different restaurant landscape than the one they left. Economically, there will be two worlds, each eating very differently than the other. Independent restaurants will likely remain in free fall, while chains like Domino’s and McDonald’s continue to profit. Diners who made it through the pandemic with jobs and health intact are aching to spend money at restaurants. On the flip side are legions of Americans, including 2.3 million bar and restaurant workers, who remain unemployed or in a deep financial hole.

“It’s going to be ugly,” said Kara Nielsen, food and drink director at WGSN, a global trend forecasting company.

It will also be interesting: Here are 11 developments that forecasters, market researchers and academics see catching fire in 2021:

1. MEAL KITS FROM CHEFS

A year ago, meal kits had been left in the dust as consumers tired of strict subscription models, packaging waste and the amount of actual kitchen labor they required. Then the pandemic sent everyone back to the kitchen, and meal kits once again seemed like a good idea — so good that chefs got into the game. Diners, hungry for a taste of their favorite restaurants and willing to do what they could to keep them in business, made them a hit. These new kits range from a \$475 roast-duck package (from Eleven Madison Park in New York) and a \$159 mail-order goat shoulder for six (from Stephanie Izard of Girl & the Goat in Chicago) to less expensive options like the \$21 double-stack burger for two (from H&F Burger in Atlanta) and a plethora of taco kits from Los Angeles. Can restaurant-meal subscription services be far behind?

2. DRINKS FROM CANS

Over the past several years, craft brewers have increasingly been putting their beers into aluminum cans, which are better for the environment than bottles and better for the beer. That shift went into overdrive this year, when breweries were no longer able to sell kegs in volume to bars and restaurants. Coupled with a nascent craze for wines and cocktails in cans, that led to a

SEE FOOD OUTLOOK, 3D



PHOTOS BY RYAN C. HERMENS rhermens@herald-leader.com

Wildcat Willy's Distillery in Winchester. The building has been a factory and a church since being built in 1833.

Wildcat Willy's offers a trifecta of distillery, restaurant and farm

BY BLAKE HANNON
Contributing writer

WINCHESTER
Kentuckians are no stranger to spirits. But when Laura Freeman, owner of Mt. Folly Farm, wanted to open a distillery, she had two things in mind: Do something that was NOT bourbon and so something that was a boon to Winchester, Kentucky.

This led to the purchase of a more than 100-year-old property on 31 East Broadway (it has been both a factory and a church since being built in 1833) and the creation of Wildcat Willy's Distillery.

“She wanted to improve downtown Winchester. She wants to bring traffic down and pretty much revitalize downtown. That was her goal,” said Zach Pasley, the establishment’s president and head distiller.

Wildcat Willy's Distillery was initially supposed to be just that when Freeman and husband Bill “Wildcat Willy” Kingsbury purchased the property in 2016, utilizing the abundance of sweet potatoes and various types of corn from their Mt. Folly Farm to make craft varieties of moonshine.

Pasley said for people who only know moonshine as coming from people “back in the



Burgers at Wildcat Willy's Distillery, like the Bacon Jam Burger, are made with beef from Mt. Folly Farm, which is just a few miles away from the Winchester distillery and restaurant.



SEE DISTILLERY, 3D The Brown Derby features Wildcat Willy's crafted Kentucky bourbon.

Wildcat Willy's Distillery and Restaurant

Where: 31 E. Broadway, Winchester
Open: 11 a.m. - 8 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday, 11 a.m. - 9 p.m. Thursday - Saturday
Call: 859-355-5000
Online: wildcatwillydistillery.com

New Girl Scout cookie Toast Yay! debuts: How to find it, when sales start

BY JANET PATTON
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Remember in January, when the Girl Scouts announced that 2020 would be the last year for Thanks-A-Lot cookies?

In hindsight, that seems like a sign that this year was going to be about big change.

Now, the Girl Scouts of Kentucky's Wilderness Road have announced the new cookie: Toast Yay!, a French-toast inspired cookie dipped in icing.

The new cookie and old favor-

ites like Thin Mints and Caramel deLites will be going on sale digitally this year to keep sellers and buyers safe during the COVID pandemic.

And this year, according to Girlscouts.org, cookie season will kick off on Jan. 1 with the first deliveries coming at the end of January.

If you know a Girl Scout in Central Kentucky, ask about buying online. If you don't, you can buy cookies through gskentucky.org/findcookies. You can plug in your zip code and find places to get cookies or

a troop to buy from directly.

There's also a Smart Cookies Mobile App that scouts can use to sell cookies and track progress.

Cookies sales annually are more than 80 percent of the Wilderness Road council's operating budget supporting camps, troops and more.

The council serves more than 8,000 girls and young women in 66 Kentucky counties and one Ohio county, according to the group.

Janet Patton : 859-231-3264



Courtesy photo

The new Girl Scout cookie Toast Yay! will be available in Kentucky this year. You can order it Jan. 1 online and look for deliveries in late January.

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DISTILLERY

'30s and '40s that were running it out of car radiators" or who have only tasted major brands prominently displayed at the local Liquor Barn, this is something different.

"We're right in the middle," Pasley said of the two extremes. "I think once I explain the process and how many times my hands have touched certain products, a lot of people are more amazed."

As the distillery got up and running, they realized it could utilize the Mt. Folly Farm for a lot more than moonshine ingredients, eventually building on a full kitchen and becoming Wildcat Willy's Distillery and Restaurant when it officially opened in December 2019.

The establishment's corn and sweet potato moonshines end up in the restaurant's signature cocktails, like Liquid Apple Pie that comes in a caramel drizzled cup mixed with apple cider and a splash of Fireball with a cinnamon stick, or its Brambleberry Blast with blackberry brandy, triple sec and house sour mix. During the summer

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Zach Pasley, the establishment's president and head distiller

time, moonshines also gave a kick up to what was deemed "adult Capri Suns" and popsicles.

Once the mash is drained of alcohol, the leftovers are taken back to the farm to be fed to its cows and chickens, which may end up back at the restaurant in best-selling dishes. These include its popular bacon jam burger with house garli aioli or its hand-breaded chicken tenders.

"I'd say the biggest



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Wildcat Willy's offers gift baskets at its distillery and restaurant.

niche we would have is most of our ingredients come from the farm, which is seven miles away," Pasley said. "There will definitely be a distinct difference."

In addition to having a

station to sell CBD products, Wildcat Willy's has stepped out of its usual moonshine production to take a crack at crafting its first Kentucky straight bourbon whiskey.

Whether it is what is on

customers plates or in their glasses, the citizens of Winchester seem to appreciate what Wildcat Willy's is doing as it does its part to contribute to what Pasley calls the "circular economy."

"The small community that we live in, they definitely care about the future of downtown," he said. "That is the biggest thing we took back (from people) is, thank you for investing in downtown."