



TrendToTable™ 

# The food trends driving today's consumer purchases

and their impact on grains, pulses and flours

  
Ardent Mills®



# Today's complex foodscape

## How to meet consumers along their food purchasing journey

There has never been a better time to understand the complexities of consumer food purchasing motivations, where grains, flours and pulses<sup>1</sup> fit into these decisions, and how to deliver on these evolving needs.

We recently surveyed more than **3,000 Canadian consumers**, and we combined those findings with industry market data and macro-societal trends for a comprehensive look at the **foods they love, why they love them, what they can't live without—and what information they need to help make their decisions.**

This large-scale, quantitative study provides a nationally representative sample of consumers ages 18+, primary or shared decision makers for food sourcing both at and away from home, with an underlying focus on grain-based foods.

**Trend to Table™** helps cut through the noise with our research findings that bring you **five trends motivating consumer purchases and the practical ways grains can help you create and innovate the foods** today's customers want. Grains, flours and pulses are naturally flexible and versatile, and they can fulfill each one of the five major trends driving consumers along the purchasing path.

<sup>1</sup> Chickpeas, lentils, dry peas and dry beans

### The ever-changing paths to purchase

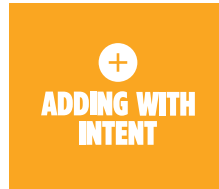
Joe Plumb, senior manager, marketing insights at Ardent Mills, explains that current trends reflect the complexity of consumer preferences. In this era, they are open to a wide range of options, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to making purchases.

**“It's an incredibly opportune time.”**

**Joe Plumb, senior manager, marketing insights at Ardent Mills**



# Here are the top five trends driving consumer purchasing decisions



## Canadians have a grain-positive mindset

Today's diverse set of consumers have cultivated a true appreciation for grains. The good news continues as grain perception is high with the key demographic of 18-34 year olds as well as those ages 65+. These groups are foundationally and passionately connected to grains—and there is promising opportunity to cultivate a deeper connection with the younger generation.

**92%** of Canadians report consuming grains at least a few times per month or more

**52%** surveyed believe grains are an affordable way to eat nutritiously

**49%** of 18-34 year olds say they would eat more grains if they had more information about them

About 40% of consumers report that inclusion of grains is something they seek out when ordering at restaurants or preparing foods at home; for younger consumers, this is even more important. Grains also hit the mark as food prices have risen and continue to be on the rise.

Beyond their universal understanding and appreciation, consumers are looking for information to support their decision making: 50% want to know more about grains, and 39% of consumers say they'd eat more grains if they had additional information about them.

## What grains are trending now

Quinoa, sorghum and buckwheat are all gaining traction with the younger demographic. Our research found that 47% of all consumers surveyed say they try to learn about different grains so they can incorporate them into their diets, behaviour that is driven by consumers ages 35-44 (51%).

## The trends speak for themselves

The majority of consumers surveyed regularly work grains into their diets:

### Quinoa

93% Awareness

69% Familiarity

### Sorghum

49% Awareness

17% Familiarity

### Buckwheat

92% Awareness

51% Familiarity

### Wheat Flour

99% Awareness

88% Familiarity

### Grains (any)

99% Awareness

92% Familiarity

### Millets

74% Awareness

34% Familiarity

### Teff

24% Awareness

8% Familiarity



# Ingredients Matter



## Selecting the right foods starts with ingredients

### Building food choices from the ground up

Consumers are often making their food decisions with ingredients as the primary decision-making factor. In fact, nearly all (88%) of the consumers surveyed report that ingredients play a role in their food selections.



**“Many consumers search product packaging for specific ingredients, the benefits they deliver and the sourcing and processing methods,”**

says Elaine O'Doherty, marketing lead at Ardent Mills Canada

“This information helps products stand out on shelf—and helps brands differentiate from the competition—and consumers are often willing to pay more for these items.”

# Ingredients Matter

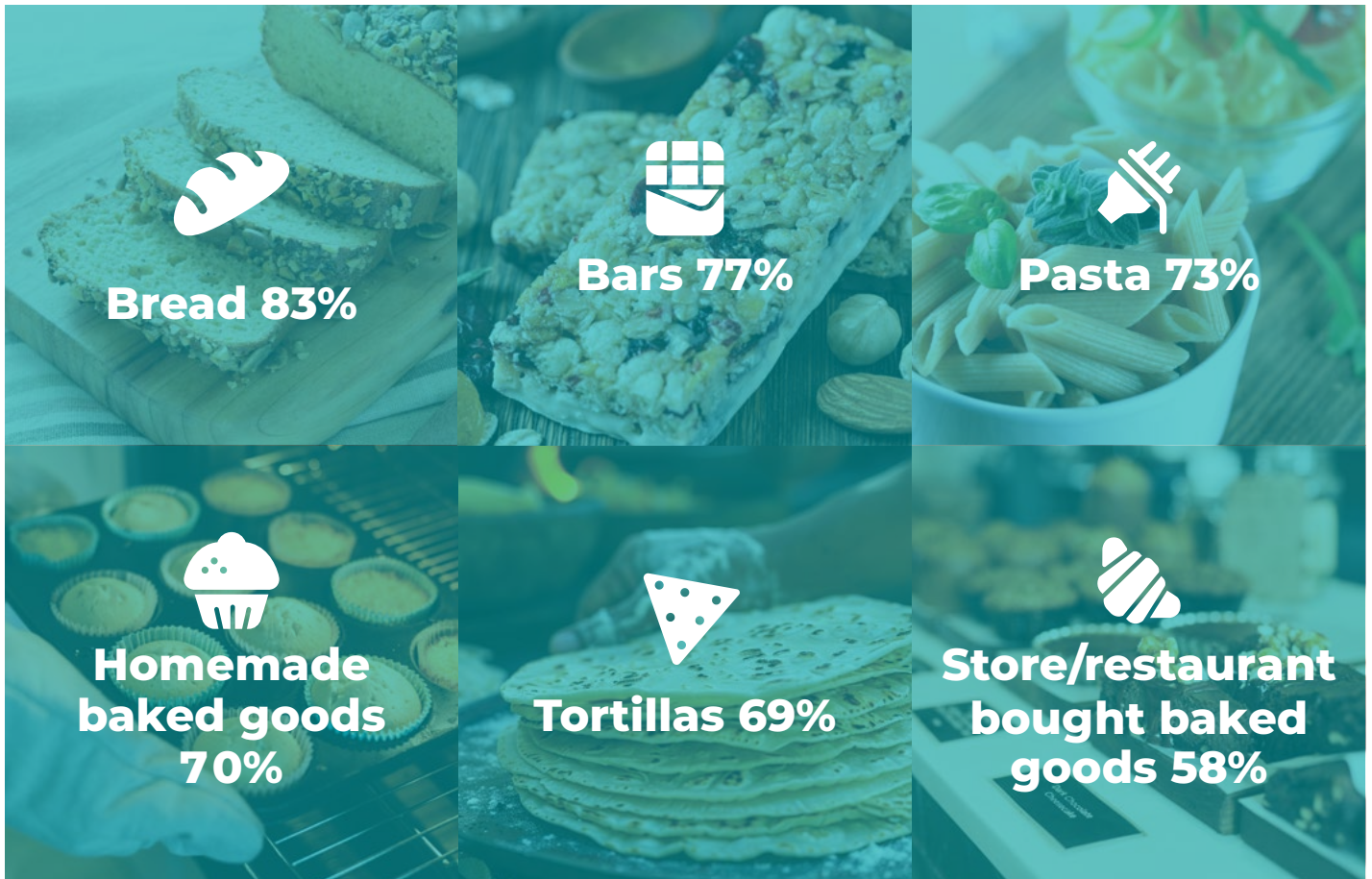
Well over three-quarters (81%) of consumers who review product information check the ingredients list specifically. Similarly, the “right” or desired ingredients can command higher prices—more than half (52%) of consumers agree that they are willing to pay more for foods that use whole and/or less-processed ingredients.

This means alternative grains are experiencing growth, with pasta being a trendy dish in consumers’ homes. In fact, 81% of all those surveyed consume pasta at least a few times per month at home, and trending pastas like whole grain and chickpea are now a favoured choice.



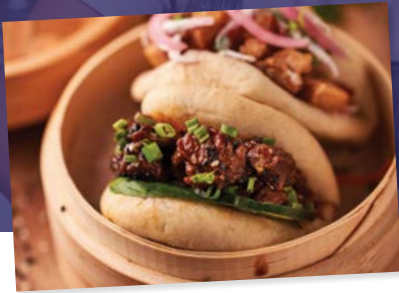
## Grains matter

Consumers consider grains when buying:





# HERITAGE IS HERO



## Global goes mainstream

### Our diverse cultural backgrounds define daily eating habits

Today's landscape is more ethnically diverse than ever, with family and ancestral roots at the forefront of our multicultural heritage. Gatherings are centered around food, and the cuisines served are influenced greatly by familial backgrounds and traditions.

In fact, 61% state their cultural background influences the way they eat. This is particularly high among those who identified as Latine (83%) and younger consumers (58% of those ages 18-24). Respondents from Quebec claim food as part of their identity (63%), higher than any other Canadian province.

Canada's richness in population diversity has resulted in multicultural flavours becoming ubiquitous. The fusion of international foods that remind consumers of home continues to become integrated with Canadian favourites.

"The population is growing at a pace we've never seen before, primarily due to immigration from South Asia, Asia, the Caribbean and African nations," says O'Doherty. "This has created a culturally diverse landscape that Canadians embrace—it's a point of pride that you see celebrated in our communities and reflected in the availability of international cuisines offered."

And while those surveyed agreed their selections are influenced by the dishes they grew up enjoying at home, global fare is also a part of everyday food choices. International cuisines are shaping the culinary options offered in grocery stores, fast food and fast casual restaurants, pizzerias and many other dining establishments.





# HERITAGE IS HERO

“Foods and flavours that make up the global options readily available in Canada are often considered experimental and adventurous in the U.S.,” says Plumb.

Grains are important to the diet of certain cultural cuisines, and 78% of consumers also agree that grains are good for their bodies. Almost half of all surveyed agreed they make an effort to know about different grains to incorporate them into their diet. Forty percent plan to eat more grains in the next year, and this is higher among Black (61%), Latine (57%), Asian (52%) and Middle Eastern (52%) consumers.



## Celebrating heritage

**53%** of consumers agree food is part of their identity

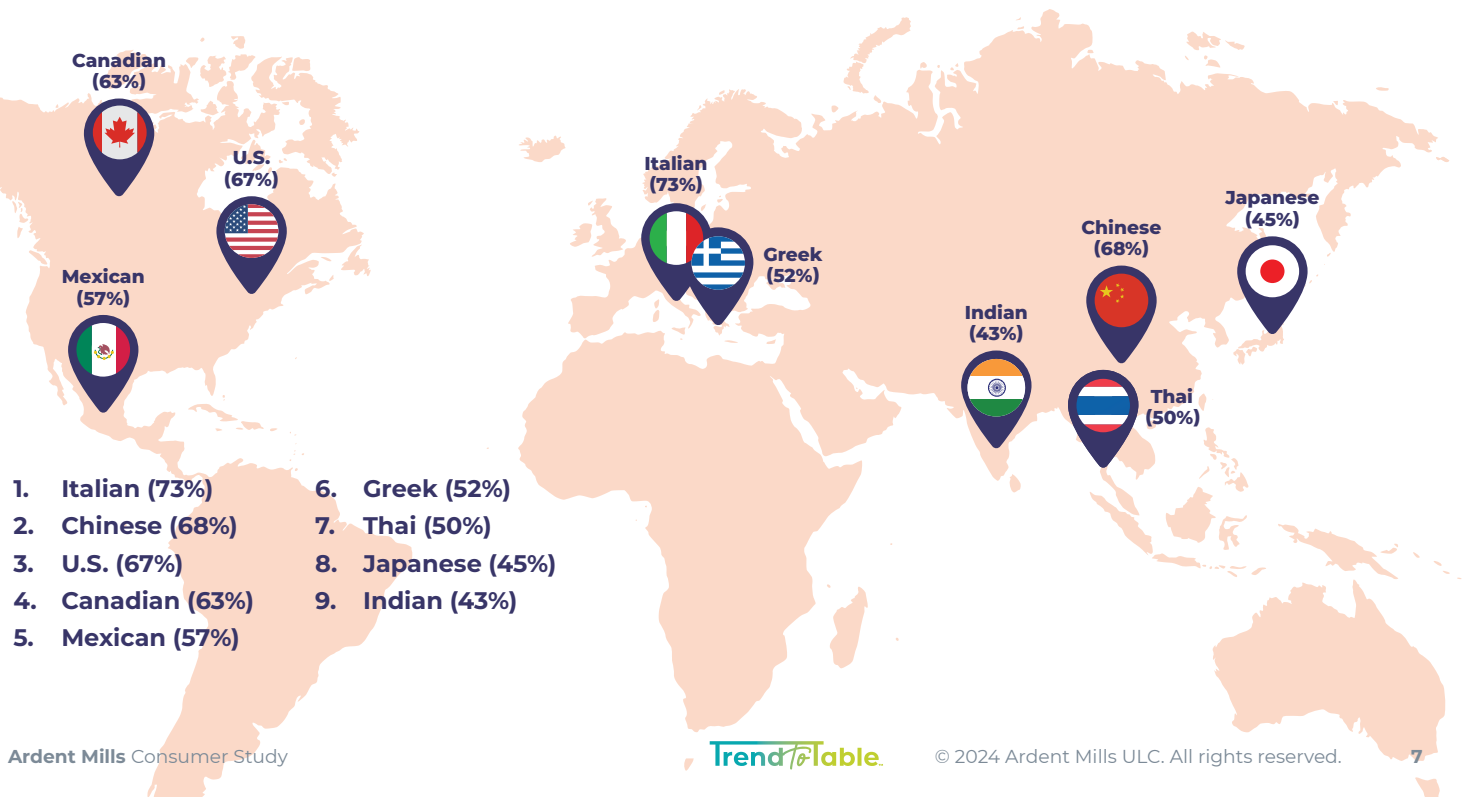
**61%** state that their upbringing influences what they eat

These findings are even stronger with the Latine population at **83%**

**“Canadians are so passionate about food. It’s really a celebratory and open mindset—honouring familiar flavours while embracing global cuisines. It’s evolving fast, and it’s an exciting time for our industry.”**

Joe Plumb

## Top cuisines consumers enjoy:



# ADDING WITH INTENT



## Intentional inclusion

### Consumers are curating their food choices based on the benefits

A top priority for today's consumer is seeking foods that add to and boost their wellness goals. This kind of investment is at an all-time high as they are more focused on mindful dietary decisions that will benefit their health and wellness, while restrictive practices take a backseat.

It sounds simple, but it's true. Consumers just want to feel good about their food choices by adding nutritional elements and favourable taste to their selections.

O'Doherty explains that these personal dietary goals are now more motivated by positive aspects rather than the removal or avoidance mindsets of the past. In fact, the vast majority (83%) agree that seeking out "good for you" foods is a top priority to meeting their dietary goals.





# ADDING WITH INTENT

**“Consumers today have shifted from restricting items to prioritizing adding in ingredients that fulfill wellness goals.”**

Elaine O’Doherty

Most consumers (83%) check package information at least occasionally, and ingredients (81%) and nutritional information (76%) are the top two areas reviewed. Nearly three-quarters (70%) agree that foods are a convenient way to make life easier.

O’Doherty explains that today’s consumers are experimental when it comes to their product selections. “It’s more of an explorative approach,” says O’Doherty. “They’re continually trying different types of foods or ingredients to see how they like them.”

**Additionally, grains deserve credit for adding multiple benefits to dishes—over half of those surveyed (63%) say that grain-based foods are an affordable way to eat nutritiously and incorporate those “good-for-you” benefits they seek, and three-quarters (78%) agree that grains are “good for my body.”**





# DESIRE TO DO GOOD



## Steering toward sustainability: Guidance for products and practices

### Information can help close the gap

Thirty-nine percent of consumers surveyed say they prioritize foods that come from brands or companies with stated goals and commitments around reducing environmental impact, treating workers fairly and giving back to the community. And almost two-thirds (60%) of those surveyed agree that the ingredients used in the food items they purchase can have an impact on the world.

However, when there is a lack of information, it can lead to confusion surrounding the topics of sustainability and regenerative agriculture—and what consumers should be expected to pay for these benefits. This can make it challenging to select the foods that align with their sustainability goals.

**!** **58% of those surveyed** want more information on how their food choices positively impact the planet



## DESIRE TO DO GOOD

**“The sustainability movement is driven by the consumer’s growing desire to do good, and younger consumers are willing to pay more to support sustainable companies.”**

Joe Plumb

### 50% claim

that foods grown using sustainable or regenerative agriculture practices are important to their dietary goals and priorities

### 50% say

that foods with a lower carbon footprint are important to those same goals

### 38% are willing

to pay more for grain-based foods that are sustainably grown

Behaviours are starting to follow at scale, with nearly half (48%) agreeing that they seek foods that are not only good for them but good for the planet—grown and processed with fair treatment of all workers in the supply chain.

### Intentional selections:

**53% agree** that their food choices can have a positive impact on the planet



**28% agree** that grains generally have a lower carbon footprint than other types of foods.



Ingredient suppliers and manufacturers that incorporate sustainable practices provide tangible ways to connect with consumers and help them feel like they’re making a difference. Product features such as regenerative agriculture, organic ingredients and sustainability can command higher prices, often more so with the younger demographic and households with children.





Indulge me



## Embracing everyday indulgences

### Sweets and baked goods are a celebrated, guilt-free part of life

Consumers welcome indulgent opportunities. Nearly three-quarters (71%) state that regular indulgent moments are important to their dietary priorities—whether it's connecting to nostalgia, celebrating a special event, sharing a home-baked good with loved ones, or working small moments of joy into their days—and almost all (92%) indicate that “great taste” is important to their eating goals.

### Food makes people happy



**92%** state that “great tasting foods” are a key element to their dietary goals

### Apology-free eating



**71%** report that “rewarding and treating” is a top dietary priority





# Indulge me

**“Celebrations and gatherings centre around food, and sharing family favourites and honouring traditions make people happy.”**

Elaine O’Doherty

**Consumers report feeling these top four feelings after eating homemade sweet baked goods:**



## Two-thirds of consumers

agree that “baking from scratch” is a way to show someone you care



There’s room at the table for savoury indulgences, too. Pizza has a top position in the indulgent foodscape, with one-quarter of consumers feeling the “indulgent” emotional sentiment after eating restaurant pizza and 77% rating their mood as “very happy.”

**“Consumers regularly seek out indulgent eating occasions because they make them feel good, both physically and mentally.”**

Joe Plumb



# Trend To Table™

## Inspired? Want to know more?

We're just getting started

The top five trends are not compartmentalized. They are fluid, and consumers are navigating each of the trends by the day and even within a single meal. The more trends you can innovate around, the more traction you can gain in the marketplace.

At Ardent Mills, we are your partner in grains, pulses and flours, as they remain a foundation of the Canadian food landscape—and they provide versatile opportunities to deliver on today's trends.

If you're ready to learn more about how to meet these trends, **Trend to Table™** is only the beginning. We're here to help you make the most of these insights, provide the ability to dive deeper and connect the dots so you can innovate, create and grow.

Explore our [innovation page](#) for additional information on our suite of services, or reach out to partner on your next innovation project.



**Ingredients  
Matter**



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All data points are derived from Ardent Mills Proprietary Research, Canadian Consumers 18+, 2023