

Biggest Food Story of 2016: Chipotle's Woes

By [Jessica Wohl](#). Published on December 12, 2016.



Top Food News Credit: Hunter Public Relations

Chipotle's ongoing recovery from last year's E.Coli outbreak was the biggest food story in the U.S. this year, while cold brew coffee was the hottest item in the broader food industry, according to a study being released today.

The Hunter Public Relations study asked consumers to select the top three food stories from a list of 20 that ran from November 2015 - October 2016.



Top Food News. Credit: Hunter Public Relations

The decline in the honeybee population, listeria outbreaks, the GMO labeling bill and no-tipping policies at restaurants rounded out the top five.

The next five on the list were Pokemon Go at restaurants; the FDA's plan to redefine the term "healthy;" clean eating and labeling; the FDA approving an updated nutritional panel that highlights sugar content; and the sugar industry pointing blame at fat. In all, the top 10 stories largely fit into three areas: restaurants, government involvement and food safety.

"Every year we see the government's influence on food and food policy becoming more and more important to consumers," said Grace Leong, Hunter's CEO and leader of its food practice.

"I don't think it's surprising that it was a restaurant story and also a food safety issue that got them to the top of the list," Ms. Leong said of Chipotle, which is not one of her company's clients.

Chipotle's problems did not even make the list last year, as the survey covers stories for the 12 months ending in October, and the chain's broader issues were not in the news until November 2015.

This year, Hunter added a question about what did people think was the top food ingredient or item of the year. Cold brew coffee came, with 13%, just ahead of avocado with 12%. Turmeric and donuts were tied next with 7%, perhaps a fitting way to show that Americans are broadly interested both in health and indulgence.

Another addition to this year's survey was the popularity of getting recipe information from videos shared on Facebook, such as those from BuzzFeed's Tasty platform. Websites and books were still more popular sources for recipes, but their popularity declined, as did magazines, which now rank just behind social media.

Hunter PR's client list includes [Campbell Soup Co.](#)'s Pepperidge Farm and Plum Organics, Diageo, E&J Gallo, Idahoan, Tabasco maker McIlhenny Co., Mondelez International, Outback Steakhouse operator Bloomin' Brands, Pompeian, Post, and Smithfield.

For Hunter, doing the annual study helps the public relations firm in its relationships with such clients. "They need to understand what they're in competition with if they're trying to break through with stories," Ms. Leong said.

The 2016 online survey included responses from 1,046 adults. Hunter has done the study since 2002 and for the past four years it has been conducted with Libran Research.

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