

The next big thing rarely comes out of nowhere

Remember when clean labels, upcycled ingredients and microbiome health were still emerging ideas? Back in 2016, these were among 17 early trend signals we encouraged clients to watch—and 10 years later, all but one of those trends maintain mainstream appeal.

The macro trend	2016 emerging trend expression	Mainstream in 2026?
 Edible Ethics	Clean labels, clean menus: Simplicity in sourcing and processing methods	Y
	Upcycling as the new norm: Consumers becoming Waste Warriors	Y
	Currency of kindness: Shaping a new food system based on social impact	Y
	Transparency in animal welfare: Declining antibiotics use to benefit animal and human health	Y
	Indie brands and progressive chefs: Bringing specialty items into the mainstream	Y
	The decline of calorie counting: Real, less processed foods negate the need to obsess over calories	Y
	Full fat as the new low fat: Consumers rebel against processed foods by turning to “good fats”	Y
 Optimal Self	Organic + natural as more democratic: Lower cost retailers and private brands shift perception of organics	Y
	GMOs and concern over cultural heritage: Less anti science, more preservation of indigenous food cultures	Y
	Next level in transparency: Anxiety over unknowns in the food supply	Y
	Biohacking: Going beyond nutrition and exercise for an upgraded life	Y
 Flexible Occasions	Interest in the microbiome: Concerns around emulsifiers in connection to gut and brain health	Y
	Rethinking fortification: Shifting away from industrialized to inherent and real	Y
	All things globally fresh: Chickpeas take gluten free to the next “authentic” level	N
	Cannabis as a legitimate new superfood: Pinpointing strains that can benefit modern diseases	Y
	Chef-driven food delivery: Emphasizing modern notions of quality and freshness	Y
	Sipping for playful wellness: Health benefits conveyed as fun, not stodgy and prescriptive	Y

Imagine the possibilities if you'd seen what was coming then.