CARBON TRUTHS
Carbon miles are the new calories – and consumers want to ‘eat’ less. Climate-friendly diets gain traction, centred on foods with the smallest carbon footprint. Businesses will respond with increased transparency regarding emissions, contributing to an increase in ‘carbon labelling’ (despite the fact that carbon along the supply chain is difficult to measure). And it’s not just about carbon reduction, or being ‘carbon neutral’; now the goals are ‘carbon negative’ or ‘active’.

LAB TO FORK
Cultivated protein (aka cell-based, or lab-grown) is the next frontier in motherless meat. There’s fast paced development in both cellular (using animal cells) and acellular (plant based) processes. Regulatory hurdles are jumped, and price points lowered – leading proponents to say it’s finally commercially viable at scale. And there’s opportunity to explore beyond meat; companies are using processes like precision fermentation, to make lab grown milk, honey, cheese, chocolate and more.

SEA FARMS
Sea plants are being hailed as a potential, sustainable food solution with the ability to replace fish, grains, meat and even plastic… Seaweed, dulse, kelp and samphire appear on more and more menus – from QSR to fine dining. Microalgae is meanwhile used to make anything from milk to burger patties. And chefs and marine scientists alike are getting excited about zostera marina, a seagrass being harvested for its grains, and lauded as ‘the rice of the sea’— and the next big superfood.
COMFORT

Contactless and friction free experiences are the holy grail of foodservice. Digital kiosks, voice recognition and cameras are enabled to make the ordering process quick and seamless; meanwhile cashierless checkouts, lockers, vending machines, drive through and curbside collection make picking up orders easier than ever. Robots are used more widely, to do everything from meal prep to delivery. And speaking of delivery, disruption continues at pace – from apps that promise delivery in minutes, to drone delivery, to precision drop-offs with the help of geolocation tools.

SEAMLESS ORDER & DELIVERY

The backlash against ‘ultra processed’ and HFSS (high fat, salt, sugar) foods continues to grow – but consumers still want to enjoy their favourite foods. Cue, a surge in innovation around ‘better for you’ alternatives. Brands look to ‘natural sweeteners’ and sugar alternatives like allulose, to reduce the glycaemic impact of products; they also turn to the likes of swapouts (e.g. grain free flour) and salt substitutes. And they drive to get as close to ‘clean label’ as possible; so products that are perceived as highly processed are reformulated with fewer, all natural ingredients.

SAME BUT HEALTHIER

Childhood obesity is a crisis, and most agree too much of kids’ caloric intake comes from ‘ultra processed’ foods high in fat, sugar or salt (HFSS). So parents scrutinise labels and brands are reformulating kids’ products to make them healthier, with targeted nutrition for toddlers to teenagers; that means all natural ingredients, hidden veggies, vitamin-boosters, and cutting down on the fat, salt and sugar content of traditional favourites. And there’s a growing for convenient, healthy solutions for kids - from ‘clean’ energy drinks to better-for-you ready meals.
**FINE EATING, NOT DINING**

For many diners, the future lies in ‘fine eating’ rather than ‘fine dining’ – i.e. focus on the food, without the formality. This gastronomy-forward, fuss free approach is driving a resurgence in French-style bistro and brasseries, gourmet wine bars and the new generation of gastro pubs – same Michelin-grade food as any leading restaurant, but in a more relaxed setting... you can even slip your shoes off.

**SENSORY EXPLORATION**

The pandemic created a newfound appreciation for our senses, not least because loss of taste and smell are well documented Covid side effects. So now, dishes are elevated with big & bold flavours – sour, salt, spicy and umami; look out too for kokumi, the savoury sensation described as ‘the next umami’. Brands also play with the sense of smell, using scents to transport us to ‘happy places’. And let’s not forget the sense of touch! After being deprived of physical interaction for so long, we want to use our hands and play with our food.

**LOOK EAST**

The cultural influence of East Asia is growing at pace. Consumers can’t get enough of the food, fashion, film and music of Korea & Japan in particular. Japanese food, already well loved globally, is explored further – and cooks get creative with cuisine mashups (e.g. Japanese-Italian), sweet formats (mochi donut, anyone?) and pantry staples. Meanwhile K-culture sweeps the world; indeed 26 Korean words have been added to the Oxford English Dictionary. The K-craze draws consumers to Korean dishes like tteokbokki, bulgogi, fried chicken and Korean corn dogs.
Sometimes we need to forget the world’s stresses, just for a moment, and feel like we’re kids again. Brands step up to the plate, with whimsical concepts and nostalgic experiences – arcade games, glow-in-the-dark designs, ice cream trucks and so on. And consumers seek out childhood favourites like s’mores, hot dogs, custard, jelly and ice cream floats – but this time round, with a gourmet and grown-up makeover. Think CBD-infused trifle, boozy slushies and homemade Pop Tarts. Because indulging your inner child, doesn’t mean ignoring your gourmand side…