

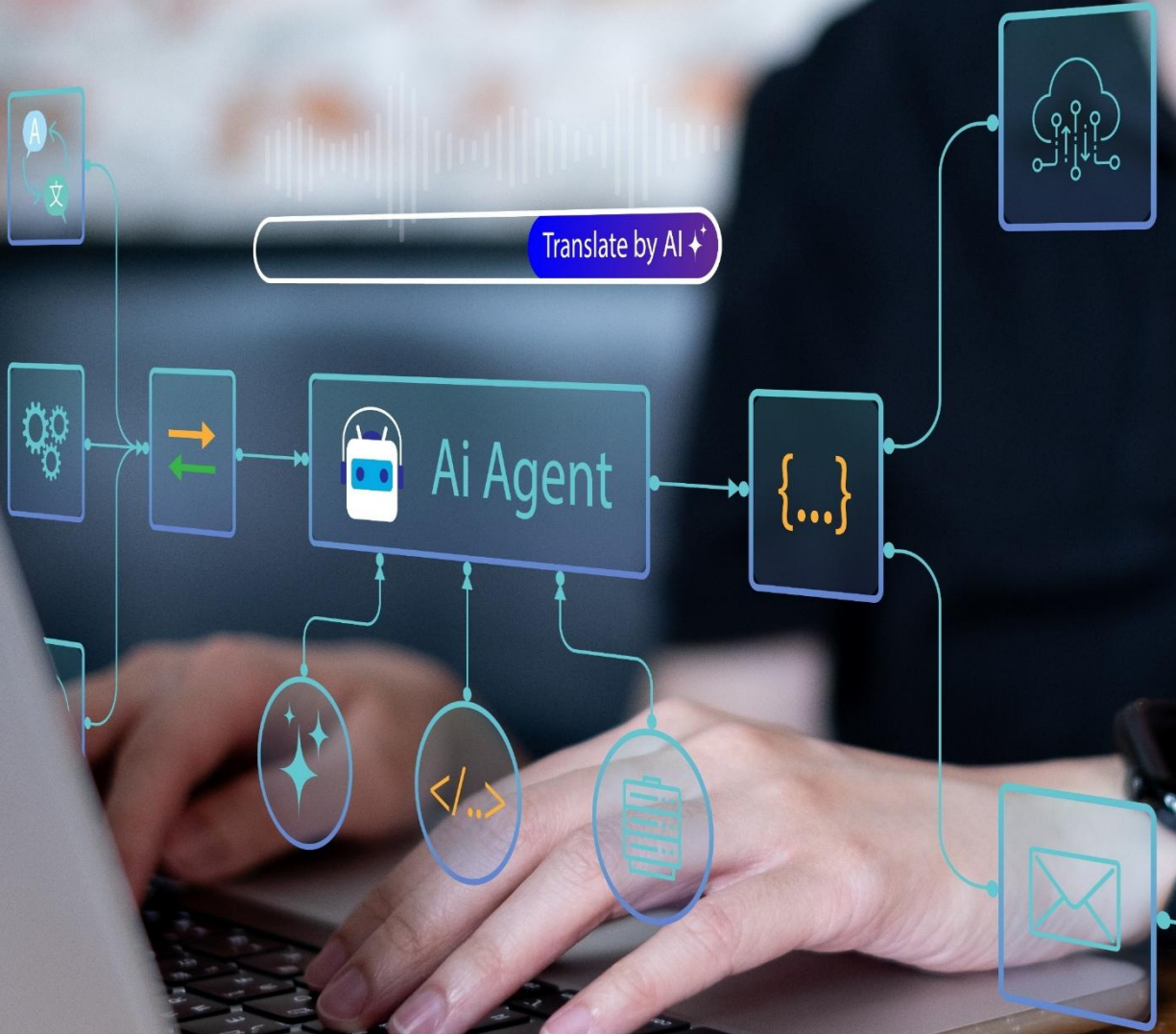
# Industry Insights

A roundup of noteworthy Canadian foodservice findings for the week of Aug. 10, 2026



Image Source: Shutterstock

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# What if you could ask your data anything?

## Which chains are growing fastest?

## What menu trends are gaining momentum?

## Where are my best opportunities for growth?

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# Smashburger LTO boosts A&W

A&W's same-store sales increased 2.1% in Q2 2026, rebounding sharply from the prior quarter's decline into negative territory.

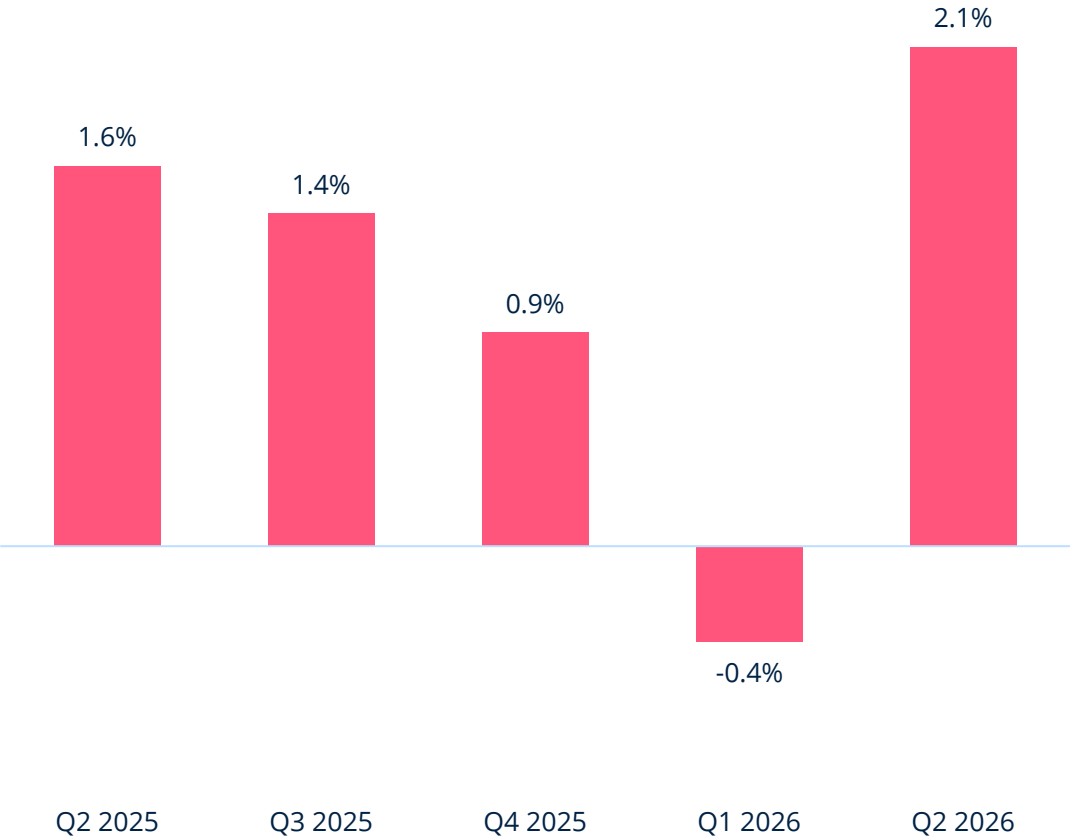
The turnaround was driven by the brand's 2025 introduction of Value Deals—menu items priced below \$4—and a recent limited-time smashburger offering that boosted systemwide sales.

Year-to-date, systemwide sales are up 2.7% from 2025, supported by same-store sales growth and 12 new store openings. A&W now operates 1,105 locations across Canada.

[Ignite Company clients: Click here for more](#)

Source: Technomic Ignite Company

**A&W**  
SAME-STORE SALES GROWTH



# Fastest-growing proteins at fine-dining restaurants

Seafood is particularly on the rise at Canada’s fine-dining restaurants, led by bluefin tuna, trout and squid. Bluefin tuna’s growth is driven by its versatile global preparations, including maki, sashimi nigiri and tartare. Trout, also on this list, is often grilled or smoked for a charred or smoky flavour profile. Trout also pops up alongside oysters and tuna.

The growth of squid reflects its flexibility, as it is added across the menu into everything from linguini to seafood rice to Mediterranean-style stews for extra protein. Squid also takes its place at the centre of the plate, typically grilled, or menued as a calamari dish.

For consumers looking for a classic option, fried chicken is also on the rise across menus. This comfort food appears in sandwiches and salads, as well as globally inspired dishes, including chicken curries.

Wagyu beef rounds out this list, menued as a stand-alone dish, sometimes as a centrepiece on tasting menus or integrated into various dishes including rigatoni. These approaches justify premium pricing, as the cattle is rare and expensive to maintain.

These proteins on the rise share the aspects of versatility in format and application.

Bluefin Tuna

29.4%

Trout

20.0%

Fried Chicken

11.1%

Squid

9.1%

Wagyu

6.8%



[Ignite Menu clients: Click here for more](#)

Source: Technomic Ignite Menu  
Image Source: Adobe Stock

# Value as a decision driver remains steady among Canadians

Value perceptions among Canadian diners remain steady at high levels, with little change in the importance of key factors over the past two years. When deciding on a restaurant, the importance of "high-quality items" and "competitive pricing" are both rated at 82%, while "quality service" closely follows at 81%. This stability indicates a mature market where consumer expectations are firmly established.

While technology and loyalty programs are gaining traction, their growth remains gradual. Canadian diners continue to prioritize traditional value drivers, such as quality and service, over newer digital offerings. This

suggests that while digital tools are becoming more relevant, they are not yet central to how consumers define value in dining experiences.

Price sensitivity shows minimal movement, with "low prices" holding steady and "competitive pricing" seeing a slight decline. This might reflect cultural attitudes that place less emphasis on affordability as a deciding factor. Overall, Canadian consumers appear focused on consistent quality and service rather than shifting priorities.

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Base: Approx. 8,000 Canadian consumers ages 18+ per trailing four quarters  
Source: Technomic Ignite Consumer, Q3 2025-Q2 2026

## RESTAURANT SELECTION DRIVERS IMPORTANT/VERY IMPORTANT

|                                                         | Q3 2023-<br>Q2 2024 | Q3 2024-<br>Q2 2025 | Q3 2025-<br>Q2 2026 | Two-Year<br>Change |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Offers a good value through high-quality menu items     | 83%                 | 82%                 | 82%                 | -1 pp              |
| Menu prices are in line with other, similar retailers   | 83%                 | 81%                 | 82%                 | -1 pp              |
| Offers a good value through quick, high-quality service | 82%                 | 80%                 | 81%                 | -1 pp              |
| Offers a good value through low prices                  | 81%                 | 81%                 | 81%                 | 0                  |
| Offers a good value through atmosphere/ambiance         | 73%                 | 74%                 | 73%                 | 0                  |
| Offers a good value through use of technology           | 54%                 | 56%                 | 56%                 | +2 pp              |
| Offers loyalty program rewards                          | 51%                 | 54%                 | 55%                 | +4 pp              |

# Around the world with chicken

The newly launched Global Menu Trends tool on Ignite features powerful analytical tools designed to help clients make the most out of the Global Foodservice Navigator Program with relevant, timely insights into key trends, performance indicators, flavours and more. As an example of this tool's capabilities, let's take a deep dive into chicken around the world.

Spicy and onion flavours have historically dominated this protein's taste profile, but in the last year, seasonings including lemon, cheese and lime have seen enormous growth.

These flavours are highlighted in dishes such as chicken sandwiches, chicken burgers and fried chicken entrees, which the Global Menu Trends tool spotlights as both the top dishes for the protein (by number of LTOs) and as showing strong year-over-year growth,

with fried chicken growing by nearly 30%.

A few recent examples of lemony chicken LTOs that this tool calls out include a recent [chicken sandwich launch in South Africa](#) with lemon pepper mayonnaise, a [fried chicken entree from Japan](#) with a honey-lemon-mayonnaise sauce, and a [chicken finger plate in the U.S.](#) that stars a lemon pepper dry rub.

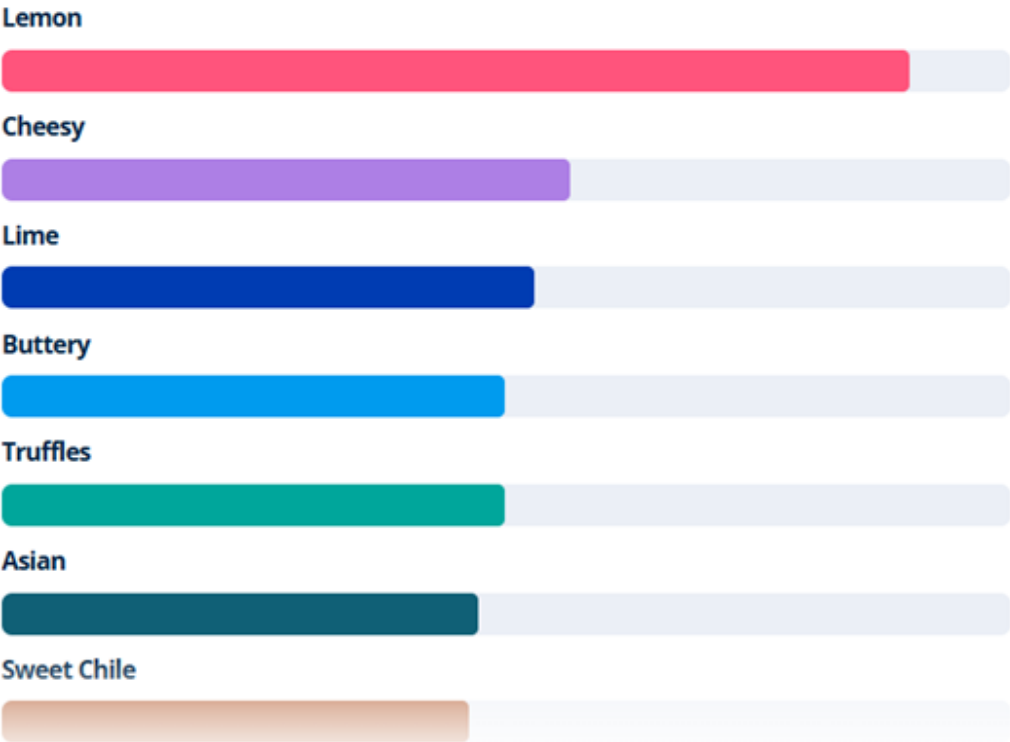
Dishes with chicken are concentrated in the Asia-Pacific, with countries from this region making up four of the top 10 markets for number of LTOs with chicken, including two of the top three. Markets in North America and the Middle East similarly saw active menu development with chicken over the last year.

[Global Navigator clients: Click here for more](#)

Source: Technomic Global Foodservice Navigator and Ignite Global Menu Trends

## Fastest Growing Chicken LTO Flavours ⓘ

Year Over Year Percentage Change



# Ignite AI Prompt of the Week

In each Industry Insights, we ask Ignite AI a top-of-mind industry question and share the answer with you. Copy our prompt or write your own to answer your industry questions in our Ignite.

AI is using data from Reports Company & Industry Consumer Menu

What are trends in fries in 2026 and what are the most common builds for fries with toppings (loaded fries)? Clear ➤

Ignite AI is an AI-powered assistant providing foodservice insights from Technomic's research data. While we strive for accuracy, users should validate critical insights against source materials.

**Cheese is the anchor topping,** appearing on more than half of loaded fries operator menus, and the only ingredient to break above the halfway mark. When combined with sauces and onion, a clear classic loaded build emerges.

Scallions show strong adoption at 28%, functioning as both a garnish and flavour component across global-inspired builds.

## Protein Builds Driving Differentiation

Protein is the primary driver of customization and creativity within loaded fries in Canada. In Q2 2026, the

protein build landscape includes some of the following:

Chicken features broad segment reach, present at quick-service and fast-casual operators. Fried chicken also appears, indicating that crispy fried formats are being used as a loaded topping in its own right.

Beef includes ground beef, bulgogi-style and barbecue preparations.

Bacon is the most common single protein, often paired with ranch or cheese.

Steak is used for that upscale/premium positioning.

[Technomic Ignite clients: Click here for more](#)

Source: Technomic Ignite AI

| MOST COMMON LOADED FRIES TOPPINGS |            |                             |
|-----------------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| Topping                           | Menu Items | % of Loaded Fries Operators |
| Cheese                            | 25         | 51.1%                       |
| Sauces                            | 32         | 48.9%                       |
| Onion                             | 20         | 40.4%                       |
| Scallions                         | 14         | 27.7%                       |
| Bacon                             | 11         | 23.4%                       |
| Chicken                           | 10         | 19.1%                       |
| Tomatoes                          | 9          | 19.1%                       |
| Sour cream                        | 9          | 19.1%                       |
| Herbs, seeds, spices              | 11         | 19.1%                       |
| Beef                              | 8          | 17.0%                       |
| Feta                              | 11         | 17.0%                       |



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