

FutureBridge

Food & Nutrition

Adapting Innovation for Generation Z

How the food industry must adapt to meet Gen Z's expectations around health, sustainability, and digital engagement to unlock future growth





81%

of Gen Zers prefer to be defined by their personality traits and interests rather than traditional demographic labels.

Contents

1. Introduction:

Gen Z's rising influence on food

2. The Gen Z Consumer:

Behaviors, values & differences

3. Obsessed, Online, Outspoken:

Turning Gen Z Signals into Strategy

4. What Next: Key actions and

FutureBridge's support

1. Introduction: Gen Z's rising influence on food

Gen Z is emerging as a powerful force in the global food and beverage landscape. With growing economic influence, this generation is shaping industry direction with distinct behaviors and expectations. Food companies must respond proactively to these shifts to remain competitive.

The Gen Z Consumer – Behaviors, Values & Differences

Generation Z (born 1997 to 2012) is emerging as a powerful cohort set to transform the food and nutrition industry. Their behaviors and values, including digital fluency, individuality, social awareness, and diverse preferences, are prompting brands to adapt with new strategies. This is a snapshot of Gen Z's growing influence and mindset.

Key findings:

Power in Numbers

Gen Z makes up a massive slice of the global population and wields fast-growing economic influence.

Values First

Purpose, ethics, and identity matter. Gen Z expects food brands to take a stand and be transparent.

Wellness = Lifestyle

From functional foods to food exploration, health and flavor are non-negotiable parts of daily eating.

Digital by Default

Online-first and socially influenced, Gen Z demands frictionless, tech-savvy food experiences.

“

We want to become a 24/7 lifestyle brand that is relevant for Gen Z and millennials. That means being present on TikTok, creating avatars, and exploring NFTs (non-fungible tokens).



Daniel Grieder, CEO of Hugo Boss

2. The Gen-Z Consumer

Who are Gen Z eaters? Key behaviors, preferences, and how they differ from previous generations.

Gen Z is Changing Everything

Gen Z (born 1997 to 2012) is not just another young consumer group. They are the most disruptive generation the food industry has encountered. Their values, habits, and spending power are reshaping the rules for innovation, branding, and engagement.

\$360 bn

in direct U.S. spending power – and growing fast

72%

of Gen Z follow a specific diet or eating pattern (vs 29% of Boomers)

77%

of Gen Z discover new food spots via social media (vs 67% of Millennials)

73%

believe they care more about food's environmental impact than older generations

Gen Z Decoded: 3 Truths Food Brands Can't Ignore

From stricter health standards to climate-conscious choices and TikTok-powered discovery, Gen Z is rewriting the rules of food engagement. Brands that don't adapt risk irrelevance in a market driven by this hyper-connected, value-led generation.

1 Diets by Design

72% of Gen Z follow a specific diet or eating pattern, from plant-based to low-sugar. Health is intentional. They expect tailored, functional foods that align with their lifestyle.

2 Non-negotiable Sustainability

73% say they care more about food's environmental impact than older generations. Gen Z buys based on ethics. If you're not walking the talk, they'll walk away.

3 TikTok – the New Taste Test

77% discover food on social media. Gen Z trusts peers, not ads. If you're not present, shareable, and authentic online – you don't exist to them.

Gen Z Momentum vs Market Reality

Gen Z offers immense opportunity for food brands, but capturing their loyalty requires navigating both tailwinds and tensions. Their rising spending power and digital engagement are fueling innovation, while price sensitivity, economic pressures, and scale challenges still hold back widespread adoption of Gen Z-targeted solutions.

Key Drivers

Growing Spending Power

Gen Z's influence and income are rising fast

Sustainability Ethos

Strong demand for ethical, eco-friendly options

Wellness & Quality Focus

Gen Z expects clean-label, functional, better-for-you products

Tech-Savvy Engagement

Gen Z lives online; they expect mobile-first, on-demand experiences

Key Restraints

Price Sensitivity

Premium products must be affordable to win share

Economic Uncertainty

Inflation is making Gen Z cautious and value-driven

Brand Skepticism

They're quick to spot inauthenticity and ditch brands that don't align with their values

Infrastructure & Scale

Emerging solutions like lab-grown meat or refillable systems face hurdles in cost, logistics, and regulation.

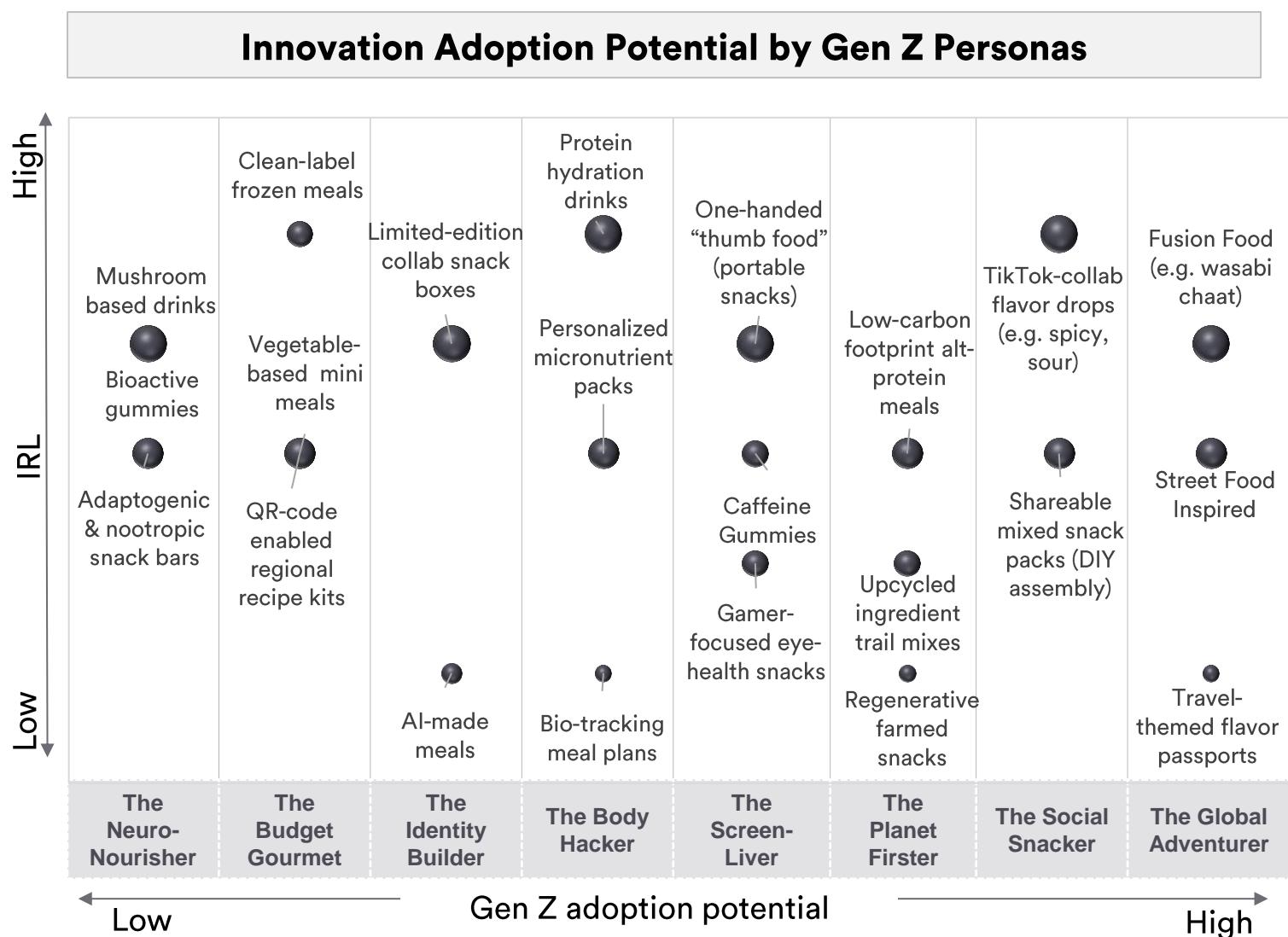
FutureBridge Identifies Gen Z Personas

This table highlights Gen Z food personas, each shaped by unique priorities from wellness to experience-driven choices.

Persona	Priority	Supporting Data
The Neuro-Nourisher	 Brain function, hormonal balance, and emotional stability	69% of Gen Z more likely to choose foods that support their mental wellbeing
The Budget Gourmet	 Affordable indulgence without compromising on ethics	80% say inflation impacts buying, yet they still seek brand values alignment
The Identity Builder	 Food as identity, ethically aligned, customized, creative, experiential.	66% say passions & hobbies shape identity, not traditional demographics
The Body Hacker	 Fitness, energy, and physical enhancement	57% of Gen Z are more focused on fitness than other age-groups
The Screen-Liver	 Convenience that syncs with digital lives	64% snack at least once a day while online or when gaming
The Planet Firster	 Environmental impact and brand transparency	73% would pay more for sustainable food options if they trust the brand
The Social Snacker	 Fun, shareability, viral experiences and social approval	84% of Gen Z like to seek viral foods (limited-edition, collaborations etc)
The Global Adventurer	 Cultural exploration, novelty, nostalgia and flavor experimentation	1 in 3 Gen Z diners prioritize cultural exploration when dining out

Source: Food Insight | Bloomberg | Vox Media | McKinsey | Eater | Attest

Strategic Opportunities in Gen Z-Centric Product Innovation



NB. The above matrix maps the link between trends and Gen Z cultural alignment to uncover opportunities.

Bubble size indicates market potential, derived from factors like category CAGR and trend momentum

The X-axis = Gen Z adoption readiness, a composite score of cultural relevance, awareness, resonance with Gen Z values, and overall trend alignment.

The Y-axis reflects the Innovation Readiness Level (IRL), rated on a scale from 1 (Low) to 9 (High).

Gen Z craves wellness with flavor. Products like CBD gummies, adaptogenic bars, and protein hydration drinks can scale fast when launched through creator partnerships, direct-to-consumer formats, and rapid go-to-market strategies.

Market outlook

Gen Z is reshaping the future of food – fast. Their influence on health trends, sustainability demands, and digital food culture is growing. With **\$12T in projected spending power by 2030**, Gen Z is not a niche, they are the next food mainstream.

- 1.** Food is identity – Gen Z uses food to express values, lifestyles, and personal goals, from plant-based diets to climate-conscious purchases.
- 2.** Discovery is social – Platforms like TikTok and Instagram drive product trial, with peer influence outweighing traditional ads.
- 3.** Values drive value – Health, sustainability, and transparency are key to earning Gen Z trust, and long-term loyalty.

Next Steps:

- Innovate with intent** – Design products that deliver both wellness and purpose
- Lead on social** – Build brand presence through creators and content-first campaigns
- Show your impact** – Communicate sustainability clearly and credibly.

3. Obsessed, Online, Outspoken: Turning Gen Z Signals into Strategy

This section explores how Gen Z's values, habits, and expectations translate into clear opportunities for food brands. Covering themes from sustainability to digital engagement and functional eating, these insights highlight where to innovate, how to connect, and what it takes to succeed with the next generation of consumers.

Value Driven Choices

Observation:

Nearly half of young consumers would pay a premium for sustainable food – 46% of Gen Z restaurant-goers (ages 20–29) are willing to spend extra for organic or sustainably sourced dishes.

What it tells us:

Gen Z does not simply prefer ethical products; they expect brands to reflect their values. Sustainability, social impact, and authenticity have become essential drivers of brand loyalty.

Industry should:

Integrate sustainability into the foundation of your business strategy, including ethical sourcing, upcycling, and full transparency. Gen Z is not swayed by greenwashing; they expect credible, verifiable action.



Opportunity: Planet-First Products for a Purpose-First Generation

Deliver future-fit innovations that align with Gen Z's ethical expectations and sustainability standards.

Cultivated Meat, Reinvented

Ethical proteins without the carbon cost



Aleph Farms, Israel (Approved late 2024)

Aleph became the second company globally to gain approval for cultivated beef. This signals the next wave of lab-grown, with climate impact up to 92% lower than conventional beef.

What it could mean for Gen Z: Guilt-free meat that aligns with both environmental and ethical values.

For more... see our [Valorizing the Unusable FoodTech Trend 2025](#)

From Scraps to Staples

Circularity through upcycled innovation



Renewal Mill x Miyoko's Creamery (Q1 2025)

Partnered to launch the world's first upcycled plant-based butter using okara flour. A Gen Z-aligned solution that turns byproducts into premium plant-based products.

What it could mean for Gen Z: Buying better-for-planet products without sacrificing taste or creativity.

Carbon Counts, Literally

Climate-conscious branding earns loyalty



Quorn (Expanded footprint labeling Q4 2024)

Quorn rolled out detailed carbon footprint labels across its frozen food range in late 2024. Gen Z consumers praised the brand's transparency and challenge to the status quo.

What it could mean for Gen Z: Visible proof that their food choices support the climate cause.

Always-On Digital Engagement

Observation:

Gen Z lives online - 55% use social media to discover new foods/recipes (more than any other generation), and 68% shop online for groceries, with 16% buying most of their groceries online.

Source: Hartman Group, 2023

What it tells us:

Gen Z expects a seamless digital experience across discovery, purchase, and interaction, and they are quick to support brands that deliver effectively.

Industry should:

Establish a strong presence on platforms popular with Gen Z. Focus on mobile-first design, creator partnerships, and engaging, shareable digital content.



Opportunity: Digital & Experiential Engagement

Create bold, tech-enabled experiences that meet Gen Z where they scroll, stream, and share.

Gaming Meets the Menu

Gamified experiences boost engagement



Chipotle, US (Expanded campaign 2025)

Launched 'Ingredient Quest' on Roblox, blending gamified learning with real-world food rewards. Gen Z engagement through fun and function.

What it could mean for Gen Z:
Food that's interactive, educational, and fun in one bite.

AI x AR = Viral Flavor

Immersive launches win Gen Z attention



Coca-Cola, US (Launched Q4 2024)

Created Coke Y3000 with AI and launched it with an AR experience on the Las Vegas Sphere. A futuristic campaign built for shareability.

For more on AI innovation...
see our [Thinking For Me](#)
FoodTech Trend 2025

What it could mean for Gen Z:
Next-level food experiences designed for the feed, not the shelf.

Convenience on Wheels

Automation drives novelty & convenience



Starship Technologies, Estonia (Scaled to 70+ campuses by 2025)

Autonomous delivery robots now operate at universities nationwide. 98% of students say they love it. Functional, fun, and frictionless

What it could mean for Gen Z:
Food delivery that's fast, futuristic, and campus-friendly.

Experiential & Functional Eating

Observation:

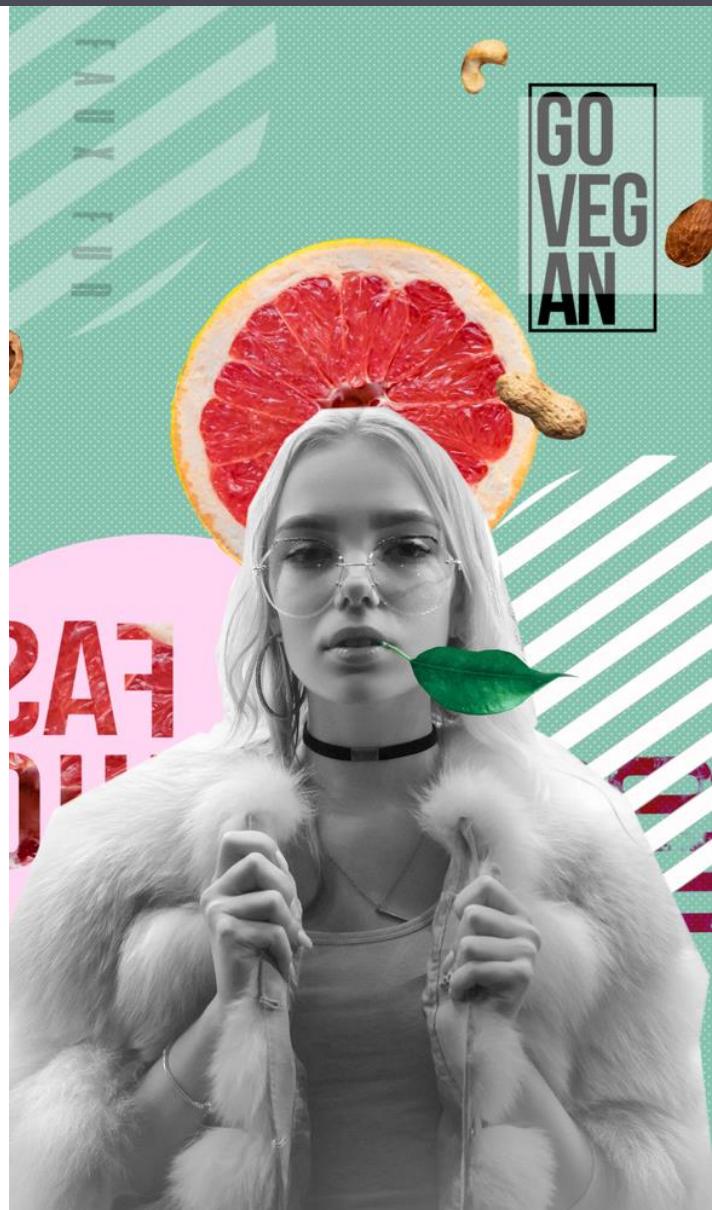
63% of Gen Z love trying new foods, and a third actively seek functional benefits like mood or energy boosts (YPulse, 2023). This generation blends curiosity with wellness, expecting food to surprise, delight, and support their mental and physical health.

What it tells us:

For Gen Z, food serves as both a form of self-expression and a tool for wellbeing. They seek bold flavours, immersive experiences, and products that enhance energy, focus, digestion, and mental health.

Industry should:

Blend sensory appeal with proven functional benefits. Develop flexible, customisable products that are easy to share and integrate into daily self-care routines.



Opportunity: Functional & Personalized Nutrition

Elevate everyday eating with functional formats and personalised wellness built for Gen Z's evolving needs.

Mood Food, Bottled

Functional drinks for emotional wellbeing



Trip (Expanded into EU retail in early 2025)
UK brand offering CBD- and adaptogen-infused sparkling drinks. Stylish, calming, and built for Gen Z's wellness routines.

For more on mood food...
see our [Eating My Emotions](#) FoodTech Trend 2025

What it could mean for Gen Z:
Chill in a can, wellness made convenient and cool.

Wellness Gets Mainstream

Big brands meet niche nutrition needs



Nestlé (Vital Pursuits launched Q4 2024)
Vital Pursuits line targets GLP-1 users with high-fiber, nutrient-dense comfort foods. A big brand aligning with emerging health needs.

What it could mean for Gen Z:
Guilt-free indulgence that fits modern health goals.

Gut Health Gets Personal

Personalized nutrition for mass audiences

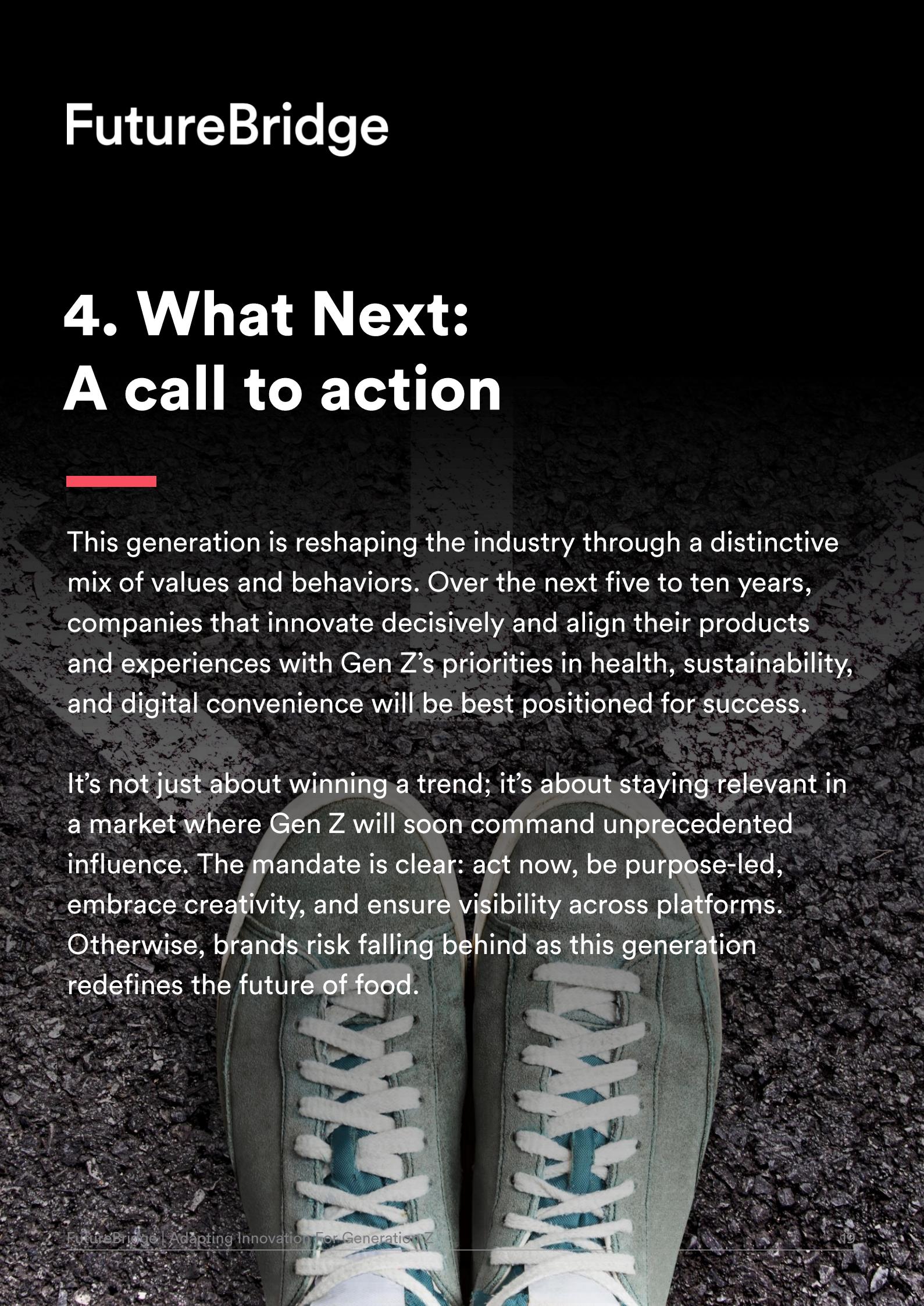


Supergut (Expanded into Target & GNC in 2025)
Delivers prebiotic-rich shakes and bars. Combines science-backed nutrition with mainstream availability

For more on life-stage nutrition... see our [Fueling Every Stage](#) FoodTech Trend 2025

What it could mean for Gen Z:
Custom wellness solutions that feel personal and accessible.

4. What Next: A call to action



This generation is reshaping the industry through a distinctive mix of values and behaviors. Over the next five to ten years, companies that innovate decisively and align their products and experiences with Gen Z's priorities in health, sustainability, and digital convenience will be best positioned for success.

It's not just about winning a trend; it's about staying relevant in a market where Gen Z will soon command unprecedented influence. The mandate is clear: act now, be purpose-led, embrace creativity, and ensure visibility across platforms. Otherwise, brands risk falling behind as this generation redefines the future of food.

Gen Z – Old ways won't work

Gen Z is transforming the landscape of food and nutrition by combining wellness with self-expression, digital fluency with expectations for transparency, and purpose with purchasing power. Brands that adapt today are best positioned to secure long-term loyalty and drive the next phase of growth.



Embed Sustainability

Gen Z mistrusts vague sustainability claims and demands transparency.

We benchmark sustainability gaps, validate supply chain actions, and build credible claims that earn Gen Z trust.



Go Digital & Omnichannel

Engage Gen Z where they discover and buy, from TikTok to direct-to-consumer

We map Gen Z's digital behavior and builds end-to-end omnichannel strategies.



Prioritize Health & Wellness

Limited appeal of current products to Gen Z's functional health goals.

We identify trending health claims, support targeted reformulation, and align benefits with Gen Z priorities.



Innovate the Experience

Lack of standout products that inspire sharing or cultural relevance.

We Spot flavour, format, and creator trends, and co-develop experiences that connect with Gen Z culture.

“Ignore Gen Z and you’re designing your strategy for the past.”

Strategic Intelligence to Power Innovation Decisions

FutureBridge equips food and nutrition leaders with actionable intelligence to navigate Gen Z-driven disruption and build future-fit strategies.

1. Innovation Scanning with a Gen Z Lens

Identify emerging technologies, ingredients, and business models aligned with Gen Z values to inform proactive investment and R&D focus.

2. Consumer-Led Concept Development

Translate Gen Z's evolving preferences into validated product concepts, guiding portfolio renewal and reducing the risk of market misalignment.

3. Techno-Commercial Feasibility and Scale Pathways

Assess readiness and commercial viability of Gen Z-targeted innovations, ensuring efficient resource allocation and go-to-market clarity.

4. Competitive and Ecosystem Mapping

Benchmark how industry leaders and disruptors engage Gen Z, uncovering white spaces and partnership opportunities across the value chain.

5. Foresight to Future-Proof Strategy

Integrate behavioral, regulatory, and digital shifts into long-term planning to future-proof innovation pipelines and brand positioning.

Meet the expert

Edward Bergen



Principal: Insights & Strategic Marketing

Edward Bergen is a Principal Analyst at FutureBridge, driving strategic insight across the food & nutrition and chemicals & materials practices. With over a decade of experience in the food industry, he delivers forward-looking perspectives on the future of food. Edward is known for his engaging speaking style and passion for storytelling.

Continue the conversation



Our addresses



North America

55 Madison Ave, Suite 400,
Morristown, NJ 07960, USA



Europe

WTC Utrecht, Stadsplateau 7,
3521 AZ Utrecht, The Netherlands



United Kingdom

Holborn Gate, 330 High Holborn
London, WC1V 7QH, UK



Asia Pacific

Millennium Business Park, Sector 3,
Building # 4, Mahape, Navi Mumbai, India



FutureBridge is a techno-commercial consulting and advisory company. We track and advise on the future of industries from a 1-to-25-year perspective.



www.futurebridge.com