Confectionery product developers need more than a crystal ball to predict the future. They need to have a good understanding of trends, and how those trends move through the consumer foodway.

There are some important questions that need to be answered. Where do trends in the food industry start? How do they differentiate themselves from fads? What demographic and psychographic changes are we currently facing in the United States? What influences and trends are changing how and what we eat? How will this affect the U.S. confectionery industry?

So what is a trend? Webster’s dictionary defines it as “a prevailing tendency or inclination… to extend in a general direction,… to follow a general course.” In simpler terms, “a trend is a new sense of direction that over time sustains itself.”

One can ask, Where do new food trends and ideas start from? Often trends are born in experimental environments. They come from innovative chefs, immigrants and their restaurants, the cross-pollination of global travelers, new ideas from students, universities, culinary institutes, college towns, entrepreneurs, food start-up companies, the health food industry and the east and west coasts (areas traditionally more embracing of change than America’s heartland.)

Where do trends first become more visible outside their primary environment? They show up at restaurants, fancy food shows, natural food expos, leading-edge trend magazines and nowadays on the Internet. Trendspotters keep a watchful eye on these venues.

Adoptive initiation occurs when embryonic trends are picked up and incorporated into food magazines, women’s magazines, fast food chains, established restaurants, traditional food industry shows such as IFT, Anuga, Sial, ISM, FIE, etc., and hotel and restaurant trade shows.

Legitimization occurs next, when these ideas and trends become part of middle America, and show up as more-permanent changes in the foodways of the nation in restaurants and in the form of commercial food products.

It can be seen that there is an evolu-