GARDEN, LIKE QUINOA, amaranth, farro, and spelt, which were eaten on a daily basis by ancient civilizations, are growing in popularity again with today’s consumers because of their perceived health benefits compared to processed wheat grains, reports The NPD Group, leading global information company.

Case shipments of ancient grain categories by broadline distributors to US foodservice outlets increased by double-digits over the past year, according to NPD’s SupplyTrack, a monthly service that tracks every product shipped from major foodservice broadline distributors to more than 700,000 commercial and non-commercial foodservice operators.

Case shipments of quinoa, which is the most widely used ancient grain, increased by 18.5% in the year ending October 2017 compared to same period year ago. Two ancient grains not as commonly known, spelt, a distinct type of whole grain wheat; and farro, a whole grain similar to barley, quinoa, and wheat berries, also realized double-digit growth in case shipments.

Case shipments of amaranth, a staple food of the Aztecs and comparable to rice or maize, increased by 19.4% in the period, reports NPD.

Although not as exotic sounding as amaranth and farro, different varieties of rice are holding their own against the popularity of ancient grains in terms of case shipments to foodservice outlets and restaurants. Bazmati rice, a unique species of rice originating from India, is also popular with foodservice operators. Case shipments of the aromatic rice increased by 20.3% in the year ending October 2017 compared to same period last year. Calrose rice, a medium-sized rice that comes from California (hence Calrose), increased foodservice case shipments by 10.4%, according to NPD’s SupplyTrack.

Generally speaking, nutritionists say that ancient grains offer more protein, fiber, and vitamins than modern grains. Ancient grains sometimes also have more calories than modern grains. Nutritionists are also quick to point out that modern grains also are nutritionally beneficial.

“The increasing popularity of ancient grains at foodservice outlets is partly due to consumer interest in the grains, but it’s also because chefs appreciate the unique flavors of these grains.”

–Annie Roberts, vice president, NPD SupplyTrack

“Just proves that everything ancient can become new again.”