Back on the Shelf: Healthy Snacks

Suppliers in the bakery and snacking segments give their forecasts. What are consumers looking for, and why? What innovations are most likely to succeed, and how can suppliers meet market demands?

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On better-for-you products and hectic lifestyles...

“On the whole, consumers are taking a more balanced approach to their diet, and this is driving trends across categories including bakery. This approach to balance leaves a wide range of possibilities open for manufacturers. There is plenty of space in today’s market for products that are better-for-you or good-for-you, but also those that offer pure indulgence. Another driver of change in the food and beverage market is the increasing pace of life. In the current always-on culture, consumers seek simplicity and speed – but they are less and less willing to compromise on quality. They’re looking for products that fit into their lifestyle and deliver product quality expectations.

Since there is no single consumer type, there is no right answer to how health messaging should be approached. The most important thing is for brands to be transparent, to give consumers clear information and allow them to choose for themselves. There is a push from consumers to improve the nutrition profile of products across the board, especially those that are aimed at children. What approach will resonate best is dependent on a variety of factors including consumer lifestyle goals, meal occasion, and frequency of consumption. To best engage consumers, brands need to understand the functional and emotional drivers that shape consumer purchase decisions.

There is also a growing desire for innovation and experimentation within the category. Offerings are therefore focusing on excellent and unique taste, premium ingredients, superior production methods or new texture and format varieties. Especially new, exotic flavors and ingredients are attracting adventurous consumers. With flavors continuously evolving in bakery and snacks, taste profiles will need to be increasingly focused on premiumization, experimentation and the consumers’ need for healthy ingredients.”

TAMMI HIGGINS, LYCORED
GLOBAL BUSINESS UNIT HEAD

On clean label and natural ingredients...

“In bakery and snacking and across the wider food and beverage industry, consumers have an increased appetite for cleaner and healthier products that contain lower levels of sugar, salt, and artificial additives and colorants. When asked directly, ‘Would you be willing to pay more for a product with natural flavorings and colors?’ Almost nine in ten respondents to a Lycored-sponsored study said they would. On average they said they would pay up to 47 percent more.

Similarly, ingredient traceability is high on the agenda. We have recognized this and our vertically integrated, holistic production processes ensure that we can control every step of production and guarantee maximum safety, potency and efficacy in our products.

The drive for natural ingredients and the push to use lower levels of salt and sugar will continue. It makes sense for companies to take a proactive approach to reformulation and find novel strategies and ingredients to avoid sacrificing on taste and flavor. This will bring more innovation into these categories. Consumers continually look for snack offers that are indulgent but are likely to feel the health halo when consuming products with reduced sodium or sugar or free of artificial additives. Replacing salts, sugars, and artificial colorants with more naturally-derived ingredients can offer a way to clean up labels and reformulate well-loved recipes.”
On healthy snacks and adventurous consumers...

“Consumer demand for healthy, yet indulgent snacks that deliver a wholesome and natural appeal continues to be one of the biggest trends that drives innovation. As consumers embrace healthier lifestyles, they are increasingly seeking out plant-based and free-from ingredients that support a more individualized approach. We see a huge opportunity here for product developers to blur the lines between the bakery and snack categories by offering satisfying and decadent products that don’t sacrifice on health, such as almond butter-based products.

Snack and bakery manufacturers can target this market segment by using versatile and nutritious ingredients like almonds, which are plant-based, free from gluten or dairy, and available in a range of forms including almond flour, almond butter or sliced whole natural almonds. Consumers are stepping out of their comfort zones and are showing a more significant interest in the stories behind the products they buy. We are seeing an increased demand for products that are not only ‘good for me’ but also ‘good for the planet.’ Consumers are curious about other cultures, which is encouraging the discovery of bold, ethnic flavors, but they also want peace of mind knowing that they are snacking responsibly. One of the most exciting flavor trends we’re seeing is adding global flavors or spice. What’s tricky is to find a healthy snack that can be a carrier for these global flavors.”

On authentic and ethical products...

“There is a global megatrend to be more authentic and transparent with product offerings in the bakery and savory snacking space. This is translating into healthy products, with alternatives such as low salt. These products align well with the increasing demand for new experiences from an educational aspect: consumers want to understand the nutritional value of a product clearly.

A trend driving the bakery and the savory snacking sector is ethical products, which have minimal ingredients and avoid ingredients like palm oil. There is also growth in snacks that highlight food waste, which typically means they are made from ingredients which otherwise would have been wasted. Growth in novel combinations of flavors on new base materials like plantain slices or vegetable pieces demands attention in the market.

For generations, herbs and spices have set foods apart, both geographically and organoleptically. These materials can be stabilized and incorporated into snacks globally, providing exciting new combinations and experiences. Manufacturers can use these ingredients to tell stories such as the origins of the spice and herb combinations.

Heat continues to be a driver of taste experience in the savory market. Chilis have been growing in use, which adds authenticity to products. Novel combinations can be created which align the delivery of heat with complimentary taste like citrus or other spice.”

On natural goodness and indulgence products...

“Trends in the bakery sector look manifold, multidimensional, and one can’t reduce them to only one theme. To always stay ahead of current and upcoming consumer trends, we are using our Symrise unique trend tool trendscope.

We have defined four overarching trend platforms: Natural Goodness, Healthy Lifestyle, Premium Indulgence, and Emotional Discoveries. Keywords within these platforms range from: natural and minimally processed products in line with the clean label trend, organic and free-from foods, combination of fruits and vegetable taste directions, sugar reduction, ancient grains, plant-based proteins, full fat, full calories, fillings and toppings, to Asian cuisine, and Sweet & Savory combinations.

The lack of time of many people has become one important trend driver. Due to this, ‘on-the-go’ snacking has risen with consumers looking for more savory bakery as well as healthier snacking options. They often use cereal snacks as a meal replacement. We continue to identify the main consumer trends, and we address these trends with specific product solutions such as our fruit powder range Optarom and Symlife Taste Modulation solutions.

In our consumer insights surveys, we identified a high consumer need for sugar-reduced bakery and snack options. This need goes in line with the growing demand for clean label and naturalness, but without compromising on taste.”
On indulgent snacks and health claims...

“We identified three universal themes which are driving the consumer trends landscape when it comes to bakery and savory snacking. The first theme is Indulgence: Consumers are finding more and more moments to indulge. Whether it is to help them take a moment to escape and unwind or to add an exclamation mark to an already great day, consumers are willing to pay a premium for products that can enhance their mood.

The second theme is Discovery: Most consumer’s sweet baked good purchases are decided at the shelf. Products reinventing traditional norms through unique flavors or mashed-up forms will surprise and delight. The third theme is Better for You: Traditionally consumers looked internal about health and wellness, but in an increasingly global and traceable world consumers are paying closer attention to the holistic impact of their decisions.

Through our team’s extensive research into the trends space, we have seen three trends stand out in the flavor area, including ranging flavor extensions, exotic flavor profiles and unexpected flavor combinations. In all three flavor areas, we see crossover. For example, in the fruit area, we see flavors like Yuzu – a citrus fruit from Japan – gaining in popularity and see consumers craving flavors from other countries and regions, such as the Middle East and Africa, that combine surprising herb and spice combinations.”

On nutritional products and clean label...

“For manufacturers, providing nutritional products is a public health issue which becomes strategic. As a staple food, bakery and snack products must incorporate the nutritional aspect into their composition to fight against overweight and obesity. Thus, consumer information through food labeling becomes a necessary and relevant element for purchases of better nutritional quality.

As a co-development partner with our customers, we consider that advising and supporting them in their nutrition and health goals are our priority; what we have been doing for 10 years with the clean label approach! Most requirements are focused on reducing sugar, fat and salt. Therefore, our reformulations are about incorporating new plant-based ingredients, wholegrain cereals, fibers, and proteins, without compromising on taste and texture. The “pleasurable eating” dimension remains essential to consumers. The reformulation aims to achieve new nutritional claims while maintaining the organoleptic qualities of the final product. After reviewing the recipe and process, a new solution is developed, selecting grains, new cereal ingredients, and protein sources as well as the right choice of specific enzymatic complex.

Snacking “at any time” represents many opportunities to consume. To innovate in this context a product must be appealing, tasty, healthy, convenient to carry and easy to consume.”

On busy lifestyles and the high protein trend...

“Fundamental changes to eating patterns, driven by busy lifestyles, mean that the traditional pattern of three meals a day has given way to a less formal eating pattern. Driven by the Millennial generation, a more fragmented and flexible eating style has emerged, such as multiple small meals that are often eaten alone or on the go. Thus, there is the demand for quick and convenient yet healthy meal solutions.

The high-protein trend continues to inspire snacking innovation since many are reluctant to consume carbohydrates late in the evening for fear of putting on weight. Protein is the ‘safe’ option, and we expect to see increasing diversification of snack offerings, particularly when it comes to plant protein. Clean label, from sustainable sources, indulgent options, better-for-you, low sodium and sugar, and mindful choices are also label claims that are on the rise.

Exploring ethnic and exotic tastes, new flavor and multisensory food experiences are fundamental. Using ingredients that could deliver green appeal and which could respond to different diet preferences (vegan, paleo or plant based), while also delivering good taste, indulgence and a better-for-you claim are the various ways to differentiate in the market. Especially among younger generations, consumers see snacks as part of their lifestyle and identity and are demanding more sophisticated snack options.”
On health-conscious consumers and acrylamide...

“Consumers are more health-conscious than ever before and are taking a proactive approach to their health. A DSM consumer survey on acrylamide, which interviewed 2,000 people across France, Germany, the UK and the US found that 70 percent of respondents who understand the topic of acrylamide are concerned about the substance’s potential negative health effects. Forty-seven percent of people surveyed by DSM also believe that food producers bear the most significant responsibility for reducing acrylamide in food.

Growing consumer awareness, as well as the EU acrylamide regulations that came into effect on April 2018, based on the As Low As Reasonably Achievable (ALARA) principle, have increased the pressure on food manufacturers to create healthier baked goods with the lowest possibly achievable acrylamide levels. As a result, snack producers are looking for ways to reduce the acrylamide content in food products – while providing the same high-quality, taste and texture that consumers expect. With ongoing discussions around the possibility of introducing maximum levels of acrylamide in food, this is undoubtedly a space to watch closely.

Reducing acrylamide levels to meet consumer demand and adhere to regulations, will require a dedicated partner who can provide effective solutions for acrylamide mitigation.”
On vegetable and fruit ingredients...

“In the bakery and snack segments, we see more vegetables and fruit ingredients in snack products. Regarding sauces consumed with snacks, the trending ones nowadays contain more fruit flavors like mango, cherry and raspberry. Food manufacturers should work on distinguishing flavors in response to adventurous snacking. However, a very spicy taste, which is most interesting for small target groups who buy or try these products on a one-time basis (a drawback).

With regards to adopting a pro-active healthy approach, we recognize this as a growing market, such as in bread, wraps and pizza bases made from vegetable ingredients. We also see the expanding use of fresh herbs and spices on conventional products such as pizza. Moreover, vegan markets and applications are growing. At Dutch Spices we have an extensive range that offers solutions, including allergen-safe ingredients. Indeed, there is a demand from consumers for less allergens in product cycles. Product categories in supermarkets are growing because we see suppliers responding to these needs.

The expansion of the fourth meal culture is definitely significant, and this will affect meal and snack sizes. In turn, the packaging should be in line with convenience preparations (on-the-go). A noteworthy approach is changing the meal portion into an amount that is more suitable for a snack moment.”

On transparency and convenience formats...

“Hectic lifestyles drive changing food consumption patterns in bakery and snacks, as many consumers are adopting more flexible eating times. Likewise, the on-going health and wellness trend has pushed both categories, creating a strong need for natural ingredients, transparency and simplicity of ingredients. It further indicates a need to focus on sugar- and salt-reduced product developments and low-calorie options. At the same time, added nutrients are evolving the category of better-for-you snacks.

There is also a shifting demand towards convenience formats, texture varieties and most of all, new concepts. As all-time snacking becomes mainstream, there is an ever-increasing variety of product options available, driving the interest of consumers for even more novelties, and shareable, ‘Insta-ready’ experiences. Novel packaging next to innovative marketing strategies will also play an important role in the future.

There is also a growing desire for innovation and experimentation. Offerings are therefore focusing on unique taste, premium ingredients, superior production methods or new texture and format varieties. Especially new, exotic flavors and ingredients are attracting adventurous consumers. With flavors continuously evolving in bakery and snacks, taste profiles will need to focus on premiumization, experimentation and the consumers’ need for healthy ingredients.”

On healthier and natural ingredients...

“We have seen a clear trend towards healthier options for several years. Healthy ingredients, such as fibers, fruit, or ancient grains, can help to provide a healthier halo. Sugar reduction is another option to achieve this, but we shouldn’t forget that taste remains king. Compromising on taste leads to reduced repeat buying. Fortunately, there are now more ways to combine taste and health.

In the bakery sector, we see that many manufacturers now have a healthier range in their portfolio, that is high in fiber and at the same time lower in sugar. We see that this market is reaching maturity and further innovations will be necessary to defend one’s position. We must also recognize that consumers are looking for natural ingredients, avoiding artificial flavors, colors, and E-numbers. While looking for authenticity, consumers are becoming more critical to well-established brands, which in turn creates opportunities for new disruptive players. Therefore, a healthy halo may be counterproductive if it is not based on clear and straightforward evidence. Consumers have become much more conscious about their food choices, and these are more diverse than we sometimes think. If well-known brands come up with a healthier approach, they should be very careful in how they position it. For instance, they could claim ‘to make this package of delicious biscuits, one apple and 20gr of strawberries were used,’ rather than just depicting the fruit.”
On functional options and plant-based trends...

“In snack and ready meal segments, the Brenntag Food & Nutrition team recognizes the consumers demand for creative recipes, functional meal options, health, naturalness, and clean labels. Consumers call for transparency on the origin of the ingredients, calorie control, freshness, all packed in convenient, sustainable packaging to eat on-the-go.

The plant-based trend also continues to drive innovation: vegetarian choices can refresh or extend the traditional product range. There are also more vegetable proteins, more fibers, less sugar, less salt, less fat, allergen-free and gluten-free, sustainable, good-for-you and environmental trends. All of these trends create options for brand new recipes with new textures and flavors.

In snacks and ready meals, consumers seek convenient solutions that fit their lifestyles, which should also be sustainable, healthy, and indulgent. They love discovering new flavors and options, including a surprise element stimulating their senses. In recent years we saw products incorporating more vegetables, peas, and beans, mainly because they have good protein content. We see a great interest in vegetables with antioxidant properties. There is also a new interest in mushrooms, as an ingredient and flavor: they are 100-percent clean label, have good protein content and provide great taste. Pulses and vegetable-based products are important in driving alternatives to carbohydrates.”

On taste and health products...

“We have just completed a global consumer survey where we interviewed over 17,000 consumers in 40 countries about their expectations in bakery, pastry and chocolate, and we identify some trends based on the insights from this Taste Tomorrow survey. Fresh insights resulted in nine key worldwide trends: taste, health, freshness, craft, ethical lifestyle, transparency, ultimate convenience, next-level experience, and hyper-personal.

Across the globe, when consumers buy bread, pastry, or chocolate, their decisions are driven by three key criteria: taste, health and freshness. Of these three criteria, the taste is the most important. It goes further than that. Consumers want to be wowed by all their senses. Consumers also consider texture to be an essential component in their taste experience. And today’s consumers in general and Millennials in particular, are trying out new and more exotic tastes from other parts of the world.

Craft is hot. It’s all about food the human touch (made by hand or by an artisan) for which 77 percent of consumers are willing to pay more. When it comes to health, 72 percent of consumers still expect producers to remove or reduce some ingredients, such as sugar or fat, to create healthier products. However, it is not only about removing ingredients: 66 percent of consumers also mention that it's about adding ingredients such as proteins and fibers.”

On authentic and natural ingredients...

“Snacks are becoming not just healthier, but also more satisfying and nutritious. Mane has carried out consumer research to gain a better understanding of consumer expectations. Consumers tend to look for authenticity, naturalness, and ingredients with health benefits. The “clean label” trend is expected to continue growing, as well as “free from” through the increased appeal of specific diets such as vegetarianism and veganism. This has been particularly evident with the strong growth of pulse and vegetable-based savory snacks, which younger consumers perceive as healthier than potato-based snacks.

As demand has increased for healthier food and drink, so has the opportunity for snack and bakery products with a functional positioning; protein and fiber-rich bakery and snack products, often with digestive health benefits, have recently gained momentum as a result of this trend. Sugar reduction will remain a key topic for the bakery sector while salt reduction is an important factor for savory snacks. As both are important ingredients for the final product, technological innovation is required to make their reduction possible.

The bakery sector has experienced an increase in the number of new product launches that are using traditional, local style recipes and we expect this trend to continue. Consumers increasingly seek snacks and bakery products that tell a story.”
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