



DRESSINGS AND SAUCES:

Complex flavors,
simple ingredients propel
product development

Cargill's Michael Baumber has worked across the food industry, from chef to his current role as a technical service representative specializing in texture solutions. His recent work had him immersed in dressing and sauces, so we asked Mike, who is based in Manchester, England, to share a few insights into the trends driving product sales in the United Kingdom – and beyond.

Dressings and sauces are the way we infuse flavor, excitement and adventure into ordinary dishes. What are the big trends you're seeing?

Fusion and hybridization are everywhere, with product developers mixing regional flavors with global influences to create an explosion of new taste sensations. They're taking inspiration from all over the world, to create a melting pot of flavors that surprise and delight consumer palates.

Are there certain flavors that are particularly hot?

When it comes to heat, chili sauces, using all kinds of exotic peppers, are certainly generating lots of interest. Thailand's sriracha is everywhere, but chefs are scouring the world looking for new flavors. Among the up-and-comers: India's fire-infused ghost pepper, Korea's fermented gochujang and Tunisia's aromatic harissa, made with baklouti and serrano peppers. But why stop there? You could have a different chili sauce for every day of the year.

So bold flavors are in, what about colors?

Appearance plays such a critical role in our whole food experience. Color is certainly important, but consumers aren't interested in artificial colorings. Fortunately, we have some great, natural sources like beetroot and other vegetables that can add brilliant color to our foods. We are seeing the inclusion of new and exciting vegetables and fruits in all manner of applications.

Where does texture fit into the equation?

Texture is central to everything we do. Food has to have the right texture, or consumers won't buy your product again. Exotic flavors may create some excitement, but the majority of our pleasure from food comes from texture.

We have different texture expectations for different applications. Mayonnaise should have a thick, spoonable texture. Vinaigrettes need to be pourable. Sauces are usually quite thick with a good amount of cling. Regardless, Cargill has solutions for the full range of textures customers may want to achieve.

Texture can also have a big impact on flavor. For example, the longer a dressing stays in your mouth, the bigger the impact of the flavor. Create a creamy dressing, and it's going to have bigger flavor impact. By understanding how foods behave in the mouth, we can help customers achieve not just optimum mouthfeel, but flavor too.

Beyond the sensory experience, are there other considerations?

In convenience foods, health is increasingly important, a fact that has product developers looking at things such as reducing fat levels. However, when you reduce fat, you have to recreate that creamy texture — which we can do. But the big consideration is "clean label." Here in the United Kingdom, it's not just a trend, it's the norm.

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“Clean label” can mean many different things. What are your customers’ main criteria?

In the world of dressings and sauces, customers are looking to replace unrecognizable additives with simple ingredients their consumers know and understand.

Global flavors. Natural colors. Indulgent textures. Healthy formulations. Clean label. How can customers turn consumer interest in these areas into sales?

We recently completed a group of “Chef Selection” recipes that take the big trends we’re seeing in the marketplace and bring them to life. At the same time, we tackled some of our customers’ most common problems, from moisture management to particle suspension. The result is a range of sauces and dips — all with different texture requirements — that showcase our texture solutions.

For example, we created a great-tasting, eye-popping beetroot and chive dip. This hummus-like vegetable dip is over 60 percent beetroot, which gives it a brilliant, natural red color. But, when you move away from traditional chickpea hummus, moisture content becomes a problem. We needed to find a way to manage that water, in a label-conscious way. Our new SimPure® functional native starch product addresses this problem. It could hold all the water, demonstrating excellent viscosity and stability.

What are some of the other “Chef Selection” ideas?

For the health-conscious consumer, we created a reduced-fat wasabi salad dressing with a thick, creamy, indulgent mouthfeel. We kept its fat content in check with a reduced-oil base, replacing the texture of fat with a starch solution. In these type of emulsified dressings, we can reduce the fat by 50 percent and more, but still achieve the creamy full-fat texture consumers expect.

We tackled the chili craze, too, with a sweet and chunky dip. We needed to create a glossy chili sauce that could suspend heavy bits of chili for an authentic, homemade appearance. We found the answer in a unique blend of gums that provide excellent stability too.

Do you have any parting advice for would-be product developers?

Flavor may be where the initial interest and excitement for a dressing or sauce lies, but fail to deliver on texture, and you can forget about repeat purchases. Cargill helps customers meet consumer demand for both great taste and excellent mouthfeel, while also delivering needed functionality and stability in the end product.

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