



CARGILL INNOVATION SPOTLIGHT:

The Power of Plant-based Protein

The way some people see it, protein may be the biggest thing in product development since sliced bread. And now you can even add protein to your sliced bread. It's not a trend that many food product developers would have predicted.

Formerly a niche market embraced by sports enthusiasts and workout warriors, supplementing protein in the diet is now priority-one for many mainstream consumers.

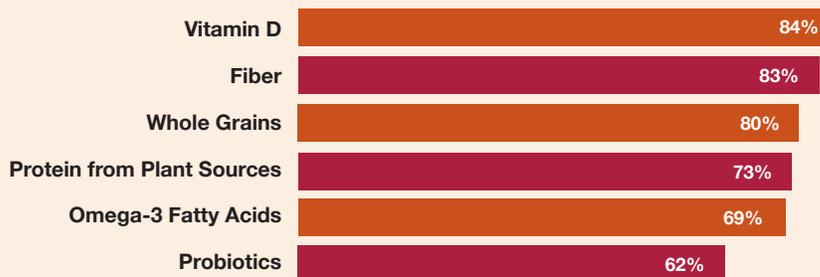
There are plenty of reasons for this. As consumers become more informed about eating a balanced diet, protein has gained a growing luster. Its rise in popularity is tied to many of the most-desired consumer health benefits, according to the 2017 Food and Health Survey from the International Food Information Council Foundation (IFIC). Dietary protein has links to cardiovascular health, weight management, immune function, as well as muscle and bone health.

But beyond protein's many important functions, consumers now realize that it may be better to eat protein from a variety of sources. Enter plant-based proteins like soy, peas and pulses. These plant-based ingredients have seen a meteoric rise in consumer popularity, with more than 70% of consumers surveyed considering proteins from plant sources to be healthy – putting them close on the heels of the heavyweights of perceived healthfulness, like vitamin D, fiber and whole grains, according to IFIC survey results. Coupled with the fact that most people feel they need to eat more vegetables, plant-based protein ingredients occupy an enviable spot and are a current darling of new product development.

For consumers, the plant protein craze is not just about eliminating meat or dairy from the diet, according to Julian Mellentin, editor of *New Nutrition Business* and author of the annual report, "Ten Key Trends in Food, Nutrition and Health 2018." There is actually a growing market for both, he wrote. "What's most important for consumers is protein from plant sources delivered in versatile and convenient forms." The desire for protein in the diet is strongest in the U.S. market, but Mellentin maintains it is also taking root in other markets, including Latin America, Australia, parts of Europe, especially Scandinavia, and also gaining ground in Asia, particularly China.

Together, plants and protein make for a powerful combination. Plus, plants bring plenty of advantages to a product in their own right. Beyond the protein content, plants frequently offer solid nutritional value, such as needed vitamins and minerals; some consumers perceive them to have a more environmentally friendly profile;¹ and they offer an alternative source of protein for people who have sensitivities to – or lifestyle reasons for avoiding – meat or dairy.

Percentage of Consumers Who See These Components as Healthy



Source: 2018 Food & Health Survey, IFIC

Not just for meat substitutes anymore

Adding plant-based ingredients is increasingly important to various product categories, according to data from Health Focus International, and is rapidly becoming mainstream. One-third of category users say it is extremely or very important to have added plant-based protein in products, but especially those where plant-based ingredients are already commonly used, such as juice, soups and milk alternatives.² Of the total market population that uses plant-based ingredients, more than half say these ingredients are at least somewhat important in numerous products.

What’s more, consumers are increasingly willing to pay a premium for these products. While a fairly small proportion of people are willing to pay a high premium of 10%, more than one-third of consumers are willing to pay at least some additional amount for added plant-based ingredients.³

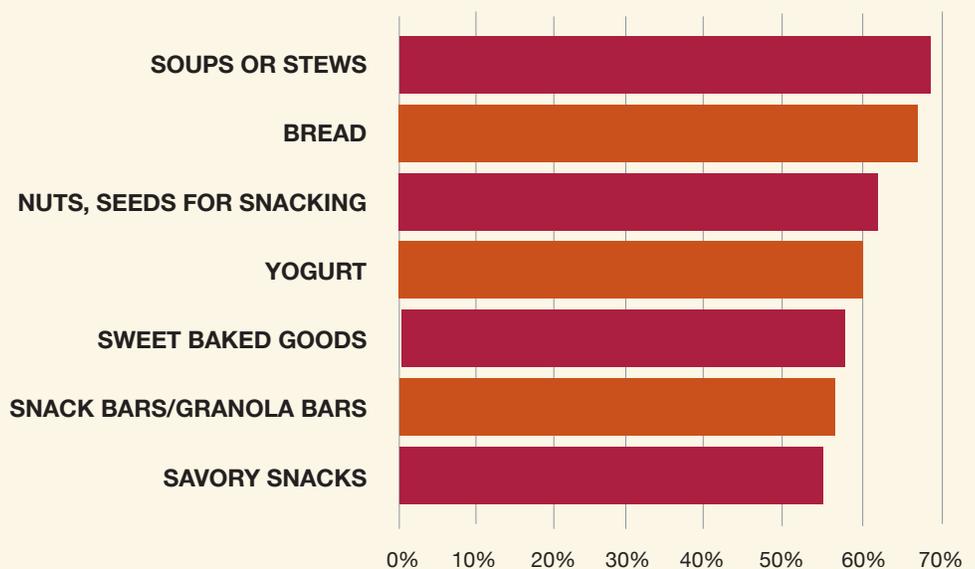
While plant-based ingredients are now an important addition to many categories, meat substitutes are one of the key segments to watch, according to Mellentin.

Noting the success of non-dairy milks, key investors are supporting new launches in this space, and they seem poised to make a strong marketing play with meat-substitute products. The level of financial backing, he wrote, “dwarfs anything the almond milk makers have managed.”⁴

The bakery segment is another category capitalizing on added protein. Bakery has been the most active segment for plant-based protein products in the last decade, making up 40% of global plant-based protein launches, according to data from Innova Market Insights. That said, although protein claims in bakery products are on the rise, a relatively small number of brands are positioning their products as high in protein, with only 3.75% of all bakery products making a protein claim.⁵ So there is ample opportunity to help educate and make consumers aware of the added protein in bakery products containing plant-based ingredients.

Bars have long been a leader in the high-protein and plant-based protein space, but other types of snacks are now also emerging as a key category for plant-based proteins, due to the growing popularity of snacking and the appeal of novel, plant-based snacks.

Percent of Total Market Population That Uses and Finds Plant-Based Ingredients at Least Somewhat Important



Source: Health Focus International August 2017

Plant-based positioning

The rise of these products has also led to a proliferation of plant-based ingredients that offer high protein as well as versatile, low-cost formulation solutions. While pea and pulse-based ingredients are some of the relative newcomers to the plant-based ingredient mix, soy-based proteins are among the most used and versatile of these ingredients. Plant proteins have gained a prominent place in the diet as a key alternative to animal proteins. Adding soy to products already containing meat, or creating meat analogs, can boost a product's nutritional value, as well as provide a potential cost advantage.

Soy, in either flour or textured form, is the most-used of plant-based ingredients, because it offers an excellent source of added protein in a variety of additional applications, from meat analogs to bakery, snacks and cereals. Textured soy flour is an economical option for lean meat replacement, with great taste and cost-efficiency, while offering the same functionality and hydration, as well as ease of use with one-to-one replacement.

Regardless of the ingredients used, it is important to note that while protein is of interest to close to half of consumers, its positioning remains secondary to other product attributes such as freshness, naturalness and avoidance of undesirable artificial ingredients, including artificial flavors, colors and sweeteners, according to the Health Focus International report.

While added protein is desirable, most shoppers are first looking for “clean” and “natural” products, so positioning plant-based ingredients as simple and recognizable should be a primary focus of the marketing message.

References

¹ Mellentin, J. “Ten Key Trends in Food, Nutrition and Health,” 2018. *New Nutrition Business*. <https://www.new-nutrition.com/>

² Health Focus International, August 2017.

³ Ibid. Health Focus International, August 2017.

⁴ Ibid. “Ten Key Trends in Food, Nutrition and Health,” 2018.

⁵ “New Bakery Products in the U.S.,” 2002 to May 2018. Analysis of Protein Claims and Use of Soy and Pea Flour. Cargill/Innova Market Insights.