

Food Product Design

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Cheese Industry Tackles Sodium Challenges

ROSEMONT, Ill.—In December 2010, more than 17 leading cheese companies and manufacturers gathered at a Best Practices Task Force meeting hosted by the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy to address opportunities and challenges associated with reducing sodium content in cheese.

The group recognized three important aspects related to the challenge of sodium levels in cheese products: maintaining taste and functionality in lower sodium products, updating process controls in manufacturing, and educating key audiences about the necessary role of sodium in cheese in terms of the cheese making process and food safety/shelf stability.

A recent cheese-sodium study spearheaded by the Dairy Research Institute analyzed Cheddar, mozzarella and process cheeses in 16 U.S. cities across four regions found sodium variability among cheese types and even within varying brands of the same cheese type.

“These research findings already are being used to develop industry-adopted best practices to minimize variability in sodium content, which then needs to be reflected in labeling,” said Nigel Kirtley, vice president cheese research, development and quality for Kraft Foods and member of the Health and Wellness Committee for the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy. “The industry will continue to use the findings to develop guidance and support to help manufacturers put this information into action for better process controls that will allow for consistently lower sodium and improved quality.”

The task force will continue to work together to meet the challenges of cheese and sodium, with the ongoing goal of providing timely educational resources and guidance to industry partners. Industry members are invited to participate and apply research and insights to their business practices.

“While cheese contributes less than 8% of the sodium in the U.S. diet, the Dairy Research Institute and our industry partners continue to investigate process improvements and solutions that industry can employ to help Americans manage their sodium consumption,” said Gregory Miller, Ph.D., president, Dairy Research Institute and executive vice president, National Dairy Council®. “To move forward with goals to reduce sodium in cheese or attempt to meet arbitrarily pre-determined target levels, the industry must determine where sodium levels currently stand through benchmark studies.”

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