

Cheese industry pledges to do more on sodium reduction

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US cheese companies have agreed to step up efforts to reduce the sodium content in cheese and educate consumers about the limits of sodium reduction.

At a meeting hosted by the Innovation Center for US Dairy 17 leading cheese firms, including the likes of Chr Hansen, Kraft Foods and Cargill, discussed the key challenges and opportunities related to sodium reduction.

The companies are working pre-competitively on best practice to reduce sodium levels through formulation as well as process and manufacturing control.

Some companies have already begun to reduce sodium levels with the launch of new reduced sodium cheeses and others are making reductions across product lines.

No industry-wide targets

However, there is currently no move to introduce industry-wide targets.

Carol Blindauer, SVP, health and wellness, at the Innovation Center told this publication: *"While a variety of individual cheese manufacturers or multi-food companies who make cheese may have committed to a targets approach to sodium reduction for their products, the industry at large is not adopting a targets approach."*

Blindauer said this is because cheese is not one single food for which a blanket sodium target would be appropriate. Swiss cheese, for example, is naturally low in sodium so there would be little merit in making cuts that would be particularly difficult to achieve without compromising on taste or risking food safety.

The industry spokesperson said sodium plays a vital role in cheese making for flavour, moisture, versatility and even food safety. Salt is a natural preservative that is not easy to replace without resorting to artificial alternatives that many consumers prefer to stay away from.

The cheese companies are agreed that more work is needed on a marketing level to put these points to the consumer. At the meeting of the task force on sodium in cheese the companies agreed that more education work was needed to inform the consumer about the nutrients in cheese, the role of sodium in cheese and the work that has already been done on sodium reduction.

Marketplace analysis

The companies are also looking to establish more clearly where the industry is as far as sodium reduction is concerned. Blindauer said a marketplace analysis has been completed and is pending publication.

She said: *"Understanding where we are as an industry is the first step to being a part of the solution to addressing sodium and cheese."*

Companies involved in the Best Practices Task Force on sodium reduction include: Bongards, Cargill, Chr Hansen, Dairy Farmers of America, Davigo Foods, Foremost Farms, Glanbia, Great Lakes Cheese, Kraft Foods, Kroger, Lactalis, Land O'Lakes, Leprino Foods, Marathon Cheese, Sargento, Schreiber Foods and V&V Supremo Foods.

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