



## The Power of Protein

By communicating the protein content of cheese to consumers, processors can position their products as meatless alternatives.

*By Miriam Erickson Brown*

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We all want to be liked, but some of us don't have to try very hard. Take cheese, for example; in recent research, consumers told us they chose cheese because they like the way it tastes. But, I think consumers might choose cheese even more often if they knew what a great source of protein it is, especially since 54% of consumers are trying to get more protein in their diets and eat less meat (one in four adults have cut back on meat consumption for health reasons).

Research shows that one-fourth of meat reducers are already consuming more dairy, mainly because they know dairy gives them healthy bones. The rest of those meat reducers are consuming the same amount of dairy. (I have to pause here and note that opportunities like this rarely come around for dairy).

Consumers do not currently see dairy products as a top source of protein. The top menu choices for meatless meal proteins are tofu, eggs and lentils. No wonder the greatest challenges for someone reducing meat in his or her diet are lack of variety, cravings and poor nutrition. Dairy's relevance in an environment like this is mind-blowing. Cheese not only tastes great, but also is a good source of high-quality protein. Think about what an effect we could have by collaborating as an industry to convey more protein messaging for cheese, cottage cheese, milk and yogurt, giving us an advantage in a marketplace that is placing increasing value on protein and multiple nutrient content. In fact, 47% of consumers find the message "good source of protein" very important on product labels.

The Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy, which is funded by the dairy checkoff, created and tested protein messages across multiple dairy categories, including cheese. All this cool stuff can be accessed on [www.USDairy.com/hw](http://www.USDairy.com/hw).

Take a look at a couple of the top-rated cheese messages (when combining purchase motivation and believability scores):

- Cheese is more than just calcium; it also provides protein your body needs to help stay healthy.
- Cheese helps curb hunger with a diet higher in protein. Cheese is a good source of high-quality protein.
- Your body uses protein all day long. Try cheese, a good source of protein, to help you get your protein throughout the day.

According to my colleague Gwen Bargetzi, marketing director at Hilmar Ingredients and a member of the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy Health and Wellness Committee, “this particular nutrient has never been as top of mind for the average consumer or offered as much potential for dairy as it does today. Highlighting dairy protein and its functional and health benefits will help grab the attention of consumers. To fully leverage this trend and show that dairy is irreplaceable in our diet, better awareness of dairy products’ inherent high-quality protein is a must.”

You don’t have to use our exact lingo — we know the marketing brains will want to make them their own, based on their company’s strategies — but these messages serve as a great foundation. The point is, by communicating the protein nutrition and the variety of other benefits of dairy to consumers, our products become a simple meatless solution in both the nutrition and taste categories. At the risk of sounding cheesy, bring it on. n

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