

CHEESE MARKET NEWS[®]

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Salt reduction, yogurt among ingredient application trends

By Rena Archwamety

MADISON, Wis. — As clean nutrition labels, reduced salt, weight management and healthy aging continue to be top-of-mind for consumers, the dairy ingredients industry responds by innovating and utilizing dairy components that meet consumers' needs.

"The nutritional benefits of dairy ingredients naturally align with a number of trending categories and products appealing to consumers of all ages — from infants to active adults to aging populations. We know that consumers perceive foods made with dairy as desirable, natural and wholesome," says Kara McDonald, director of marketing and communications, U.S. Dairy Export Council (USDEC) Global Marketing Program.

USDEC and other dairy checkoff supported organizations, including the Dairy Research Institute, Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy and National Dairy Council, continually work to uncover new and improve existing dairy ingredients and applications to meet consumer demand and buying trends, McDonald adds.

The USDEC Global Marketing Program works on marketing U.S. dairy ingredients both domestically and abroad. Two products it is focusing on due to increasing demand both here and abroad is whey protein concentrate (WPC) and milk protein concentrate (MPC).

"The reason we're seeing such demand for both milk proteins is twofold," McDonald says. "One is the rise of middle-class markets around the world. Also, aging consumers, and consumers in general with disposable income, are looking for health and wellness needs."

Another in-demand ingredient area is milk and whey permeate, a source of dairy solids obtained by the removal of protein and some minerals and lactose from whey.

In the United States, McDonald says permeate ingredients are important for their benefits and functionality in formats like baking

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and soups, but also for permeate's ability to be a sodium replacer. One natural characteristic of permeate is that when it is used in formulations, sodium levels can be decreased without affecting the taste.

• **Permeate the market**

Sodium and cost reductions are two of the possible uses for the trademarked ingredient VersiLac, a blend of milk and whey permeate from Proliant Dairy Ingredients, Ankeny, Iowa.

"With so much of the food industry focusing on sodium reduction, we were pleased to discover that our new ingredient, VersiLac, can be used to boost

salty notes in a wide variety of finished applications," says Kim Peterson, applications research specialist, Proliant Dairy. "We have had success replacing a portion of the salt in savory applications such as soups and sauces, in seasonings for chips, dips and dressings, and in bakery applications like biscuits, cookies, pie crusts and pizza crusts."

Proliant Dairy initially focused on demonstrating how VersiLac could replace more expensive dairy ingredients like whey or nonfat dry milk. From this work, the company found that when VersiLac is used in food systems, it helped bring out the core flavors of these foods. This prompted the development of applications where VersiLac could be used to reduce more costly ingredients like cocoa powder, chocolate, cheese

powders, butter or sugar.

"Combining the savings of replacing more expensive dairy ingredients, such as nonfat dry milk, with the reduction of another expensive ingredient, like cocoa powder, results in a significant cost-savings for food manufacturers," Peterson says. "Additional benefits of using VersiLac are the nutritional advantages of reducing salt, sugar or butter. VersiLac is a versatile ingredient that can be used in a wide variety of food systems to help achieve cost savings or nutritional improvements."

Permeate for many years was used primarily as a feed ingredient, but processing and drying technology has evolved over the last 5-10 years that has allowed more high-quality, food-grade permeate, says Chris Snyder, president

and CEO, Proliant Dairy.

"As we look forward, there will be more value-added products to come from permeate streams," Snyder says. "There's always the opportunity to do more and better, creating more value. But it will take investment."

The Lauridsen Group Inc. (LGI), the parent company of Proliant Dairy, is about to complete its latest investment in a new technology center in Ankeny that will have a research and test kitchen, research and development labs and a pilot plant for research and development for all of LGI's companies. The state-of-the-art center is expected to open in the next few months.

"We're clearly optimistic that there's a future for products from permeate," Snyder says. "We think there's a pretty rich source of new products and innovation to come from this underutilized by-product stream."

• **Greek accent**

McDonald says another key dairy ingredient that is becoming popular is yogurt. During the Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) Expo in June, USDEC will feature the use of yogurt as an ingredient and in novel products among its prototypes, including a savory Greek yogurt that mixes Greek yogurt with vegetables and spices, picking up on the explosion of Greek yogurt's popularity.

"Some yogurt-based products are on the market now, such as salad dressings, dips and sauces," McDonald says, adding that this provides many nutritional benefits. "Especially if you use Greek yogurt, it's high in protein."

Greek yogurt is the featured ingredient in a new shelf-stable product, Rickland Orchards' new Greek Yogurt Bar, which includes honey-roasted granola and real fruit with a Greek yogurt coating.

Healthy eating on-the-go was the inspiration for this product, according to Rickland Orchards CEO and co-founder Jason Cohen.

"I started to want to get back into shape, and my nutritionist said 'Eat Greek yogurt,'" Cohen says. "I added fiber with different granola, and for antioxidants I added berries. Then I had to travel for work and it wasn't as easy to do all these things on the go. I thought to myself, portability is important, and a lot of people do not have time to prepare foods. I didn't see anything on the grocery shelf using Greek yogurt."

Cohen began work on developing a shelf-stable product with Greek yogurt. He ran into a challenge when looking for a domestic source.

"I called around to dairy manufacturers in the United States, and the response I got last summer is that they were so busy, so behind on making traditional Greek yogurt, that they didn't have the time and attention to create shelf-stable Greek yogurt."

He ended up having to go to Europe to find a supplier, and eventually he

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found a company that would work with a dairy farm that made Greek yogurt. The Greek yogurt went through a proprietary process, then probiotics were added and a formulation was created that was acceptable to U.S. standards of identity.

"A lot of formality steps were taken so we could make sure when we were giving it to the customer, it was genuine," Cohen says.

The recent publicity and popularity surrounding Greek yogurt has helped with the launch of Rickland Orchards' Greek Yogurt Bar. In the first 90 days the product has been on the market, Cohen says it has received authorizations in more than 10,000 locations.

"In my career, I've never seen something move so quickly based upon buyers feeling it's a need or enhancement to the category," Cohen says. "Other bars are getting protein from nuts. With us, a lot of the protein is coming from the yogurt. It's how people are eating Greek yogurt today. It's not that we're creating another energy bar — we're creating another way to eat Greek yogurt."

• **Envelope of innovation**

With the success of the Greek Yogurt Bar, Cohen says Rickland Orchards is working on new shelf-stable products using Greek yogurt, such as the same granola, berries and Greek yogurt in a cereal format, dark chocolate and Greek yogurt candy bars, and shelf-stable smoothies. Some of the new products will be launched at the Washington D.C. Fancy Food Show in June.

"It's all about pushing the envelope of innovation, looking at different formats to deliver Greek yogurt," he says.

In addition to the Savory Greek

Yogurt, USDEC will feature other dairy ingredient prototypes at the IFT Expo in June. USDEC will sample a dairy protein dip that uses milk protein concentrate blended with hummus and spices, targeting protein-seeking and label-savvy consumers. A rehydration beverage will include naturally-occurring milk minerals from permeate, providing potassium, calcium and sodium in a thirst-quenching beverage.

The prototypes also will include a crispy cracker that uses WPC and MPC to boost the protein content as well as permeate to reduce sodium, and a jerky-like "Dairy Protein Chew" made with WPC and whole milk, positioned as a novel snacking occasion for consumers seeking non-meat sources.

McDonald says snacking is a huge area of potential for new dairy ingredient applications.

"This is about a \$90 billion industry, the snacking category," she says. "It continues to grow as people move away from the traditional three big meals a day. There are a lot of meal occasions, smaller meals to keep energy up and keep people moving throughout the day. Snacking is really hot and continues to be a great opportunity."

She also stresses that nutrition consistently is a great driver for dairy ingredients, since consumers perceive dairy on the food label as more natural, wholesome and containing essential nutrients.

"I would definitely suggest always trying to tie in the nutritional benefit of the ingredient they're using," McDonald says of dairy ingredient applications. "Having that benefit and touting it can be extremely effective in marketing. Whether it's a snacking product, breakfast, or for seniors and healthy aging, it's good to tie in the benefit." CMN