



Editor's Page: Innovating Functional Foods

By Jennifer Grebow
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When gearing up for the Institute of Food Technologists' Annual Meeting/Food Expo, I've learned it's important to arm myself with a healthy appetite—and an open mind. As expected, at this year's show, I ate my way from booth to booth, aisle to aisle, feasting on an endless array of creative new functional food and beverage concepts. It was thrilling to see what today's ingredient advancements, and their suppliers, are capable of.

Suppliers know the limits of their ingredients, and their IFT food and beverage samples show attendees what's possible. Among the treats I tried at this year's show were Ingredion's (Westchester, IL) Bone Health Almond Milk fortified with Aquamin calcified mineral ingredient and Nutraflora soluble prebiotic fiber; a Dairy Protein Jerky Snack from the U.S. Dairy Export Council (Arlington, VA), made with whey protein and whole milk—9 g protein per serving—then dried and shaped to resemble beef jerky; and a clear antioxidant powerhouse beverage, AOX Water, from DSM Nutritional Products (Parsippany, NJ) featuring Teavigo green tea EGCG, resVida resveratrol, and vitamin E.

Also, Archer Daniels Midland (Decatur, IL) debuted its first Clarisoy soluble soy protein line extension—Clarisoy 150, for more neutral beverages—in a Harmony Soymilk sample with 6 g protein per serving. And BASF served up a "toning" shot containing Tonalin conjugated linoleic acid; gummy snacks with phytosterols and lycopene; and Ginger Crisp cookies with omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin D.

And an innovative ingredient came out of Glanbia Nutritionals (Fitchburg, WI), which won one of IFT's four Innovation Awards at the show. The award winner, OptiSol 2000, is a unique protein binder that maintains a sticky matrix while at the same time allowing up to 50% sugar reduction in chewy granola, snack, and other bar foods.

So, yes, ingredient suppliers are ready with new ideas. But are shoppers ready to embrace some of the most advanced concepts?

I had this in mind when I visited with Robin Wyers, chief editor, Innova Market Insights, at Innova's Taste the Trend pavilion highlighting drivers of food and beverage development. Robin guided me through one particularly fascinating timeline of innovative dairy launches—some of which failed to hit home with customers.

Some of the ideas that came to naught actually seemed like they would have been good ideas at the time. So, I asked suppliers about what they try to keep in mind when proposing new concepts.

Laura Troha, marketing communications manager, human nutrition, BASF (Florham Park, NJ), says: “The gap you describe [between ideation and acceptance] should be a non-issue if product development and marketing occur in step with trends and consumer research.”

For instance, she says, BASF’s innovation platform, which the company calls Newtrition, approaches conception from all angles. “Think Newtrition represents BASF’s commitment to an open dialog with the experts and opinion leaders of the food, beverages, and dietary supplements markets. This dialog allows us to identify essential demands, and to develop new ideas, concepts, and solutions for successful product launches that meet consumer demand and unmet needs—including diverse cultures and eating preferences.”

Also, for food and drink, taste is obviously paramount, reminds Carol Lowry, Cargill’s (Minneapolis) senior applications scientist, health and nutrition. Taste challenges can be overcome with the right expertise, she says, pointing to a now best-selling omega-3 bread developed for a large grocery chain. And, most importantly, reminds Troha, “Consumers will buy the products if they deliver what’s promised. They must contain quality and safe ingredients and be backed by science—that’s paramount to success.”

Markus Lipp of the U.S. Pharmacopeia, author of our In Response story on standards for functional food, echoes this: “The integrity and longevity of the functional food industry rests on whether products provide the health benefits promised.”

I’ll certainly drink—and eat—to that.

Jennifer Grebow
Editor-in-Chief

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