



The new era of “clean label”

Rebuilding consumer trust with transparency
and label-friendly products

It is no secret that many consumers have passed a tipping point when it comes to what they eat and food products they buy. These consumers have a keen interest in transparency and want food products that they consider to be “clean label.” No product category is immune, and there is likely no going back.

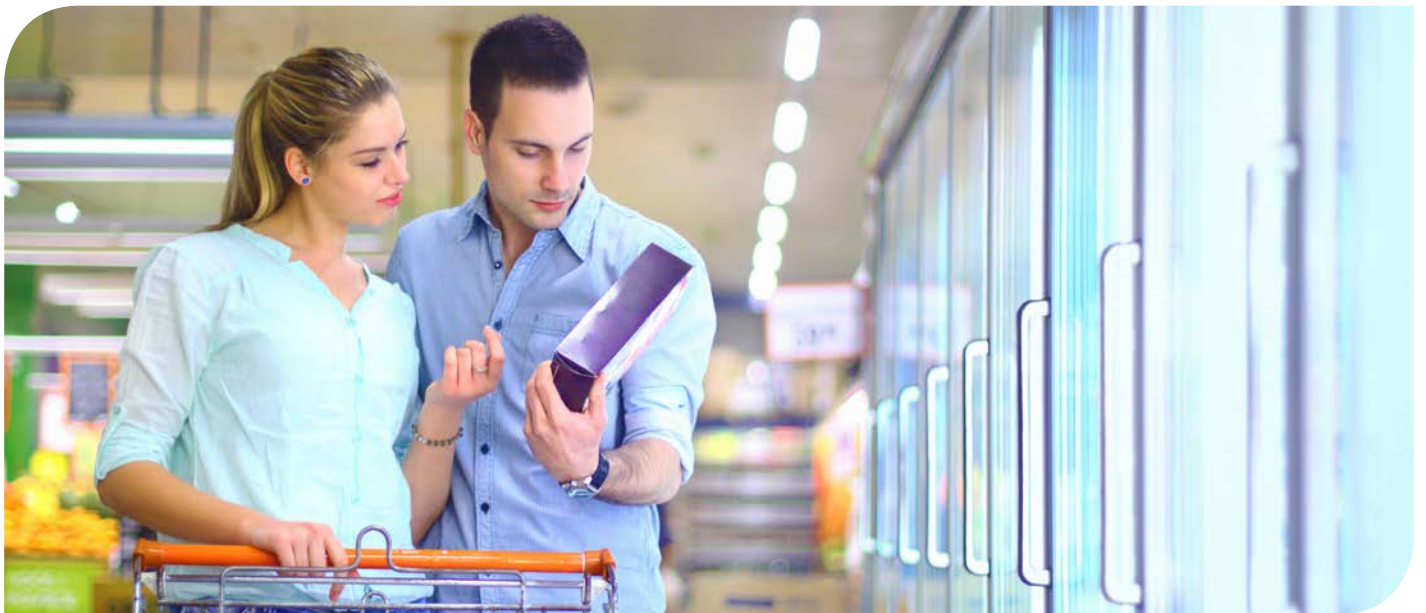
But the definition of what makes a product “clean label” varies depending on who you talk to. For some, it means ingredients that seem natural or are recognizable, while others look for short, easy-to-understand ingredient lists, and still others seek out products that are certified non-GMO or USDA organic.

What this lack of consensus on defining “clean label” means for many brands is not exactly clear. The segment is on the rise, with global sales of clean label products expected to reach \$180 billion by 2020, according to Euromonitor.¹ (This was the first time Euromonitor attempted to assess the global clean label market looking at products in 26 countries. It classified products with clean label claims including all natural, no artificial additives, no artificial colors, no artificial preservatives, no artificial flavors, no artificial sweeteners, GMO free, BPA free and no monosodium glutamate.)

The trend has also translated into a boon for non-GMO products, with the Non-GMO Project Verified certification now noted as the fastest growing food label representing \$19.2 billion in annual sales and 43,000 products certified.²

Though clean label as a category lacks overall definition, Jaclyn Bowen, executive director for the Clean Label Project, noted that there is significant market opportunity for products that are considered label-friendly. But, she explained at a recent Natural Products Expo West seminar, that it takes having a holistic conversation with target customers to understand what they want.³ Bowen believes these demands will continue to grow and suggested that companies shore up their supply chain and quality compliance measures, noting that transparency and consumer advocacy will promote increased understanding.

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So what's a brand to do?

The good news is that there are a variety of new label-friendly ingredients available, from sweeteners and sugar replacers to starches and oils, which have a wide range of applications and functions.

Suppliers well versed in label-friendly solutions can help provide appropriate options for a growing list of food applications. A great example is chicory root fiber. It is a plant-based, familiar ingredient that one could grow in a home garden. Chicory root fiber is harvested and processed in a manner that helps protect its naturally occurring fructans. Chicory root fiber is now seen as a functional and reliable ingredient that can help modify texture, lower calorie count, reduce sugar and even enhance calcium absorption. Also called inulin, chicory root fiber is a well-researched prebiotic fiber that can help support healthy gut bacteria and bone health. It can be used in numerous food applications including bakery, beverages, confectionery, dairy and dairy alternatives.

Starches are another area in which product formulators are looking for label-friendly options. Modified starches have played an important role in food formulation, providing texture, controlling moisture and stabilizing ingredients in products such as yogurt and bakery foods. Replacing them with a label-friendly option can be a challenge. It often takes a blend of different starches or other complementary ingredients to achieve the same results.

On the sweetener front, there are also a variety of options made from natural sources. Sweeteners made from the stevia plant are among the most popular and versatile label-friendly sweeteners. The ingredient is extracted from the leaves of *stevia rebaudiana*, a plant species native to Latin America. The sweet compounds found in the stevia leaf are steviol glycosides, which are approximately 200 - 350 times sweeter than sugar and heat stable. Stevia leaf extract has seen significant acceptance in the marketplace as a useful ingredient for beverages, dairy products and more.

Label-friendly ingredients have come a long way. No matter what ingredient or function you are looking for, there are likely to be label-friendly options to consider. But while sourcing and using these ingredients is easier than ever, it is also wise to partner with an ingredient supplier that is well versed in transparency and traceability, and backed by a reliable supply chain. Ultimately, being thoughtful, clear and precise about your ingredient sources is a solid way to build consumer trust.

Sources

¹ Clean Label—A \$180 Billion Global Opportunity. Food Business News. Accessed at [http://www.foodbusinessnews.net/articles/news_home/Business_News/2016/10/Clean_label_a_\\$180_billion_gl.aspx?ID={35B6F389-F481-4BF5-8DD1-9BAB90D5EA8B}&cck=1](http://www.foodbusinessnews.net/articles/news_home/Business_News/2016/10/Clean_label_a_$180_billion_gl.aspx?ID={35B6F389-F481-4BF5-8DD1-9BAB90D5EA8B}&cck=1)

² Verification Facts, Non-GMO Project Verified. Accessed at <https://www.nongmoproject.org/product-verification/verification-facts/>

³ <http://www.newhope.com/business-resources/clean-label-rise-what-supplement-manufacturers-can-do-meet-consumer-demands>