



THE “CLEAN LABEL” TREND:

A New Era in Dairy Products

Meeting the high bar for health in “clean label” dairy

In 2018’s new world of product formulation, dairy products have a lot going for them. As a category, they have been riding the wave of several key consumer trends, from “clean label” demands (two in three shoppers now look for label-friendly ingredients in dairy, according to a 2017 Cargill report¹) to protein consumption that should keep the category growing for years to come. But at the same time, consumers set a high bar for their dairy products, and ingredient perceptions are still critical – so dairy formulators need to stay on top of these quickly changing viewpoints to remain relevant in the competitive dairy segment.

As food categories go, dairy is ahead of the game. In general, dairy products enjoy a solid overall health halo.² Transparency is also critical for the dairy category. In fact, Label Insight’s 2016 Transparency ROI study noted that dairy ranked highest in terms of the importance of transparency, with 97 percent of respondents saying it is at least somewhat important, and 73 percent calling it very important.³

Consumers also have a growing desire for products that are functional, and they view dairy products as solid in this respect. According to the 2016 report from Canadean, a global market research firm, “Top Trends in Dairy: Exploring Milk, Yogurt and Cheese Categories,” consumers have faith in the health benefits of consuming dairy.



This is boosting usage, especially among specific age groups such as children and seniors, who are prone to specific health requirements and will consume dairy to meet those needs.⁴

Riding many waves

Digestive health is also top-of-mind for many consumers,² and dairy, especially Greek yogurt, plays well here too. Even as consumers move toward more plant-based dairy alternatives for health reasons, it has still been a winning scenario for the dairy category overall.

Beyond health issues, consumers are turning to dairy to meet their shifting dietary habits. For example, protein consumption is growing worldwide, and regardless of whether consumers want their protein from animal or plant sources, dairy products fit the bill. Greek yogurts have been at the forefront of this trend, according to *New Nutrition Business’* 10 Key Trends in Health and Wellness for 2017. Cheese products will also see rising interest among protein-seeking consumers, but the dairy category as a whole is expected to experience continued growth and leadership in other parts of the world, such as Asia and the Middle East.²

As consumers (especially younger generations) shift toward eating smaller meals and frequent snacking,⁵ dairy products are also poised for growth, as many products in this space offer important attributes such as a convenient format and inherent nutritional value. “Dairy foods are already established as snacks in the repertoire of health-conscious consumers in most markets,” writes Julian Mellentin, editor of *New Nutrition Business*, in the Ten Key Trends report. “Dairy’s place as an anytime healthy snack is growing, thanks to versatility; dairy is suitable for many product formats, from spoonable, to drinkable to squeezable.”²

Nowhere are all of these trends playing out more prominently than in the yogurt category. For example, yogurts described as “clean label” saw 3.7 percent growth, according to data from the Nielsen Product Insider for the 52 weeks ending January 28, 2017. And, with their health in mind, Americans are increasingly looking to reduce their sugar intake, because they associate lower sugar consumption with better health and believe it will help maintain a healthy weight.⁶

Label-friendly tools

These shifts in consumer perception are driving yogurt manufacturers to reformulate products with both label-friendly ingredients, as well as lower sugar content. But making a yogurt that meets current consumer expectations of taste, color, and texture is a tall order when you take out key ingredients like sugar, emulsifiers such as mono- and diglycerides that help balance water and fat, and stabilizers like modified starch, which create texture.

As these trends gain momentum, ingredient suppliers have been diligently looking for new label-friendly options. Their efforts have created a variety of new tools available to make products that satisfy these consumers’ demands, while also addressing the formulation issues.



of respondents said that they paid “extremely close/close” attention to “clean label” in dairy products.¹

Next-gen sweeteners

On the sweetener front, high-intensity sweeteners have made great strides in adding greater sweetness and better taste to dairy products. While traditional stevia leaf extracts containing high levels of Reb A have been the norm, dairy manufacturers now have the ability to create products with zero-calorie sweetness using Reb M and Reb D, found in trace amounts in the stevia leaf. These compounds can provide sweetness without the bitterness and licorice aftertaste common with other traditional stevia leaf extracts. They also offer a more rounded, sugar-like sweet taste and a faster sweetness onset. Because Reb M and Reb D are so rare in the plant itself, suppliers are now starting to produce them using fermentation. These ingredients are ideal for manufacturers looking for the ability to replace sugar by up to 100 percent, as well as achieve a significant calorie reduction.

Erythritol, a sugar alcohol found naturally in certain plants and fruits but made commercially via a fermentation process, also continues to be a popular sweetener option in dairy products. Erythritol can help mask the aftertaste of intense sweeteners. It has higher digestive tolerance and has been clinically shown to offer Better Tooth Protection™ than other sugar alcohols. It is even available as a Non-GMO Project Verified option.

Prebiotic fiber

Chicory root fiber, a member of the fructan family which includes various fibers such as inulin, short chain inulin (oligofructose), fructooligosaccharides (FOS), and galactooligoosaccharides (GOS), is useful for adding bulk and texture in dairy products. Chicory root fiber is a versatile, label-friendly ingredient. It can provide bulk to a product in place of sugar, and is lower in calories than fully digested carbohydrates. It is suitable in products that are dairy-free, low-fat and gluten-free.

The chicory root fiber ingredients are also gaining popularity in dairy formulations because they provide added health benefits. For example, FOS from chicory root is an emerging ingredient in products positioned for weight loss because it increases the satiety effect without having a significant impact on glycemic index. Additionally, because chicory root fiber is a prebiotic, it is increasingly recognized for its value to a product by helping to balance microorganisms in the human microbiome.

Functional native starches

Modified starches have long played a role in dairy products like yogurt, providing a very cost-effective solution for emulsification, thickening, texture, taste, mouthfeel and stabilization. Suppliers are now developing functional native starches that are reaching similar levels of functionality without the chemical modification. Tapioca-based starches, for example, have little impact on taste, but can help thicken and stabilize dairy formulations. Tapioca is also a gluten-free option for consumers seeking products that do not contain gluten.

Suppliers are now creating custom starch blends from a variety of botanical sources to further increase their functionality and cost-effectiveness in dairy, as well as other applications.



Ultimately, the dairy category is poised to see continued growth. This will only continue as manufacturers create new products and reformulate existing brands to meet consumers’ increasing interest in label-friendly ingredients, while also addressing their expectations for sugar reduction and great taste.

¹ Transparent, Simple, Clean: The New Norm. Cargill Proprietary Research, 2017.

² Mellentin, J. “Ten Key Trends in Food, Nutrition and Health, 2017.” New Nutrition Business.

³ 2016 Transparency ROI Study. Label Insights. <https://www.labelinsight.com/transparency-roi-study>

⁴ Dairy Trends – What to Look For in 2017. <https://www.dairyreporter.com/Article/2017/01/05/Dairy-trends-what-to-look-out-for-in-2017>

⁵ Snacking Motivations and Attitudes, U.S., 2015. Mintel Research. <http://www.mintel.com/press-centre/food-and-drink/a-snacking-nation-94-of-americans-snack-daily>

⁶ International Food Information Council Foundation (IFIC) 2017 Food and Health Survey. <http://www.foodinsight.org/2017-food-and-health-survey>