



**A fresh take on bakery products:**

Indulgence with  
a dose of function

## As consumers strive to reduce sugar and calories in their diets, it might seem logical that bakery products would be seeing a significant drop in consumption.

But in actuality, the bakery category is going strong... with global sales predicted to reach \$574 billion by 2024.<sup>1</sup> It seems that consumers have a deeply rooted relationship with their bakery items, and still want to indulge on occasion.

At the same time, bakery purchasers are definitely seeking healthier baked goods. They not only want to see them made with familiar ingredients, but they are looking for a dose of function, seeking bakery products that promote digestive health, weight management and heart health.

But how that cookie crumbles is still very important. So bakery formulators must now find ways to innovate, providing function while also adjusting to evolving standards for better-for-you bakery items that also meet consumer expectations for taste, texture, moisture retention and shelf life. Those who can navigate the space successfully have a strong opportunity as the concept of functional bakery continues to gain strength.

Bakery products – including breads and rolls, sweet goods, packaged snacks and frozen doughs – are undoubtedly an important staple for most consumers. And even as they strive to eat more healthfully, bakery products remain a big attraction for grocery stores,

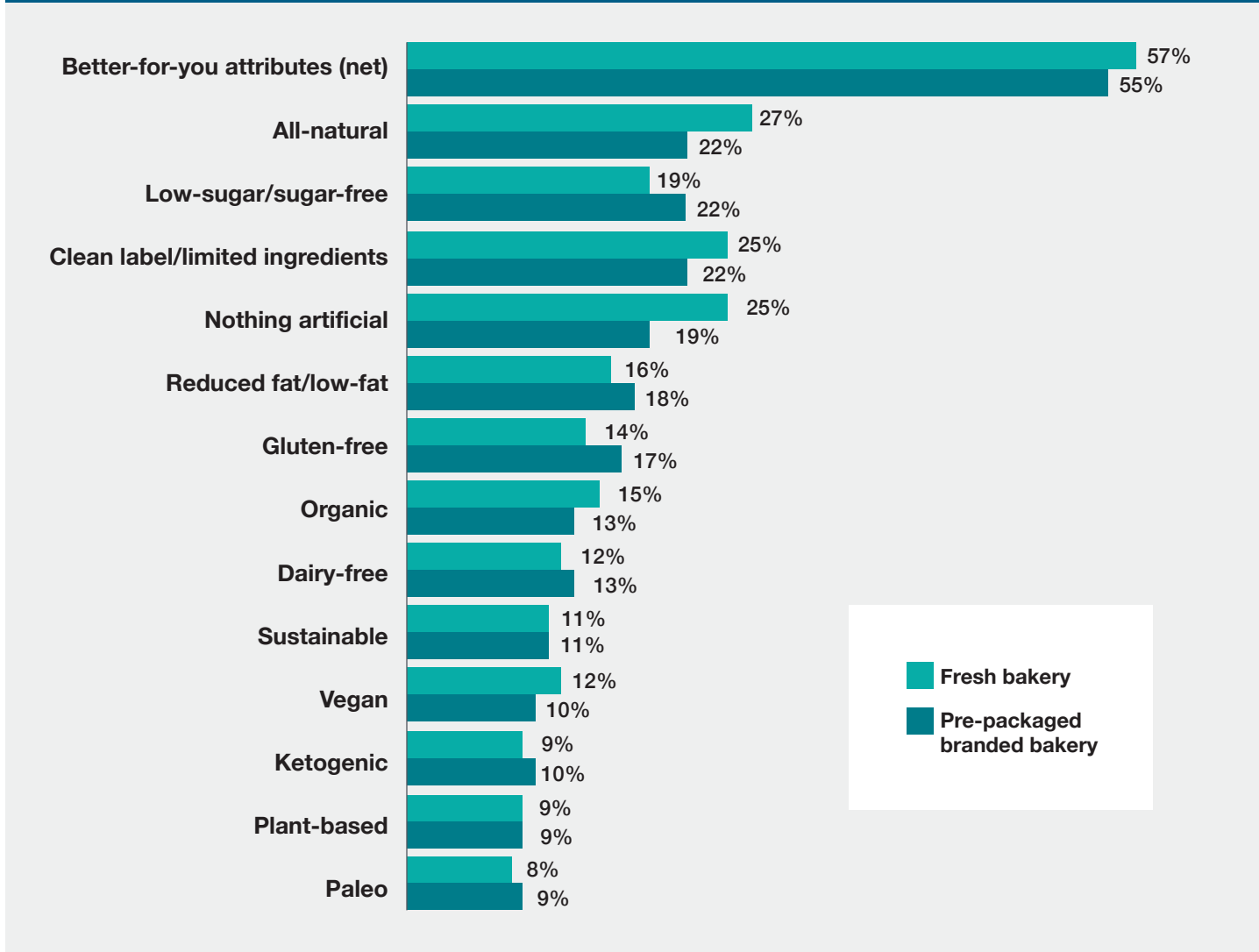
with the bakery department remaining a strong draw. According to a report from the Food Marketing Institute and the American Baker's Association called "The Power of Bakery," U.S. total bread and baked goods sales surpassed \$59 billion in 2018, with in-store bakery departments reaching \$13.8 billion, dominated by desserts, cookies and sweet goods.<sup>2</sup>

But it's a bit hard to pinpoint exactly what consumers want in bakery products these days. Indulgence is still a clear driver, especially in fresh bakery, making up 76% of in-store bakery department sales, according to the Power of Bakery report. The study also noted that consumers tend to want their bakery products fresh, and even use emotional terms like "yummy" or "love" as top-of-mind descriptors for these products. But functional attributes are increasingly important in bakery, with 60% of shoppers noting they are looking for products with added health value in both the grocery aisles and the in-store bakery.

According to proprietary research from Linkage Research & Consulting, more than half of bakery purchasers now consider better-for-you attributes when purchasing bakery items.<sup>3</sup> In general, these qualities tend to be a bit more important for fresh bakery, but not exclusively so.



**Better-for-you attributes when purchasing bakery items**



Source: Linkage Research & Consulting (in "Market Opportunities in the Clean Label Bakery Aisle.")

**A new benchmark**

So, removing or reducing the use of once-key ingredients like sugar, fat, emulsifiers and gluten have become a new baseline in the category. For example, while gluten-free eating has leveled off somewhat, consumers do still associate a strong health and quality halo with gluten-free products. This has prompted the growing popularity of alternative flours from ancient grains, such as amaranth, buckwheat, and millet in breads and other baked goods.<sup>4</sup>

Less sugar is also now an important attribute in bakery, especially as the new Nutrition Facts label requires a line for added sugars, which will likely prompt further consumer attention to sugar content. Reducing sugar has a broad impact on taste, function, texture and mouthfeel in bakery items, especially in sweet goods like muffins and cookies. While there are a number of new solutions to reduce sugar content, one of the most popular is the stevia sweetener, which can replace the sweet taste in these products.

But for many bakery formulations, they can only do part of the job – high-intensity sweeteners cannot provide the bulk and functionality of sugar. However, adding chicory root fiber to the formula in combination with stevia adds both a sweet flavor as well as a bulking function.

While label-friendly ingredients like stevia and chicory root fiber have become go-to ingredient solutions in many bakery categories, the segment is now about more than just taking less-desirable ingredients out of the formula.

As the segment sees continuing innovation, here are a few up-and-coming trends that are gaining ground in bakery products.

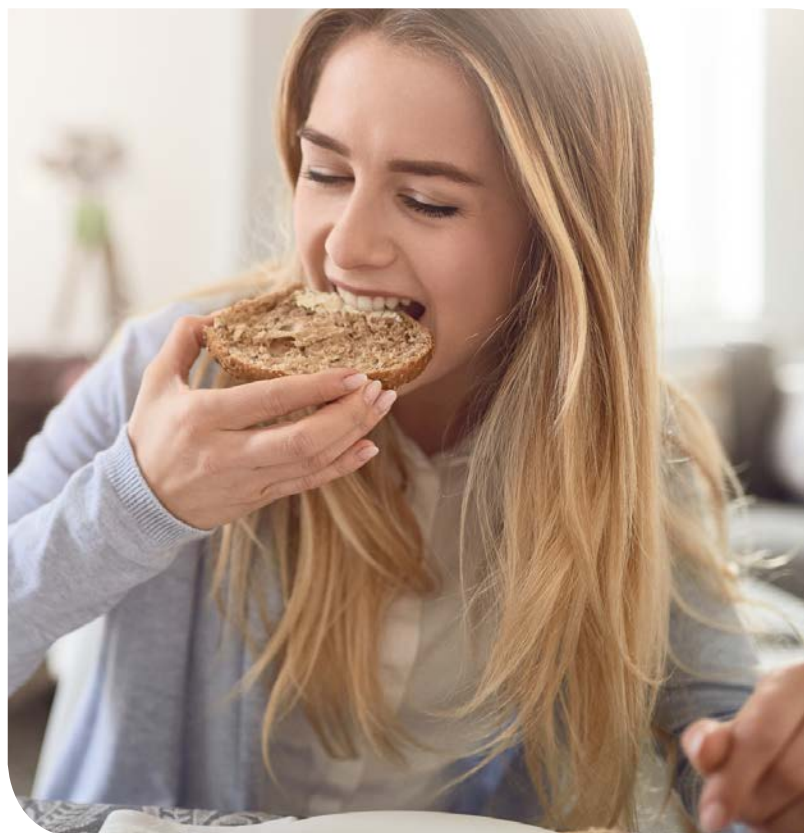
## The potential of pre- and probiotics

With as many as 70 million Americans affected by some form of digestive disease,<sup>5</sup> it is little wonder that digestive health is a big topic. Both probiotics, the healthy microbes needed to maintain a healthy balance in the microbiome, and prebiotics (the non-digestible carbohydrates that help them thrive) are showing up in a wide array of foods and beverages, including baked goods. A recent meta-analysis has shown the viability of developing functional bakery products that contain both prebiotics and probiotics.<sup>6</sup> However, formulators should be aware that these ingredients can be exceptionally sensitive to processing, and must maintain certain physical parameters in order to provide health benefits. For example, inulin from chicory root fiber works well in bakery products and has been shown to offer a prebiotic effect.

## Fiber fortification

Fiber has long been an important formulation tool in bakery products, but innovation is taking this to a new level. A number of soluble and insoluble fibers from plant-based ingredients now qualify as fiber under the new FDA definition, and are available with a number of label-friendly attributes, including certified organic, non-GMO\* and gluten-free.

Chicory root fiber is once again a top solution for adding fiber to bakery items. It is naturally sourced fructan containing inulin, which is a clinically researched<sup>7,8</sup> and well-positioned prebiotic fiber that has supporting health benefits under the new FDA definition.<sup>9</sup> Beyond serving as a great sugar replacement, it is a fiber that is known to support weight management, support bone health and have little impact on glycemic response. In bakery formulations, it can serve as a fat mimetic, a bulking or masking agent, can enhance product body and add mouthfeel, texture and flavor.



## Protein with a capital “Pea”

Protein has enjoyed a long health halo with consumers in many foods and beverages, and that is likely to continue. It is now emerging as a way to enhance the healthfulness and function of bakery and snack foods. Plant-based proteins – from pulses, soy and especially peas – are proving especially effective in the segment, because they offer strong function and label-friendly, sustainable credentials.

Soy proteins continue to be used most, and are an important solution in bakery foods, creating crumb structure, egg replacement, water absorption and a longer shelf life. Pea proteins are newer to the scene, but are proving to be a strong option. Many pea-based ingredients are also non-GMO,\* certified organic and processed without the use of hexanes. They also offer a clean, easy-to-work-with taste, and function well in a variety of applications, including bars, breads, cookies, muffins and pastries.

As consumers increasingly look for products with more protein, and other categories succeed in adding protein claims to products, further innovation and disruption is likely in bakery products ranging from crackers to bars.

Ultimately, consumers still want to think of their favorite bakery products as the ultimate comfort food, but if formulators can offer the tastes and textures consumers expect with additional health benefits and function, that is the best of both worlds and a win-win for the bakery segment.

\* There is no single definition of “non-GMO” in the USA. Contact Cargill for source and processing information.

### References

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