



Winning Combinations

**A crash course in the brave new world
of product mashups**

In today's world of food and beverage development, innovation is imperative. And to push the envelope, companies are thinking way outside the box – breaking boundaries, creating unexpected blends and forming some unlikely partnerships to develop products that meet consumers' growing desire for new and exotic food and beverage experiences.

These products, now often called mashups or hybrids, sound a little like accidents waiting to happen, but increasingly, these inventive ideas are becoming some of the sector's most winning combinations.

While many of these products might begin as happy accidents (think back to the collision of the chocolate bar and jar of peanut butter) or a serendipitous moment (such as the viral TikTok tutorial on turning tiny pancakes into cereal that prompted numerous variations, along with other tiny baked-good “cereals”¹), they have appeal for consumers who see their foods and beverages as a means of discovery, fun and new experiences.

What's behind the trend?

The product mashups of today tend to be bolder than ever, using new ingredients and technologies to reimagine what a product could be. But at the same time, these innovations are also conceptualized around broader consumer demands for healthy and “natural” products.

Many of these broader demands serve as a baseline for mashups and hybrids. Today's consumers, for example, are clearly looking for solutions to support their health and wellbeing. According to insights from FMCG Gurus, consumers are becoming more proactive about health in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as they realize that all areas of health are interconnected.² For example, the company's 2021 Beverage Trends research shows that 60% of global consumers say they would like to improve their general health and wellness over the next 12 months.

Healthful attributes are a standard for many products today, even mashups. This is particularly true in beverages, where the hybrid trend first took hold with new products like lower-sugar kombuchas, keto-friendly smoothies and cold-brew coffees.



It is also essential for new products to be exciting. Consumers want new experiences – even in everyday foods and beverages. At the same time, the product still must taste good and be enjoyable, both of which are primary motivators in product purchase.³

It also doesn't hurt if a product allows consumers to express themselves. Beyond seeking comfort and enjoyment from foods and beverages, today's consumers (especially younger generations) see themselves as more sophisticated and adventurous, and they are looking for foods and beverages that help them portray this impression... especially as they share a novel product on social media.⁴

Meeting all these demands is, of course, a difficult challenge for product developers, who now must create nutritious products with sustainably produced ingredients, and then wrap it all up in a good, authentic marketing story. Ingredients that bring value to a product provide the framework, but from there, it's an open field.

Flavorful and unexpected fusions

The idea of mixing and matching flavors to create something new has now gone way beyond the idea of sweet and sour. And it's little wonder: nearly three out of four global consumers now report they like products with new and unusual flavors.⁵ That means consumers – especially Gen Z'ers and millennials – are looking for products that take them somewhere by providing new sensory experiences through taste, texture and color.

This is leading to all kinds of new combinations that merge unlikely flavors into new formats, such as miso-flavored chips or nut-based flavors to enhance the taste of an original craft beer.⁶

As noted earlier, the beverage category is leading the way in hybrid product development, as these drinks seek to not only cultivate a healthier image, but also generate excitement. Product developers are adding vitamins, minerals, botanicals and other ingredients to re-create caffeinated beverages with less sugar and preservatives.

The same trend is also taking place in the alcoholic drinks sector, where product developers are combining tea and seltzer, beer and lemonade, or kombucha with alcohol to create beverages touting various alcohol levels for consumers seeking these options.

In the food sector, snacks are another segment leading the way with innovative combinations. The category is taking a cue from restaurants that are combining everything from watermelon and chocolate chip cookies to dumplings and burgers.⁷

Consumers' continued acceptance of plant-based eating is fodder for new mashups as well. The future is likely to bring more crossover between meat-based

and vegetable-oriented snacks, as well as those that contain a mixture of both. These products are thought to have potential appeal to flexitarian consumers who aren't opposed to eating meat, but want to reduce their intake.

Adding a touch of nostalgia

Nostalgia, or products that take us back to childhood or fond memories, is another trend prompting new brand partnerships and product combinations. Innova Market Insights calls "Modern Nostalgia" one of its Top Ten Trends of 2021. This is likely due (at least in part) to the fact that people worldwide have faced the biggest crisis in a century and are looking for ways to invoke memories from happier times.⁸

This is a well-studied phenomenon, according to a recent Innova report delving into the trend. Quoting a UK-based historian, the report notes that many of our childhood memories are shaped by food and that it "acts as a catalyst for reconnecting with the past and summoning memories."⁹

Again, the snack segment has been especially prolific in unpacking some interesting pairings. Brands are, for example, reimagining popular cookies or snacks with a 21st century spin or offering favorite cereal-based flavors in new formats, such as nutritional breakfast drinks.¹⁰

While many of these products are fun to try and generating strong consumer interest, it remains to be seen whether these out-of-the-box innovations will enjoy a minute of fame, or take hold to influence a whole new generation of consumers. Only time will tell. But meanwhile, product developers have an open canvas to pursue a whole new age of innovative foods and beverages.

Let's create something unexpected.

Contact us at 1-800-932-0544, customerservice@cargill.com or visit cargill.com.

¹ "The Next Big Hybrid Foods." Symrise Insight blog. <https://in-sight.symrise.com/article/the-next-big-hybrid-foods>

² FMCG Gurus. "Three Key Beverage Trends in 2021." Blog, March 2, 2021. <https://fmcggurus.com/blog/fmcg-gurus-three-key-beverage-trends-in-2021/>

³ FMCG Gurus. "Experimenting with Flavor in 2021." Blog, September 2, 2021. <https://fmcggurus.com/blog/fmcg-gurus-experimenting-with-flavor-in-2021/>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid. FMCG Gurus. "Three Key Beverage Trends."

⁶ Innova Market Insights. "Top Ten Trends 2021."

⁷ Ibid. Symrise Insight.

⁸ Innova Market Insights. "Modern Nostalgia: Retro Childhood Snacks Gather Pace Amid Global Unease." 2021.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.