



Sweet solutions for
today's beverage trends

In today's market, sugar tops the list of ingredients shoppers are seeking to avoid. This aversion is mirrored in purchasing decisions, with claims like “naturally sweetened,” “no added sugar” and “no artificial sweeteners” having a notable impact on sales. The data underscores a clear message: while taste remains paramount, consumers are seeking beverages that they perceive as having “better-for-you” overtones – creating opportunity for innovative brands.

“Considerations around sweeteners always seem to bubble to the top,” says Jennifer Berndt, Cargill's Associate Marketing Manager for beverages. According to the company's latest IngredientTracker™ survey, three of the top-six ingredients consumers report avoiding are sweeteners. Sugar remains the most scrutinized, but artificial sweeteners aren't far behind.

Popular on-pack claims paint a similar picture of a consumer base eager to limit sugar intake and avoid artificials. Shoppers rank promises of “no artificial sweeteners” among the most-influential on purchase decisions, but claims around sugar content – including “no added sugar,” “reduced sugar” and “sugar-free” – all appear to carry weight with a large number of shoppers.¹

Nor is it a question of consumers saying one thing, but doing another. Innova's database of product launches finds significant sales growth associated with many of the same sweetener-related claims.

Beverages positioned as “low sugar” delivered a double-digit 11% CAGR from 2019-2024, while sales for drinks with a “sugar-free” claim posted an even-more-impressive 18% CAGR over the same period.

Sift through all the data, and a recurring theme quickly emerges: for many consumers, beverage purchases aren't just about taste and hydration. Sweetener choices matter, and brands should consider aligning their formulations with prevailing attitudes toward sugar and artificial sweeteners.



A sweeter future with stevia

Enter stevia, a zero-calorie sweetener with a growing fan base thanks to its sweet taste and non-artificial status. Across beverage subcategories, product launches with stevia are on the rise.

New iced tea drinks made with stevia are up 3%. Sports beverages with stevia have soared 13%, and the zero-calorie sweetener has made significant inroads in the massive carbonates subcategory too, with product introductions up 48%.²

Advances in stevia technology help to explain the steady growth. “We've worked with stevia for nearly two decades, investing hundreds of thousands of hours to unlock the secrets of the stevia leaf,” explains Amber McKinzie, Product Marketing Manager for Cargill's sugar reduction and sweeteners portfolio. “It's an innovation journey that has led to huge leaps in the taste and functionality of our stevia sweeteners.”

Today, Cargill's sugar reduction toolkit includes Truvia® and ViaTech® stevia leaf extracts, as well as fermentation-derived EverSweet® stevia sweetener and the company's most-advanced sweetener system, EverSweet® stevia sweetener + ClearFlo® natural flavor.

Cargill's beverage application specialists can help brands land on the best sweetening solution for their specific needs. A combination of Truvia and Zerose® erythritol may provide plenty of sweetening power for modest sugar reductions. For deeper reductions in sugar, ViaTech or EverSweet may be a better choice. And for the most-challenging formulations, McKinzie says EverSweet + ClearFlo is a game-changer.

“The sweetener system brings together Cargill's best-tasting stevia sweetener with a natural flavor, resulting in a solution that is unlike anything else on the market,” she explains. “With EverSweet + ClearFlo, you get a more-sugar-like sweetness profile, plus a host of other benefits, including flavor-modification properties, improved solubility and stability in concentrated formulations, and faster dissolution.”

The company's sugar-reduction portfolio also includes a strong supporting cast, ranging from texturizers like pectin, carrageenan and starches, which can help replace mouthfeel and body, to Zerose® erythritol, a synergistic partner for high-intensity sweeteners. Formulas that incorporate both erythritol and stevia benefit from more up-front sweetness, a rounder flavor profile and improved mouthfeel – all without adding to the calorie load.

McKinzie notes that sugar reduction is not an all-or-nothing proposition. "There's plenty of gray space for reduced- and low-sugar options," she says. "Some brands may want to go all the way to no-sugar-added, but others may prefer to aim for more moderate reductions. There's consumer appetite for both."

Toward that end, Cargill has developed a novel approach to modest sugar reduction in some chocolate-flavored beverages using cocoa powders with fewer bitter notes. "Our Gerkens® Sweetie cocoa powders still provide a well-balanced, chocolatey flavor," McKenzie explains, "but their flavor profile allows formulators to dial back some of the sugar."

Sweet savings

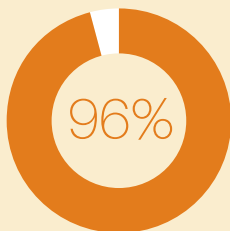
For beverage manufacturers, cost is always a consideration – and Cargill's EverSweet® stevia sweetener shines in this regard. It has a lower cost-in-use than cane and invert sugar prices, depending on usage levels. Plus, as a fermentation-derived stevia sweetener, it is less susceptible to external market factors as compared to traditional commodities.

EverSweet® Stevia Sweetener

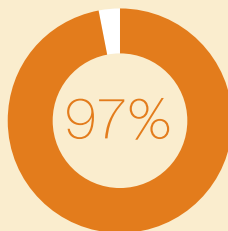
"Stevia can be a huge cost-saver, and it can deliver those savings while still creating a great-tasting product," notes McKinzie. "It's a win for everyone – manufacturers will appreciate the lower cost-in-use, while consumers will love its sweet, calorie-free taste."

Brands will also value sustainability benefits from EverSweet, affirmed by third-party-validated Life Cycle Assessments. Because EverSweet is produced via fermentation, it requires less water and land, and results in a much lower carbon footprint than stevia sweeteners produced from plants or bioconversion methods.

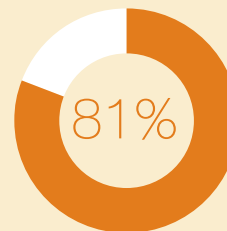
EVERSWEET SUSTAINABILITY ADVANTAGES



**Lower land-use
related impacts**



Lower water footprint



**Reduction in
carbon footprint**

Learn more about the results in our [EverSweet Life Cycle Assessment](#).

Hit the sweet spot

Demand for beverages made with less sugar shows no signs of slowing down. However, thanks to Cargill's commitment to innovation, beverage manufacturers are equipped with affordable tools that deliver on taste and sugar reduction without relying on artificial sweeteners. The company's versatile portfolio includes industry-leading sweeteners like EverSweet, together with essential supporting ingredients, enabling Cargill to help brands delight consumers with great-tasting, low and no-sugar-added beverages.

As Berndt puts it, "Consumers want sweetness without calories and added sugar. They want products made with familiar ingredients. And they want great taste. It sounds like a big ask, but we have the tools and the expertise to deliver all three. With our help, brands can truly hit the sweet spot in beverage formulation."



Consumers want sweetness without calories and added sugar. They want products made with familiar ingredients. And they want great taste. It sounds like a big ask, but we have the tools and the expertise to deliver all three."

Learn more about [Cargill's industry-leading solutions for sugar reduction.](#)



Sources:

¹ HealthFocus International (U.S.), 2024.

² Innova market data (U.S.), 2023.

EverSweet® is a product of Avansya, a joint venture of Cargill and dsm-fermenich.