

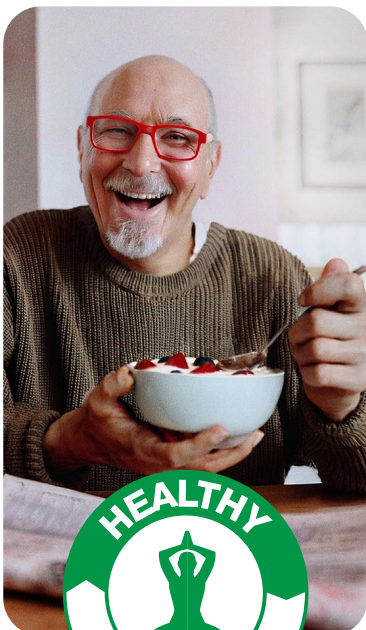
Dairy trends

Opportunities to deliver
“dairy joy for everyone”

Cargill
TrendTracker



Our 2026 edition of “Dairy joy for everyone” trends is grounded on Cargill’s proprietary TrendTracker™ macro trends, before honing in on the most relevant factors impacting the dairy industry. It is based on bespoke research for Cargill’s Food & Beverage and Indulgence categories (conducted in conjunction with The Food People), and is complemented by new product launch analysis from the Innova Market Insights database.



TrendTracker™ macro trend #1: “Healthy for me”

Dairy – like most food & beverage categories – is seeing an increased demand for health-conscious options without compromising on the indulgent nature that these products traditionally evoke. There’s a clear consumer desire towards more balanced dairy offerings that are high in protein & fiber, and low in sugars & fat, met by manufacturers boldly calling out “grams of protein per serving” on the front of pack on a multitude of products.

Consumers are increasingly turning to nutrient-dense whole foods as a cornerstone of a well-rounded diet. Additionally, they are also seeking out foods that can play a potential

role to prevent or delay health issues from occurring. Whether it’s about countering cognitive decline, boosting gut or skin health, or benefiting immune function, consumers seem to be recognizing the potential for nutrition to help address these health concerns before they escalate. Consequently, the marketplace is witnessing an uptick in products that are formulated to cater to consumer needs at different life stages.

With milk sensitivities on the rise, there seems to be a surge in demand for lactose-free cheeses, milks and yogurts, which are all touted as offering “easier digestion.”



TrendTracker™ macro trend #2: “Conscious consumption”

In recent years, the dairy industry has suffered from perception issues associated with the pitfalls of production at scale. It has therefore aimed to counter this narrative through progress in the most notable areas of animal welfare and environmental impact.

Regenerative farming practices are being adopted, and zero waste goals are being called out to ensure the longevity of the sector.

Plant-based dairy – purchased by consumers for environmental and animal welfare reasons - is reaching new heights in terms of meeting the sensory expectations of the consumer. This is being achieved through the adoption of new alternative proteins from previously untapped grain and vegetable sources, and hybrid solutions that are offering the ‘best of both worlds’.

Uncertainty around availability of milk and regulations are leading manufacturers to focus more on value. At the same time, substitution of costly ingredients with more efficient options is helping to ensure that price hikes have been minimized. Nevertheless, inflationary pressure is clearly impacting consume behavior.

At the same time consumer expectations around transparency and label friendliness shows no signs of abating. Consumers have found a renewed recognition and appreciation for dairy as a natural, whole food that is packed with essential nutrients, including protein and calcium. Full cream and fat products are enjoying a renaissance in response to a growing understanding of fat’s importance to satiety. Furthermore, the sensory qualities that these products deliver is being visualized through images and wording around “thick” and “creamy” textures.



TrendTracker™ macro trend #3: “Experience it!”

Enhancing traditionally smooth food & beverage products by playing with flavors and textures encourages different mouthfeels and consumption experiences. Especially younger generations (often influenced by social media hypes) are open to try out bold flavor combinations, mashups, and globally inspired formats & flavors.

Premiumization continues to drive preference. For example, the rise of “aerated” textures is a notable recent trend. Here, product developers are achieving a more elegant mouthfeel without compromising the balance of the dairy product as a whole.

Beyond indulgence, products are being launched that enable consumers to relax, reduce anxiety, or achieve more restful sleep.

A wealth of “Dairy joy for everyone”

The dairy category encompasses everything from healthy, functional and lactose-free products, through to dessert-inspired creations that offer playful indulgence. This highly innovative and on-trend category is truly continuing to deliver “dairy joy for everyone.”

Want to know more? Please contact [Sandy van Espen](#)

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