



FUNCTIONAL FOODS ROUNDUP

A desire for fewer ingredients, convenience and addressing health claims are some of the expected trends this year.

Words by Ranjan Sharma

Healthy food trends for 2013

It's the time of the year for predictions regarding what is going to be hot in the year ahead. Although it is almost impossible to predict what consumers are likely to choose, here is what is likely to succeed in healthy foods in 2013.

1. Increased consumption of plant-based products and a decreased consumption of animal products. This trend can partly be attributed to the drought in northern hemisphere, leading to the increased cost of meat products, and partly to consumers' recognition of the adverse health effects of eating excessive meat. US-based Phil Lempert, aka the Supermarket Guru, predicts a shift toward meatless proteins such as eggs, nut butters, tofu, beans and legumes. This means 2013 will bring more plant-based products and increased opportunities for established vegetarian and vegan brands such as Sanitarium's Vege Delights and ConAgra's Lightlife.



2. A focus on sustainably produced products. Now that environmental issues have come to the forefront, the word sustainability is being hammered across food processing companies including raw materials such as coffee beans from the rainforest, palm oil from South East Asia or the packaging material across the product range. In 2013, packaged food will come under more scrutiny for its lifecycle attributes. This means there will be more marketing of products that help minimise a negative environmental impact.

3. Minimisation of ingredients. In 2013, manufacturers will find that consumers are spending extra time checking the list of ingredients. Those who have little knowledge or time to decipher the codes for food additives will opt for products with least number of ingredients. This will create extra headaches for food companies as formulating with minimum ingredients may not always result in the desired product functionality.

4. Convenience is still the key. Convenience of packaged foods for consumers is unlikely to dissipate in 2013 as more people become time poor. For food processors, the production of more convenient foods sometimes means compromising the nutritional benefits.

5. Seeking new salt alternatives. Salt reduction and a search for salt

alternatives in packaged foods are continuing trends for 2013. This is hardly surprising as most of us are consuming significantly more salt than the recommended levels. Recent Heart Foundation research has shown that, on average, children are eating around 6g of salt a day; a level recommended for adults. Similarly, adults are consuming over 50 per cent more than the recommended daily intake for salt.

6. Demand for natural ingredients. While the hype around the natural products has somewhat dampened, this trend is still likely to be active in 2013, especially for food additives such as colours and flavours.

7. Health claims on packaged food products. Will this be a year when Australian manufacturers start making and streamlining health claims on packaged foods? As the process for the approval of the Nutrition and Health Claims proposal from Food Standards Australia New Zealand has now been completed (FSANZ Standard 1.2.7), companies have opportunities to start developing strategies to make health claims on packaged foods (see below for more details).

8. Demand for products with non-allergic ingredients. The demand for non-allergic ingredients (e.g. gluten- and peanut-free ingredients) has been on the rise for past five years and it is unlikely to slow down in 2013. As most large processing companies deal with

multiple food ingredients from global suppliers and complex manufacturing processes, producing allergy-free products remains a challenge. Inadvertent presence of allergenic ingredients can have large financial implications if the products are recalled. In this market smaller manufacturers have some advantage as they can better control the ingredients and processes than larger manufacturers.

moisture-rich products to extremely high hydrostatic pressures (400-600 MPa), thereby inactivating pathogenic bacteria. The success of this technology is evident from BevNET's Best of 2012 awards for new products and beverages. In this year's juice category, 4 out of 10 winners were juice products processed using HPP. These are Evolution Fresh (Best Product), Harmless Harvest (Best Coconut

a low throughput, which remains an unattractive proposition to large processing companies.

An interesting way of formulating nutritional products is being offered by Alcrea Health in the US (www.formulationstation.com). Using Alcrea's web-based Formulation Station, custom-branded nutritional formulations can be made by consumers. Users can browse and modify existing formulas to develop custom products with their own ingredient levels and dosage forms. At the click of button the user submits a unique formulation for review by an Alcrea Health scientist and generates a request for purchase. Although it seems like a user-friendly approach, the assumption that customers are familiar with bioactive ingredients seems farfetched. And although Alcrea Health staff claim to scrutinise the final formulation, there is a danger that customers will start marketing products with unsubstantiated health benefits.

“ This will create extra headaches for food companies, as formulating with minimum ingredients may not always result in the desired product functionality ”

9. Increased snacking and mini-meals as portable nutrition. US based NPD Group research has found that people are eating fewer items per meal but are snacking more, a trend likely to continue in 2013. Phil Lampert links this trend to health professionals recommending smaller portions that aid in better utilisation of nutrients. Convenience of smaller packs may also be a contributing factor. In Australia, snack as meal products similar to One Square Meal from Sanitarium and Duets from Yoplait and are likely to benefit from this trend.

10. Child nutrition a top priority. Child nutrition remains a priority for most parents who regularly shop at supermarkets. Parents might ease up a bit when eating out but when it comes to buying packaged foods, products with 'healthy' nutrition messages are likely to fare better in 2013. Products in this category are likely to include yogurts, organic foods, and products with wholemeal.

Innovations

High pressure processing (HPP), as a tool for producing fresh-tasting, nutritionally superior beverage has gained popularity in successful new products in the last few months. HPP involves isostatic compressing of

Water), BluePrint (Best Juice) and Suja (Best Functional Beverage). In Australia, the HPP processed food category is a small but growing trend with recent launches of fruits juices, ready to eat meat products and avocado-based products. The main limitation for growth of this category remains the large capital cost for installation and



Regulations

The ministerial council has finally approved the Nutrition, health and related claims proposal from FSANZ. This will be implemented as Standard 1.2.7, Nutrition, Health and Related claims, and will become law in early 2013. Food businesses will have three years to meet the requirements of the new Standard. Nutrition content claims and health claims are voluntary statements made by food businesses on labels and in advertising about a food. The new standard is designed to help reduce the risk of misleading and deceptive claims about food, expand the range of permitted health claims, encourage industry to innovate, giving consumers a wider range of healthy food choices and provide clarity for the jurisdictions enforcing the Standard. Companies will need to ensure that health claims, such as 'low fat' and 'high calcium' only appear on healthier foods while foods containing higher levels of saturated fat, salt and sugar will not be able to claim health benefits. 2

Ranjan Sharma, the editor of Functional Foods Weekly, www.functionalfood.biz, has more than 20 years experience in food research, innovation and commercialisation.