2020 – 3 years to go and counting!

The impact of ingredient and processing developments on R&D

Dr Pretima Titoria
2020 – 3 years to go and counting!

‘2020’ has long featured in research & development strategies as a key milestone date, but now with only 3 years to go, food and beverage companies must decide where to focus their efforts. In this white paper, Dr Pretima Titoria plots key industry trends against the new ingredients and latest processing technologies to identify what can realistically be achieved.

Balancing near term and long term innovation priorities is an enduring challenge for the food and beverage industry. Interviews with sector leaders conducted for Leatherhead’s Poised for an age of innovation report considered the role innovation plays across four key areas (see figure 1): protecting the existing portfolio, stretching the product category, acquisitions & mergers and developing next-generation products.

A strategic approach

Innovation success ultimately depends on meeting or exceeding consumer demands. Yet ingredient capabilities and processing technologies can be a limiting factor. It’s a little bit ‘chicken and egg’: is it the consumer / market trend that truly drives innovation or the availability of ingredients and technologies to facilitate change?

Figure 1: Key activities where innovation plays a role
Plotting consumer and market trends against emerging ingredients and processing technologies can reveal opportunities and challenges. Adoption of the traditional stage-gate exercise or a Technology Readiness Level (TRL) study will ensure that relevant ideas/concepts are incorporated within company strategies at the appropriate time and pace.

This paper considers current food and beverage industry trends (see figure 2) alongside relevant ingredient and processing developments. It shows how short term innovation can play a strategic role in achieving longer term goals.

**What is going on in the ingredient market?**

**Sugar reduction** continues to be a crucial theme within the wider health trend, particularly in light of high profile targets set by public health bodies. The most recent of these is the Public Health England guideline for the industry to achieve a 20% sugar reduction in certain categories by 2020 (with a 5% reduction in 2017).

Current sugar reduction strategies include optimal use of intense and bulk sweeteners. Stevia and agave are gaining attention due to their ‘natural’ label and the availability of various formats and grades. Expert knowledge can help identify the best sweeteners or sweetener blends for different applications while avoiding detrimental impact on flavour profiles or costs.

Exploitation of flavours is another emerging sugar reduction tactic, as evidenced by the recent DouxMatok development. The company claims to have developed a flavour-carrying particle enabling sugar content and calories to be reduced by more than 50% without losing sweetness or raising costs. This proprietary product is expected to be available in Europe by 2018. Potential applications include yoghurts, baked goods, breakfast cereals and

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snacks. In addition, Nestlé\(^2\) has announced a ‘successful’ modification of the structure of sugar, enabling it to be reduced by 40% in chocolate. Nestlé aims to start using this modified sugar across its chocolate range in 2018. However, it is unlikely to be available to other food and beverage manufacturers.

Table 1: Prospective ‘natural’ emulsifiers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proteins</th>
<th>Polysaccharides</th>
<th>Phospholipids</th>
<th>Saponins</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pea</td>
<td>Basil seeds</td>
<td>Sunflower</td>
<td>Quillia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lupin</td>
<td>Corn fiber</td>
<td>Rapeseed</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Soy</td>
<td>Maillard reaction complexes</td>
<td>Lechitin blends (with other natural emulsifiers)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Corn germ</td>
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</tbody>
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\(^4\) Kristensen MD, Bendson NT, Christensen SM, Astrup A and Raben A (2016) Meals based on vegetable protein sources (beans and peas) are more satiating than meals based on animal protein sources (veal and pork) – a randomised cross-over meal test study. Food & Nutrition Research, 60:32634.

\(\text{Plant-based and traditional foods}\) are at the top of many consumer wish lists. This is underpinned by evidence showing that use of plants, nuts, seeds and ancient grains can bring nutritional benefits. For instance, meals prepared with beans and peas have been found more satiating and palatable than meals based on animal protein\(^4\). And there are additional benefits associated with ancient grains, such as the majority being gluten-free.

Developing products with plant/nut/seed-based ingredients and ancient grains is not without challenges. Chickpeas, lentils, fava beans, soy beans, seaweeds and algae are readily available in raw and powdered formats, along with quinoa, spelt, teff, kamut, chia and farro grains. However, their use is application dependent. These ingredients have an impact on textural and taste profiles, so they require expert knowledge of ingredient blending and the interactions between hydrocolloids, starches and proteins. There are also regulatory challenges surrounding labelling. ‘Almond milk’ or ‘soy cheese’ might be the manufacturer’s preferred product name. But items that are not strictly dairy (bar some exemptions) cannot be labelled, advertised or presented using protected terms for milk and milk products. Direct or indirect suggestions of a dairy connection are not allowable for ‘non-pure’ dairy or imitation products.
What about processing technologies?

With consumer demand for ‘on-the-go’ products increasing, ‘night shift’ food is also gaining attention. These products can be delivered via exploitation of ingredient knowledge and product development tools. But new processing technologies are a critical enabler to enhance products’ quality, appearance and functionality.

Busy schedules mean consumers are looking for ways to wind down and relax in preparation for a healthy sleep. Drinking warm milk before bedtime is a popular and traditional habit; milk contains an amino acid called L-Tryptophan which helps the body produce melatonin and serotonin, two chemicals which tell the body to sleep. Functional ingredients under consideration in relation to this ‘night shift’ trend include GABA, pyridoxine, calcium, potassium and ornithine. These can be found in ‘bulk ingredients’ such as barley grass powder, maca, panax, whole grains and asparagus powder.

The availability and effectiveness of functional sleep-promoting ingredients is a critical factor. Various new and/or optimised technologies are being used to protect and deliver functional ingredients within product structures. Conventional thermal treatments are making way for non-thermal methods which better satisfy demands for high nutritional value and fresh-like characteristics. Ultrasound and high-pressure processing look set to play an important role in the development of ‘night shift’ food in the short-term. Their use was recently found to preserve the fructo-oligosaccharide content of cranberry juice, maintaining its prebiotic qualities, as well as increasing anthocyanin content. This underlines the potential contribution ultrasound and HPP could make to the delivery of high quality functional ingredients. What’s more, these technologies represent a non-thermal means to inactivate microorganisms.

Successful ‘on-the-go’ product development requires manufacturers to embrace new technologies across processing and packaging. Investing in smaller, more flexible and single-pack pouches can represent a quick-win, ideally using ‘green’ or ‘recyclable’ materials. Ultrasound and HPP can also offer benefits here, providing the textural properties and microbiological stability of the product can be maintained.

**2020 and beyond**

So how important is the 2020 R&D milestone? It’s all relative. While deadlines can help focus the mind, many industry developments are iterative by nature.

Of the work streams highlighted in Figure 1, ‘protecting the existing product portfolio’ and ‘stretching the category’ are likely to dominate the 2020 agenda. While consumer or market needs are an underlying driver of change, the activation of change is dependent on technology and ingredient readiness. 2020 will

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come and go and innovation must be a strategic long term discipline that is supported – not distracted by – near term goals. Focusing on areas where emerging ingredients and technologies can quickly be applied to R&D challenges is the surest route to success. Innovation is a journey, not a destination and every step counts.
How Leatherhead can help

With strong links to various ingredient manufacturers/suppliers and emerging technology hubs, Leatherhead can work with you to ensure successful product development with the latest ingredients and technologies. Confidence in the product deliverables can be validated with bespoke product analysis exploring ingredient efficacy, product characteristics and shelf life stability, all of which Leatherhead can assist with. Furthermore, an understanding of the global regulatory landscape can be provided, ensuring that the products you develop comply with any local restrictions. Contact help@leatherheadfood.com for help uncovering the latest consumer, ingredient and processing technology opportunities.

About the author

Pretima graduated with a B.Sc. (Hons) in Food Technology at University of Reading and obtained her Ph.D. in the area of rheological characterisation of food biopolymers/hydrocolloids at Cranfield University. She continued to develop her skills in this area over several years while working at the Institute of Food Research, Norwich and at Dupont Cereal Innovation Centre, Cambridge, before joining Leatherhead Food Research in 2001. Pretima now leads the Nutrition and Product Development Team, managing confidential contract research projects. Pretima has many years’ experience in physico-chemical characterisation of ingredients, interim products and final products, focusing on the textural and microstructural properties and their effect on product quality and stability, as well as their role in oral processing. Pretima is also involved with assessment of emerging technologies for the food & beverage industry, and is a Fellow at the Institute of Food Science and Technology (FIFST).
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