

NEW FOOD INGREDIENTS

The evolution of processed foods has also created the need and opportunity for many new food additives and ingredients, derived from primary processing activities as well as applied biotechnological research. Food ingredients and functional foods from natural sources are increasingly in demand. As a result, biotechnological research is intensifying in both Canada and the United States in pursuit of these more valued processed food inputs.

HEALTH CONSCIOUS CONSUMERS

Food consumption patterns have changed dramatically in North America in the last 10 years, gradually shifting towards healthier diets as consumer awareness of nutrition increases. This consumption shift is creating many new opportunities for food and beverage processors. Many of the new products successfully introduced in recent years are lower in fat and higher in carbohydrates and dietary fibre.

Others are emerging as "functional" foods which are those foods that have recognised benefits to health and physiology which extend beyond their basic nutritional value. These new food products have started to appear mainly in drugstores and specialized health food retail outlets. These products contain health-enhancing food ingredients and represent for consumers a new source of dietary fibre, low caloric food ingredients, sugar substitute or fat-replacer.

Canadian and U.S. consumers have demonstrated a preference for lower alcohol content in beverages as well as a demand for an increasing variety of alcoholic beverages. This has created opportunities for many new wines and brewery products and many new companies and brands have emerged to respond to these niche market opportunities.

Growth in non-alcoholic beverages is even more dramatic. Many of the fastest growing food products have been bottled waters, fruit juices and other ready-to-serve beverages such as iced tea.

CONVENIENCE FOODS

North American consumers also demand convenience in many of the foods they buy. This has led to the emergence of many new products described as "portable nutritious foods" such as granola bars; and dehydrated fruit and nut snacks; and individually packaged cheese fingers designed for workplace and school lunches. Both this product category and ready-to-eat desserts grew in sales volume in Canada by more than 40 percent between 1991 and 1994.

There are also many new products and opportunities for dry food mixes which are prepared through the addition of water and/or microwave cooking. One example of these products is instant "oriental noodles" the sales of which grew by more than 50 percent between 1991 and 1994. Shelf-stable, microwaveable prepared foods are also enjoying strong growth in Canada and throughout the North American market.