

Indulgent snacks still take the biscuit

Pecan Deluxe gives insight into the future of snacking, including healthy alternatives, spiced and untraditional flavours and no cut downs on indulgence



For many, life would not be the same without the odd treat. Even with the rise of veganism and the growing popularity of plant-based and clean-tasting foods giving consumers more lifestyle choices, there is increasing evidence that many are unwilling to give up on their indulgent snacks, according to leading inclusions specialist Pecan Deluxe Candy (Europe) Ltd.

Consumer snacking takes many forms and although the public wants the food industry to make food healthier, people still have a desire for traditionally indulgent items, be it the chocolate chip cookie dough chunk in an ice cream, a buttery shortbread piece in a split pot yoghurt or a salted caramel piece in a cereal bar.

Whether it's biscuits, cakes, yoghurts, ice cream, cereal bars (even bowls of cereals) and bagged snacks like trail mix, the challenge is to reproduce 'moreish' flavour characteristics. Healthy options need to give that maximum punch, while incorporating a reduced-sugar, lower fat or fortified range of ingredients that will keep permissible indulgence at the forefront of trends.

An ingredient supplier needs to respond to the needs of customers, including 'better for you' inclusions without compromising on taste or texture for ice creams, yogurt toppings, snack bar applications and much more. However, the nation's sweet tooth also needs to be catered for.

The sweet taste of success

An unwillingness to compromise on sugar levels in some foods is borne out by the latest Public Health England (PHE) sugar reduction progress report between 2015 and 2018, which found that there has been limited progress cutting sugar content for biscuits and ice cream, while the average per 100g has actually increased in puddings and sweet confectionery.

Pecan Deluxe's EMEA Managing Director, Graham Kingston, believes the market has polarised, with on one hand consumers wanting natural full flavour from their snacks, while on the other looking to replace traditional ingredients, especially with

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increasing interest in vegan friendly foods. He says: "Demand is growing from manufacturers for more innovative flavour inclusions – that extra something that lifts a product out of the ordinary and makes it stand out on a shelf."

"However, the growing choice of guilt-free sweet snacks and desserts is changing the landscape for health-conscious and price sensitive consumers, with significant success in reducing sugar content in branded yogurts, fromage frais and breakfast cereals, but the implication could be drawn that there will still be a market for traditionally sweet foodstuffs."

Sowing the seeds of indulgence

Reduced calorie ice creams – theoretically allowing consumers to eat one tub and not feel bad about it – innovative chilled bars and high protein snacking is big, in conjunction with reduced carbohydrates, while increased use of nuts and seeds containing fibre, protein and 'healthy fats' has been tapped into by inclusions specialists such as Pecan Deluxe, which is offering a range of praline items including chickpeas, banana chips and pumpkin seeds.

Jenny Baillie, Business Development Manager at Pecan Deluxe, believes offering a diverse range of options for all foods is no bad thing. Baillie says: "We certainly hope there will be a balance between indulgence impulse buying and healthy-on-the-go snacking. Adventurous consumers may want to break the habit of gorging on unhealthy snacks but they also seem reluctant to give up their special treats."

"It's possible to provide balance within the snack. For example, using healthy grains and reduced sugar content in a cereal bar but perhaps adding some dark chocolate brownie pieces to bring it alive without tipping the balance too far. We have also developed



protein fortified recipes to work closely with customers' ever more varied product themes."

The feel and satisfaction provided by unexpected or contrasting textures make an important component for developing new product lines that excite consumers. Texture is a key contributor to snacks, providing consumers with a visual and mouthfeel experience which gives them a break from the routine and stress of their lives.

Texture-based ingredients are responsible for delivering much of a snacking product's flavour and consistency, and inclusions have always had a massive part to play in lines such as ice cream, chilled desserts, baked goods and beverages.

The future of snacking

Whether satisfying new snacking habits or moments of indulgence, more variations are being added to the menu mix to cater for consumer tastes in both local and globalised dishes, wanting exotic flavours from afar but also the taste of home in restaurants and quick service chains (QSRs).

Spiced flavour inclusions like cinnamon and ginger are set to go mainstream, alongside old favourites such as salted caramel and chocolate. Confectionery is seeing more play on senses and textural excitement using chilli heat, popping candy, fizz and sour inclusions, while plant-based and free-from are also key drivers.

As niche markets grow in popularity – the UK launched more vegan products in 2018 than any other country – Pecan Deluxe says it has responded by actively re-developing many of its core products, such as brownie and cookie pieces, into vegan-friendly versions with great success.

Graham Kingston concludes: "The common theme with all of these is 'premium'. In order to deliver the differentiation, a product must deliver fully on its flavour, be appealing to consumers and be of a high quality. What we are seeing is a consolidation where historically new flavour variants have been developed, that shelf space is now being taken by consumer specific ingredients, particularly in the world of ice cream, catering for allergens, weight reduction, veganism, and functional ingredients."