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TRENDING
SEASONING BLEND



You're Thinking About Snack Foods All Wrong

Snacks are an ever-present part of our lives. If you're not eating a snack right now as you read this, chances are you've had one today – or you will. (Now you're thinking about what it's going to be, aren't you?)

Snacking is big business. Cheetos alone sells more than [\\$1 billion in products every year](#).

The snacking sector has undergone a lot of changes in recent years, becoming something of a microcosm for food industry trends at large.

From the snacks consumers choose to where they purchase and eat them, snacking looks a lot different today than it did just a few years ago.

The reality is, most food manufacturers have failed to keep up with the new realities of snacking demand and consumer preferences.

Conventional thinking around snacks says they serve one of two functions:

- **An indulgent treat** – an impulse buy at the grocery store checkout line or a cookie you give in to in the break room, these are sweet or salty “cheat” food items to be enjoyed during a particularly stressful or celebratory day.
- **A sensible pre-meal holdover** – a responsible choice that satisfies you until lunch or dinner, these are nutritious and filling food items that are more about solving a problem than about being enjoyed for their flavor.

More and more food manufacturers today are realizing that when consumers reach for a snack, they're not looking just to satisfy a craving or make it to their next meal.

They're looking for an experience.



What flavor should it be? How should it be packaged? Should it be crispier? These are important considerations for culinary experts and R&D teams.

**But their first question should be:
“When consumers seek out this snack,
what experience do they want to have?”**

Here’s a closer look at some of the experiences that are trending for snacking consumers today and how food manufacturers can deliver memorable snack products.

Trending Snack Experiences

EXPERIENCES THAT CAN BE SHARED (IN-PERSON AND DIGITALLY)

Food is an inherently communal experience, and consumers crave food experiences they can talk about and share on social media. Extreme flavors like “flamin’ hot” remain incredibly popular, particularly with younger generations. It’s all about a memorable experience. General Mills recognized this with last summer’s [release](#) of its CinnaFuego Toast Crunch, a Cinnamon Toast Crunch snack with added spicy pepper.

“Cinnamon Toast Crunch (CTC) is always looking to give our fans the most absurd and exciting experiences,” said Mindy Murray, senior marketing communications manager at General Mills.

Other intense flavor experiences have potential. Adding more cheese flavor to a snack, for instance, can be achieved through [cheese powders](#), blends, and [concentrates](#). A higher percentage of cheese makes for a more extreme flavor, which can be further amplified through other cues such as color.

At the same time, many consumers are eager to share their snacking experiences not just in person, but online as well. According to Innova research, nearly one in five consumers always want to try new digital food experiences. Social media remains a driving force in shaping food trends, and increasingly those conversations are taking place in online gaming and virtual platforms as well.

EXPERIENCING AN EXCITING NEW FLAVOR

According to the [Frito-Lay Snack Index](#), 71% of consumers say they’re more excited to try new flavors or variations of their favorite snacks in 2023.

Trying something new is a memorable experience, and snacks with interesting and exotic flavors are an easy way to do just that. Unique combinations such as [citrus and spice](#) and global flavors can prompt consumers to crave a new experience and reach for a specific snack. Innovation and collaboration are key to getting new flavor formulations right. Drying processes, combined with culinary expertise, can help food manufacturers distill the exact flavor or blend.

EXPERIENCES THAT PLAY ON NOSTALGIA AND CONSISTENCY

While some consumers are actively seeking out new snacking experiences, others are looking for snacks that feel a bit more familiar. According to Innova research, 30% of consumers say stress is a trigger for snacking, and 40% say they experience happiness after snacking.

But familiar doesn't mean there are not opportunities for innovation. Bringing back a beloved product or flavor combination with a unique twist can tap into consumers' feelings of nostalgia while also satisfying other ingredient expectations. In fact, the Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) identified "Nostalgia & Newstalgia" as a [2023 flavor trend](#).

EXPERIENCES THAT AMPLIFY OTHER EXPERIENCES

Snacks serve as a vital part of so many experiences. From popcorn at the movies to peanuts at the ballpark, some parts of life just aren't complete until they're paired with the right snack. But it's not all sweet and salty treats. There's a growing movement toward health-conscious snacks and foods that amplify healthy experiences, including working out. A post-workout smoothie can actually enhance the experience of exercise with a snack that people feel good drinking. In fact, Innova researchers found that 57% of people are consuming snacks for their nutritional benefits.

The connection between positive, healthy experiences and nutritious food applies to mental health and wellbeing, too. Innova found that 60% of consumers say that snacking boosts their emotional wellbeing. Products and positioning that play into the positive physical and mental experiences tied to certain snacks have a real opportunity with consumers today.

Serving Up Exceptional Snack Experiences

The [Agile Kitchen at Bluegrass](#) is designed to help leading food manufacturers identify and act on the latest trends in the food world, from snacking to plant-based and everything in between. Our team of culinary experts and R&D professionals work as an active collaborator in helping to bring exceptional snacks to life that deliver experiences consumers won't soon forget.



Our Agile Kitchen team can help your company stay on top and ahead of food trends.

[Contact us today for a virtual consultation.](#)

The Agile Kitchen at Bluegrass™ is a creative space that blends innovation and insights to deliver formulations and products that align with pressing consumer trends. Bluegrass Ingredients food scientists and culinary experts partner with customers to use these powders and all our products to invent and improve the future of food.

Delivering Great Taste

Bluegrass Ingredients operates at the cutting edge of taste and flavor trends. The **Bluegrass Agile Ingredient Innovation®** Model is custom built to help brands and flavor houses achieve the rapid food innovation they need to stay ahead of today's dynamic consumer taste and dietary demands.

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