


# Defining Real Ingredients and Honest Processing in Product Development

We have many different ways to describe ingredients and food. That's not necessarily a bad thing. Describing where food comes from, what's in it, and what it tastes like help people make better decisions for their diet and their palate.

 **HERE'S THE CHALLENGE:**  
FOOD MANUFACTURERS, CONSUMERS, REGULATORS AND NUTRITIONISTS DON'T ALWAYS AGREE ON WHAT TERMINOLOGY SHOULD BE USED – OR EVEN WHAT SPECIFIC TERMS MEAN.

## WHAT DOES ULTRA-PROCESSED MEAN?

Take a phrase like “ultra-processed.” The term has gotten a lot of attention recently, and many people believe too much of what we eat consists of ultra-processed foods (**more than 70%** of the U.S. diet is comprised of ultra-processed food). But regulators are still working on a **uniform definition** of ultra-processed foods.

That's why ultra-processed often gets confused for other even less defined terms like “junk food.” Consider **this scenario** put forth by Johns Hopkins public health writers:

**“Two people are standing in line at the grocery store. One has a cart full of instant ramen, hot dogs, ice cream, and soda, and the other has a cart full of whole grain bread, breakfast cereal, creamy reduced-fat peanut butter, and strawberry yogurt. Which one is buying ultra-processed foods (UPFs)?”**

The answer, the **article** reveals, is both.

Perceptions for what constitutes ultra-processed vary from consumer to consumer – and generation to generation. For example, one in four consumers say cheese is ultra-processed, according to the food and beverage insights firm **Menu Matters**. Younger consumers are more likely to think so. About 32% of Gen Z compared to 18% of Boomers and older individuals said cheese is ultra-processed.

It's easy to see where conceptions around certain phrases in the food world start to break down. Yet today's consumers are seeking authenticity in the foods they eat and the brands that make them. Claims like “real” and “natural” are influencing the products consumers reach for – whether those terms have exact definitions or not.



## REAL INGREDIENTS: DO CHEESE POWDERS USE REAL CHEESE?

For food manufacturers, unclear definitions and shifting terminology create challenges in product development. Even within a specific ingredient, different varieties can cause confusion.

When it comes to cheese powders, Bluegrass Ingredients' dairy cheese powders contain real cheese.

Here's a definition of cheese powders from our recent FAQ:

**Cheese powders are dehydrated dairy ingredients made from real cheese and processed into a powder format. This creates a consistent, shelf-stable ingredient, which is a big benefit to food manufacturers.**

 **READ MORE FROM BLUEGRASS INGREDIENTS**  
**- [CHEESE POWDERS: A TECHNICAL GUIDE FOR PRODUCT DEVELOPERS](#)**

In today's world of information overload and AI cynicism, consumers are skeptical. They're looking for authenticity and transparency in how they shop and how they eat. Many are willing to accept things like ultra-processed foods, provided they're aware of it and it delivers a benefit.

Case in point: 48% of consumers said they would be OK to purchase and consume ultra-processed foods if it adds more health/nutrients, per [Menu Matters](#). Other leading attributes were prolonged shelf life (32%) and allowing for favorite foods to be shelf stable (29%) – both aspects that are closely aligned with cheese powders.





## WHAT IS HONEST PROCESSING?

In response to unclear definitions in the food world, one trend gaining traction is the concept of “honest processing.” The [Specialty Food Association](#) named honest processing as a key trend for 2026. Here’s the SFA definition of honest processing:

**“While “ultra-processed” has become a scarlet letter, food and beverage production processes are not the real issue. Instead, consumers are rejecting the mystery behind how foods are made. This trend redefines the line, where processing is visible but still has a definite purpose (i.e. fermentation, dehydration, freeze-drying, or cold pressed), reducing consumer apprehension and enhancing understanding of how their favorite specialty products are made. Think freshly pressed juices, cave aged cheeses, roasted almonds, and limited-ingredient lists.”**



## HOW CAN FOOD MANUFACTURERS USE HONEST PROCESSING?

For food manufacturers, honest processing doesn't necessarily mean reformulating, it means being clearer and more transparent about how a product is made.

Here are a few key steps to honest processing:

- ✔ Identify source ingredients and their key attributes (e.g. cheddar cheese powder made from real cheddar cheese)
- ✔ Describe the processing taking place (e.g. dehydrated)
- ✔ Explain the impact on the end product (e.g. creates a more consistent, stable flavor)
- ✔ Incorporate details into labeling and product marketing

## BLUEGRASS INGREDIENTS CAN HELP FOOD MANUFACTURERS WITH HONEST PROCESSING

Effectively harnessing the honest processing trend comes down to using the right ingredients in the right processes while conveying the right information to customers and consumers.

At Bluegrass Ingredients, our culinary and R&D teams partner with food manufacturers every day to improve processes and innovate new flavors and ingredient solutions. Our dairy cheese powders offer a cost-optimized solution ideal to deliver on the honest processing trend.

Contact us today to get started.