[Top 4 Ingredient Trends from IFTs Food Expo - IFT.org](https://www.ift.org/news-and-publications/food-technology-magazine/issues/2023/september/features/top-4-ingredient-trends-from-ifts-food-expo)

**Top 4 Ingredient Trends from IFT's Food Expo**

A team of Food Technology editors visited the IFT FIRST Food Expo floor in search of the latest ingredient innovations—and found four top trends that are exciting both industry innovators and consumer palates.

By **Emily Little, Linda Milo Ohr, Julie Bricher**

September 1, 2023

As *Food Technology* editors navigated a busy 2023 IFT FIRST Food Expo floor in July, four ingredient trends stood out as innovation frontrunners for food product developers and manufacturers looking to spark joy in the market. While development of tasty and nutritious plant-based foods has gone beyond the burger and creation of better-for-the-planet packaging and products continue to drive new concepts in the food industry, the ingredient trends spotted at IFT’s annual exhibition are leveling up some of the trends of recent years.

**1) Less-Is-More Ingredients**

It’s probably not surprising that the most pervasive trend throughout the IFT FIRST Food Expo hall in 2023 was the industry’s continued quest to provide food manufacturers ingredients that offer less and more at the same time. Whether the primary aim is reduced or zero sugar, less sodium, or the extension of necessary raw materials in final products, the twin goal is to ensure that these same ingredients also provide something more, whether it’s natural or clean label qualities, food waste reduction while maintaining the full ingredient nutritional profile, or extending flavors or raw materials when supply chain issues arise.

Exhibitors showed a variety of clean label sugar and sweetener alternatives, including syrups, fruit concentrates, and honey, that doubled down on the promise of less is more. “Sugar reduction is one ofthe top dietary lifestyles among adults. They also want clean and simple labels,” said Cargill’s Nick Gauger, who noted that the company’s new cocoa powder ingredients for sugar-reduced beverages, Gerkens Sweety cocoa powder range, enables up to 15%–30% sugar reduction without compromising on taste.

“The cocoa powders are low in bitterness but still maintain a well-balanced chocolate flavor with a sweet perception, resulting in less sugar needed in the final application,” Gauger added. “This enables sugar reduction without additional sweeteners or artificial ingredients, another consumer demand.”

Another natural sweetener, monk fruit concentrate, went all the way there on the no-sugar claim. “One of the best things about this is it doesn’t have any sugar in it,” explained Eli Jao of Monk Fruit Corp. “Three drops equal about a teaspoon of sugar. So, because of that, people with diabetes and such can be able to enjoy the sweet things in life and not have to worry about spiking their blood sugar.”

David Banks, senior marketing director, Bell Flavors & Fragrances, said that in addition to consumers’ health concerns that are driving the reduced sugar and sodium movement, supply chain issues may be another reason that food manufacturers are looking to infuse a less-is-more approach to ingredient use and substitutes. “I would say that one of the main trends coming out of the supply chain issues, globalization, and price influxes is replacement or extension,” Banks said. “So, using flavors or other ingredients as a way to extend or fully replace something that is found in nature, has high variability, and high usage rates, [but] it’s gotten very expensive.”

Egg replacers are a great example of this, he said, noting that when prices rose to $8 per dozen last year, the food industry was hard pressed to replace their many functions in final products—from texturizers to flavor enhancers to binders. “Future-proofing is key,” he said, “and we need to look at using natural biotechnology to extend raw materials and to make things taste better through different means.”

**2) Familiar-Forward Flavors**

New flavors were everywhere on the expo floor as the “permissive indulgence” trend continues to grow. But while consumers are looking for new and exciting flavors to try, they’re still cautious and want something familiar. It’s something Sweegen’s head of global marketing, Sally Aaron, called “one foot in the familiar” during the company’s presentation on the Business FIRST stage. It’s the concept of combining one experimental flavor with one well-known flavor to create a new experience.

“As we’re doing market research studies and consumer research studies and scanning what’s going on restaurant menus, we started seeing this trend for consumers wanting unique, exotic, and natural flavor,” said Natasha D’Souza, vice president of taste and consumer experiences at Blue California, Sweegen’s sister company. “And we found that, especially in this exotic line, people are more willing to try these when they have their guard down when they want permission to indulge.”

According to the *2023 Flavor Trends*report from T. Hasegawa, 39% of consumers choose beverages as a way to treat themselves, and 27% of tea consumers like to experiment with new flavors. The report lists pomegranate, passion fruit, elderberry, blood orange, and dragon fruit as the top flavors in terms of consumer experience and interest.

Jasmin Masri, technical sales and marketing coordinator at Custom Flavors, said that she is still seeing tropical flavors peaking, and consumers are looking for the real flavors of that tropical fruit, such as guava, papaya, and mango.

“Tropical has been an on-trend flavor profile category for the past year or so, maybe a little bit longer, and a lot of very true-to-fruit profiles,” she explained. “So, we’re shifting away from the artificial candy-like profiles and really just nailing down that true-to-fruit flavor.”

In addition to the indulgent and tropical flavors, many exhibitors also showcased nostalgic flavors from past decades. The concept of “newstalgia” takes familiar flavors from memory and presents them in a new and inventive way. In the case of Bell Flavors & Fragrances, this meant calling back to the 1990s with a pizza bagel but updating the familiar item with pickle, similar to a Cuban sandwich, for a modern twist.

“We’re seeing a lot of these opportunities around classic things brought back in different ways,” said Bell’s Banks. “That fake piece of pepperoni meat [on the Bagel Bite] was really bad, but we ate them as kids and really loved them. So, we upscaled it to the next level.”

What’s old is new again, and companies are using flavor as a means to bring nostalgia into their products while keeping up with innovation.

**3) Sustainability Gets Creative**

Companies are being asked by their consumers to deliver on sustainability promises, and this means getting creative with their solutions and thinking outside the typical recycling box.

This includes finding new, innovative ways to make familiar ingredients, such as precision fermentation. This process of using bioreactors to make ingredients from microbial hosts can result in higher yields with higher purity. Wacker Chemical Corp., which has an ingredient division, creates plant-based cysteine and other ingredients with this technology.

“Everything we do is plant-based,” said Scott Turowski, national sales manager with Wacker. “The unique thing is that most cysteines are derived from animal sources like feathers and hair. We make a fermented one. It’s all biotech.”

Precision fermentation offers the ability to make ingredients by bypassing the animals needed, thus creating a more sustainable supply. Kat Crozier, head of marketing at Perfect Day Foods, spoke about the new whey protein the company has developed to add to the company’s animal free dairy and protein ingredient lineup.

“The ingredient never uses a cow, but it’s nature-identical to the whey protein found in cow’s milk,” she explained. “It uses 99% less blue water consumption, has 97% less greenhouse gas emissions, and uses 60% less energy. It’s just a really sustainable protein.”

Cargill also showed its work with fermentation with a new life cycle assessment of its EverSweet stevia sweetener.  “This is the second iteration of our life cycle assessment for EverSweet stevia sweetener,” said Carla Saunders, senior marketing manager at Cargill. “It shows that we’ve been able to improve our metrics from just two years ago. We can reduce sugar, save cost, and quantify sustainability impact.” The company claims that these sweeteners use 98% less water, produce 83% less CO2, and require 98% less land than beet sugar.

In addition to sustainable ingredient manufacturing, upcycling was once again prevalent. This process of taking a byproduct or waste stream and using it in a new way can allow brands to reduce waste and find a new source of revenue. This was especially apparent in the Startup Pavilion, with brands such as Renewal Mill and Krill Arctic Foods. Ocean Spray’s booth featured the brand’s new cranberry seeds, an upcycled product with a bright red color.

“It was a waste stream,” said Mike Czerniak, business development manager, Ocean Spray. “When we slice and dry the cranberries, they would fall out and it will just go to waste, and so now we collect those seeds separated from the fibers. It’s competitive to chia or flax, [and] I think the big differentiating factor is the color.”

**4) Even Better Better-For-You**

Better-for-you ingredients focus on personalized health and wellness goals, including cardiovascular and immune health. At IFT FIRST Expo this year, the vibe was decidedly “even better better-for-you” options, as exhibitors showcased numerous ingredients that not only offered specific health benefits, but also additional functional benefits. On display were multifunctional ingredients that help consumers reach holistic health goals as well as personalized wellness goals, from energy, beauty, and longevity boosters to disease prevention.

“We’re trying to get as much functionality into common foods and beverages as possible, as people move away from more sports and lifestyle nutrition and are more [interested in] getting functionality into their food and beverage diet,” explained Alex Amann, junior flavorist, Prinova. “The end consumer is always looking for convenience, but also multi-benefit food items. So, it’s not just an energy drink anymore, but it’s an energy drink plus immunity. They’re trying to get the bang for their buck in one single product.”

Consumers’ quest for greater energy has boosted ingredient suppliers’ efforts to create products with this added feature. At the Food Expo, for example, Bioenergy Life Sciences showed that in addition to delivering sustained energy for consumers, its ribose can also offer functional benefits like a browning/caramelizing effect and a slightly sweet flavor profile. This was demonstrated in a plant-based taco-flavored meat product.eart health remains a top consumer concern, according to many IFT FIRST exhibitors. “Younger consumers, around the ages of 18 to 39 years old, are also concerned about heart health,” said Hanna Bean of BENEO. Ingredients, including dietary fiber, were on display for their cardiovascular benefits. BENEO introduced a new barley beta-glucan, Orafti β-Fit that answers the call for heart-healthy, plant-based, science-backed, and familiar ingredients. “Sixty percent of consumers have heard of beta-glucan,” noted Bean. In addition, beta-glucans from barley contribute to blood sugar management.

The immune health category has flourished as post-pandemic life returns to normal for consumers. At its booth, Kyowa Hakko USA discussed its new white paper, which found that two in five U.S. consumers surveyed (40%) reported taking supplements to support immunity in the past 12 months, and of those, more than three in four do so as part of their regimen for long-term immune support. Kyowa’s IMMUSE postbiotic is a heat-treated, nonviable patented strain of *Lactococcus lactis*that works by activating immune cells called pDCs (plasmacytoid dendritic cells), which are unique cells that promote optimal function of the immune system.

Postbiotics, preparations of nonviable microorganisms that confer a health benefit when administered in adequate amounts, represent the next wave of immune health ingredients, noted some exhibitors. “Consumer awareness of postbiotics is growing,” said Cargill’s Jenna Nelson. The company’s product Epicor is a whole food yeast fermentate with a unique fingerprint of metabolites and functional compounds that support a strong immune system and healthy gut