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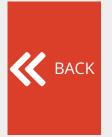
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Cover Photo Credit: Konscious Foods

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How to Solve the Cocoa Challenge

New ingredients, angles, options to extend or replace chocolate. **READ NOW!**

Credit: Rocket Launch / T. Hasegawa Inc



Credit: Nestlé USA

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Comforting Taste, Less Sugar

With consumers demanding lower sugar without any loss of comforting flavor, formulators have made great strides in reducing sugars in dairy products.





Credit: kirin_photo / Getty Images



Credit: Matt Sampson/Kristine Carey

Natural Appeal

Prepared Foods explores natural and organic product trends with Kristine Carey, executive director at Naturally Colorado, part of The Naturally Network. LISTEN NOW!

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New Products Cargill.



Fun with Flavor 🔗

Campbell Snacks, Camden, N.J., ended 2024 and greeted 2025 with a host of new Goldfish offerings. After introducing a three-item Goldfish Crisps line in December 2023, Campbell's came back in 2025 with two new flavors: Barbecue and Spicy Dill Pickle (previously in a LTO test). Separately, the brand extended its grahams portfolio with three new dessert-inspired flavors: Strawberry Shortcake, Vanilla Cupcake and Cinnamon Roll.

"Our permanent additions to the Goldfish Grahams line come after a surge in popularity, thanks in part of successful, limited-edition collaborations with iconic brands like Hello Kitty and Elf," said Mike Fanelli, senior director, Goldfish snacks marketing. "This expansion provides an opportunity for us to tap into the growing bitesized sweet cracker category and engage Gen Z and Millennial snackers with trending flavors that satisfy their need for a little treat."



K Say Olé

For the first time in nearly a decade, Mondelēz International, Inc., Chicago, extended its RITZ Bits Cracker Sandwiches line with a new Spicy Queso flavor. It debuted in December in 3oz snack-sized bags at convenience store locations. Larger, 8.8oz boxes arrive this month at major food retailers, the company said.

"With Spicy Queso, we're answering consumers' demands for exciting, bold flavors and turning up the heat on the RITZ Bits you know and love," said Steven Saenen, RITZ vice president of marketing. "It's a bold twist on your childhood favorite—with a kick in each mini bite."

Mondelēz extended its RITZ Toasted Chips line with a Sweet Habanero flavor earlier in 2024.

Turn crisp insights into craveable solutions.

Cargill experts share insights on the latest trends, ingredients and concepts popping up in this lively category. Get tips for snacking success in What's Hot in Snacks.

EXPLORE NOW >

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Artisanal Flavor, Texture ≫

La Panzanella Artisanal Foods Co., Tukwila, Wash., extended its cracker line with three new namesake Bruschetta offerings: Tomato & Basil, Olive Oil & Sea Salt, and Garlic & Parmesan. Officials said the "bite-sized toasts are baked in the traditional Italian bruschetta style, beginning as freshly baked bread that's then sliced, seasoned and crisped in an oven for just the right added crunch." They debuted at Whole Foods Markets nationwide for a suggested retail of \$4.49.



"With the foundation of each of our cracker recipes deeply rooted in Italian baking, adding Bruschetta to our lineup just made sense," said Kat Palange, La Panzanella's US marketing director.



New Snack 🚫

King's Hawaiian, Torrance, Calif., took to the streets across Manhattan in New York City last fall to give away and promote the company's first snack: King's Hawaiian Soft Pretzel Bites. Hundreds of street cart vendors switched their iconic New York pretzels for King's Hawaiian Soft Pretzel Bites and handed them out free to consumers. New York football legend Eli Manning also gave out samples as well.

"Growing up in New York City, I appreciate the joy that comes along with the city's iconic street cart pretzels," said Raouf Moussa, King's Hawaiian chief marketing officer. "It only made sense to celebrate the nationwide launch of King's Hawaiian's irresistible Soft Pretzel Bites with Eli and the hardworking street vendors of New York City, bringing everyone together and spreading aloha."



K Artisan Breads

Last fall saw Aspire Bakeries LLC, Los Angeles, begin distributing three of its La Brea Bakery Take & Bake breads in more than 1,000 Target stores nationwide. French Dinner Rolls, a French Twin Pack Baguette, and French Sandwich Rolls each feature a signature sourdough starter and just four simple ingredients. The breads are free from artificial preservatives, colors, and flavors, and all items are certified Non-GMO Verified, kosher, and vegan.

"Our Take & Bake line is about delivering the same exceptional quality and taste that our customers have come to expect from La Brea Bakery, but with the added convenience and enjoyment of baking it fresh in their own kitchen," said Jonathan Davis, La Brea Bakery's culinary innovation leader.

Seasonal Rolls >

In October, Campbell's, Camden, N.J., extended its Pepperidge Farm line with new Farmhouse Stuffing Seasoned Rolls, complete with sage and onion flavor notes. Officials said the launch overlapped prime stuffing season, "as nearly 80% of Pepperidge Farm stuffing unit sales come in November and December alone." The seasoned rolls hit shelves for a limited time last fall at \$4.99 per 12-pack.

"As we head into fall, demand for our Pepperidge Farm rolls start ramping up. With that in mind, we thought it was a perfect time to introduce our newest innovation that captures the quintessential flavors of the holidays in every bite," said Ama Auwarter, Campbell Snacks vice president of bakery marketing.





"Mom-Made" Mixes 🔗

Last fall saw My Better Batch, Greensboro, N.C., introduce four premium, "mom-made" boxed cookie mixes that deliver a "great-tasting, no-compromise shortcut that truly tastes homemade." Varieties include Double Chocolate Chip, Chocolate Chunk, Celebration, and Classic Sugar Cookie. Mixes require just butter and an egg. My Better Batch is available online through the company's website for a SRP of \$7.99 per 16oz box or \$29.99 for a variety pack.

"I wanted to create a product that empowers moms to leave the mom guilt behind—even when they're short on time," said Founder and CEO Lindsay Hancock. These mixes are not just easy; they're designed to make anyone feel like a pro in the kitchen, balancing a homemade touch with total convenience."

Reasons to Celebrate >>

Last fall saw grocery retailer Albertsons Companies, Boise, Idaho, extend its Own Brand private label line with new Overjoyed, a "curated selection of colorful and tasty products including cupcakes, candles and liners; cookies; chocolatey trail mixes; cheesecakes and sprinkles." The line includes French macarons, s'mores trail mix and chocolate fudge brownie ice cream cake.

"At Albertsons Cos., we are dedicated to bringing people together around the joys of food, and our newest Own Brand, Overjoyed, underscores this commitment by helping shoppers celebrate the joys of every day and connect with loved ones," said Brandon Brown, Albertson's senior vice president, Own Brands.





Small Size, Big Flavor 🔗

Last fall saw McKee Foods Corp., Collegedale, Tenn., extend its Drake's brand with Drake's Mini Cake Bites, bitesized cakes in flavors inspired by classic Drake's varieties: Pound Cake, Coffee Cake and Devils Food with chocolate chips. An 8.44oz box contains contains 20 mini cake bites. Drake's Mini Cake Bites are sold in eastern U.S. supermarkets, supercenters, value retailers and convenience stores.

"These portable, portion-controlled treats meet the snacking needs of busy families," said Chip Stenberg, Drake's associate brand manager. "With four mini cakes in each pouch, Drake's Mini Cake Bites are perfect for on-the-go snacking."



Upcycled Naan \sim

Atoria's Family Bakery, Gilroy, Calif., partnered last year with Upcycled Foods, Inc., (UP Inc.) Berkeley, Calif., to develop and launch Atoria's Family Bakery Mini Upcycled Naan. It features flour made from barley, wheat and rye rescued from the end of the beermaking process. After debuting with Misfits Market, the product is available at Albertson's and Safeway

stores in the Southwest, co-ops nationwide and independent food stores nationwide.

"We are proud to partner with the team at Atoria's Family Bakery to collaborate on new upcycled products that honor family tradition, a commitment to simple ingredients and modern consumer expectations for food that delivers on flavor, nutrition and sustainability," said Dan Kurzrock, UP Inc. founder and CEO.

Credit: WASIO Photography/Courtesy Atoria's Family Bakery



Artisanal Japanese 🔗

New York City's Tom Cat Bakery introduced a line of artisanal Japanese Milk Bread products for both retail and foodservice customers. Developed in collaboration with Japan's Yamazaki Baking, officials say these "breads seamlessly merge authentic Japanese baking traditions with Tom Cat's impeccable American artisan standards." Varieties include a Shokupan sandwich loaf; a seeded, pull-a-part roll; and a burger bun.

Working with the experts at Yamazaki, Tom Cat said it acquired special equipment to follow "yudane" processes in which flour and water are pre-cooked and added to the dough, creating the signature springy and fluffy texture expected in a true Shokupan. Officials say Tom Cat's Japanese milk bread also gets its flavor from generous amounts of heavy cream and honey.



Pour & Bake Batters 솠

Parents have a lot on their plates, so hacks in the kitchen are essential. A survey conducted by Opinium Research* found that while 74% of parents admit to taking shortcuts—like using prepared mixes when baking—more than half feel guilty at least sometimes for not baking from scratch. Providing a new kitchen hack is The Krusteaz Company, Tukwila, Wash., which introduced three refrigerated Pour & Bake Batters. Varieties include Chocolate Brownie, Vanilla Cupcake and Chocolate Cupcake. They're available at Kroger-owned stores and Walmart in the refrigerated dough section with a MSRP of \$6.99.

"Krusteaz celebrates the everyday wins and any baking occasion no matter how big or small. Parents today are busier than ever, and we could all use a secret weapon from time to time," said Caroline Platt, Krusteaz director of brand marketing.

*Survey conducted by Opinium Research among a sample of 1,000 U.S. parents of children aged 0-17. Survey completed September 23-30, 2024.



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New Products

Pink Partnership 📎

Allergen-friendly baked goods leader Sweet Loren's Inc., New York, N.Y., partnered with Barbie maker Mattel Inc. on a co-branded refrigerated, pink, heart-shaped cookie dough. Each pack contains 12 pre-cut heart-shaped cookies that are easy to bake and ready in less than 15 minutes. Sweet Loren's notes that it colors the cookies with natural extract from red beets instead of artificial colors. Its products also are free of the top 14-allergens (including gluten, dairy, eggs, nuts). The item debuted in January to retail stores nationwide and carries a suggested retail of \$6.99.

Officials say the collaboration also entails a giveback component. Sweet Loren's and The Barbie Dream Gap Project support Girls with Impact, an organization that empowers girls to pursue their business dreams.





Must-have Menu Option >>

Today's competitive restaurant operators need to offer gluten-free items as cost of market entry. In fact, Datassential Menu Trends research (July 2024) shows "Gluten Free" has grown on menus by more than 30% during the past four years and currently boasts a 42.7% total menu penetration—with its highest incidence among American (20.5%) and Pizza (15.7%) menus. These facts led Tyson Foodservice, Springdale, Ark., to develop Tyson Gluten Free Fully Cooked Breaded Chicken Tenderloins.

Officials say the new breaded tenderloins deliver a "delicious, crispy, juicy bite that rivals traditional breaded chicken" while they're also free of the top nine allergens.





\land Seasonal Treat

Macarooz, Cypress, Texas, celebrated the Christmas season and introduced refrigerated Sugar Cookie Mac Pops for \$13.99 per 10-count pack in Costco stores. Officials say the offerings are crafted from upcycled, gluten-free macarons and each Mac Pop comes dipped in chocolate and finished with a festive sprinkle topping.

Healthy Snacking 🔿

Mindful Eats LLC, Irvine, Calif., expanded its Krack'd Snacks line with several new items. New offerings include Mylk Chocolate Peanut Butter Caramel Crunch and Mylk Chocolate Aloha Caramel, along with a Vegan Whyte Chocolate Pumpkin Spice PB Caramel Crunch. All products maintain all the dietary accommodations of being vegan, dairy-free, keto-friendly, gluten free, and diabetic-friendly.

Separately, the company also introduced protein cookies with the same dietary benefits and 11g of protein per serving. Varieties include Soft Baked Snickerdoodle, Soft Baked Whyte Chocolate Macadamia, and Soft Baked Peanut Butta.





\land Spread the News!

Organic and natural nut and seed butters processor Once Again Nut Butter, Nunda, N.Y., added new organic, gluten free graham crackers in Cinnamon, Honey and Chocolate flavors. Officials say they have just 1g of added sugar and feature a blend of organic sorghum flour, oat flour and cassava flour-plus a touch of organic cinnamon; real clover, Non-GMO Verified honey; or rich dark chocolate liquor. Once Again also added Chocolate and Peanut Butter to its line of organic, gluten free graham sandwiches.

"The launch of our graham sandwiches created quite a happy stir among our consumers, inspiring us to bring stand-alone crackers to market and build on our sandwich flavors," said Gael J. B. Orr, director of marketing. "Kids are enjoying the taste of our snacks, while adults are appreciating that they are cleaner upgrades of childhood favorites."





SANDWICHES

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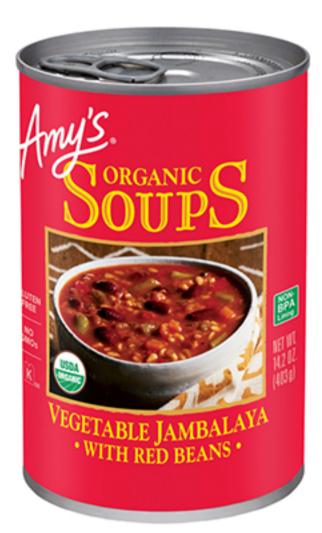
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Last fall saw T. Marzetti Company, Columbus, Ohio, introduce New York Bakery Gluten Free Texas Toast in Garlic and Five Cheese varieties.

"Creating this gluten-free bread has been an inspiring journey for us and is a testament to our unwavering commitment to quality and to our consumers," said Izzy Laanaba, T. Marzetti senior director, brand management. "By leveraging cuttingedge techniques and our deep expertise, we've developed a dough-based recipe that replicates the flavor and texture of our classic breads."



Same toast you know and love, **now Gluten Free!**



Flavorful Organic Soups

Organic and natural foods leader Amy's Kitchen, Petaluma, Calif., introduced five soups "that celebrate both international cuisines and American Southern classics." Officials said each soup is cooked from scratch with "organic ingredients, farm-fresh vegetables, and hearty grains." New gluten-free offerings include North Indian-inspired Dal Makhani, Vegetable Jambalaya and 3 Bean Vegetable Chili. Additional flavors are Pasta Fagioli and Gumbo.

Amy's new soups are available at select grocery stores nationwide, including Albertson's, Amazon, Kroger, Safeway, Target, Walmart, with selection varying by store. Suggested retail is \$3.99 to \$4.99.



Gluten Free Beer \gg

Holidaily Brewing Company, Golden, Colo., launched a crowdfunding campaign on Start Engine in late October. Holidaily said it plans to expand distribution (beyond its current nine states) and enhance product offerings. Officials also said the brewery is exploring new sustainable packaging solutions and developing new flavors. Holidaily notes that its flagship product, Favorite Blonde Ale, is the nation's top-selling gluten-free and the brewery has seen exponential growth with a 1700% increase in sales since its inception.

"This is a chance for our fans to share in our success as we continue to grow, innovate, and lead the gluten-free beer movement," said Karen Hertz, Holidaily Brewing founder. "We're not just brewing beer—we're providing a solution for millions of people who have been left out of the craft beer experience due to gluten sensitivities."

Better Baking 🔿

Already known for organic breakfast and snack offerings, Nature's Path Foods Inc., Vancouver, B.C., introduced five line Organic Flours to the United States. A 32oz Organic Gluten-Free All-Purpose Flour features oat flour, is certified gluten-free, and suitable for all recipes that specify "gluten-free allpurpose flour," the company says.

Nature's Path Organic Flour is available at Hannaford, Woodman's, Raley's, and Hy-Vee stores in the U.S. as well as online directly from Nature's Path and Amazon.





📯 Nostalgic Nosh

Quinn Foods LLC, Boulder, Colo., expanded its Pretzel Nuggets line with a "PB&J Berry" featuring peanut butter along with dried strawberry and raspberry. The nuggets are certified gluten-free, Non-GMO Project Verified, vegan friendly, and made without corn, soy, wheat, or dairy. They launched Nationally in Sprouts in December, and online at Thrive Market in January.

"Growing up I ate a lot of peanut butter-and-jelly sandwiches. My go-to was a mix of strawberry and raspberry jellies, combined with creamy peanut butter on wholewheat bread," said Kristy Lewis, Quinn founder/CVO. "I ate them for breakfast, lunch, dinner, or as an on-the-go snack! It was my fuel during car trips, school lunches, and during the after-school shuffle."

From Basketball to Better Eating

NBA legend and San Antonio Spurs point guard Chris Paul embraced a plant-based diet in 2019 and introduced his Good Eat'n gluten free, non-GMO snack brand through GoPuff (GoBrands Inc.) in 2022. This November, the company announced that the company's five-item plant-based line was available in more than 250 H-E-B stores across Texas.

The line includes 5oz Puffs (Hot Hot, Cinnamon Sugar) 6oz Tortilla Chips (Nacho Cheeze, Big Dill Ranch) and a 5oz Popcorn (Cookies N Creme Popcorn), which are found in H-E-B's "Healthy Living" department.



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TRENDS GLUTEN FREE NEWS

Better Bread-Without Side Effects

New wheat research could reduce the impact of celiac disease. prepared FOODS

University of California-Davis researchers have found a way to remove certain sections of wheat's DNA without impacting its ability to make good bakery foods.

Credit: eclipse_images / Getty Images

by Meghan Donnelly

Researchers from the University of California-Davis may have found a way to make wheat safer for those with celiac disease and improve the overall quality of gluten-free bread.

Wheat contains proteins called gliadins and glutenins that are important for making dough strong and elastic, but they also contain certain parts (called epitopes) that can trigger celiac disease in some people. The amount and length of time a person is exposed to these harmful epitopes can influence whether they develop celiac disease.

In a new preprint, a research team, led by Dr. Jorge Dubcovsky and Dr. Wenjun Zhang, found that by removing specific sections of wheat's DNA, they could reduce these harmful epitopes without negatively affecting the wheat's ability to make good bread. One particular deletion, called Δ gli-D2, removed major harmful epitopes, which not only made the wheat safer for people with celiac disease but also made the dough stronger and better for breadmaking. The Δ gli-D2 deletion didn't affect the wheat's yield or protein content, making it a promising option for producing wheat that is both better for baking and safer for people at risk of celiac disease.

Additionally, this new type of wheat could help reduce the number of people who develop celiac disease by lowering the amount of potentially harmful proteins in their diet.

Dr. Dubcovsky indicated that this is a "first step in a longer project to gradually reduce the amount of harmful epitopes in wheat. There are more than 50 proteins with these epitopes that are concentrated in nine regions of the wheat chromosomes. Using small deletions and gene editing, we are 'cleaning' each of these regions with the objective of combining them in the near future."

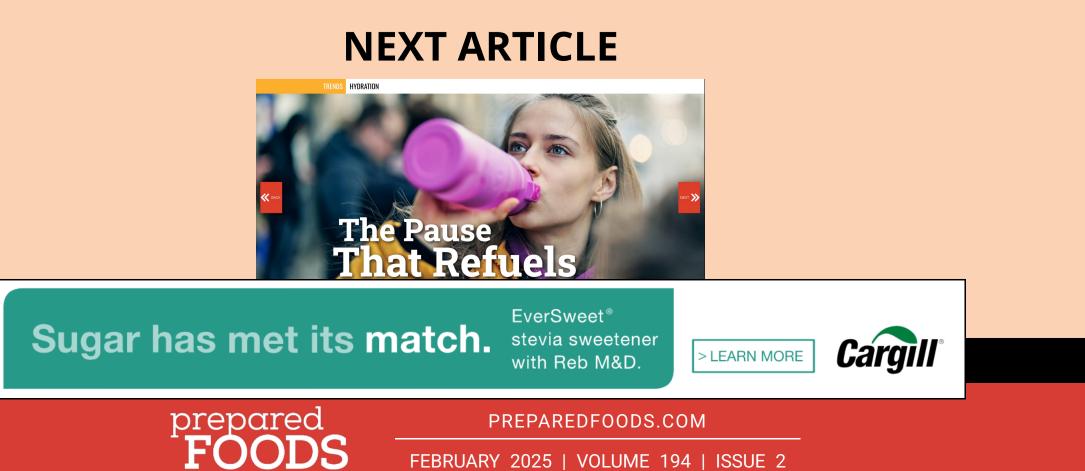
The Celiac Disease Foundation awarded a research grant to the Dubcovsky Lab to support the ongoing development of these celiac-safe wheat varieties. This funding will accelerate the creation of commercially viable wheat for bread and pasta that can be enjoyed by those with celiac disease. The Foundation's investment underscores the critical importance of advancing research that can transform the lives of millions affected by this chronic autoimmune disease.

"We are incredibly excited about the progress being made toward producing celiac-safe wheat, but we recognize that there is still much research ahead of us," said Marilyn Geller, CEO of the Celiac Disease Foundation. "While we may be years away from developing commercially viable wheat strains that are truly safe for those with celiac disease, the Celiac Disease Foundation is committed to investing in groundbreaking research that has the potential

to significantly improve the quality of life for our community."

Read more at: https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/2024.07.19.604379v1

This is a republished August 2024 blog post from Meghan Donnelly, MS, RD, director of health communications at the Celiac Disease Foundation. The Celiac Disease Foundation is a leading global patient advocacy organization committed to accelerating diagnosis, treatments, and a cure for celiac disease. Our mission is to improve the health and well-being of the millions of individuals around the world affected by this genetic autoimmune disease. Learn more at www.celiac.org.



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In 2023, Prepared Foods magazine created the Spirit of Innovation Awards, an awards show designed to recognize and celebrate the companies that have gone above and beyond to generate new and exciting products that are revolutionizing the way people perceive food. For more than two decades, we always look forward to asking you...

All winners will be recognized at the Spirit of Innovation Awards Event in November. They will also receive an online celebration where R&D team members share their stories, as well as industry-wide promotion including custom logos and press exposure.

> Please note, the nominations page includes categories and information about eligibility.





Have you developed a groundbreaking new product that evemplifies innovation?

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TRENDS HYDRATION

The Pause That Refuels

More consumers—beyond athletes embrace hydration beverages, benefits.

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Photo: Imgorthand / Getty Images

By Lu Ann Williams

Each fall, Innova Market Insights releases its annual Top 10 Trends for the next, coming year. This eagerly awaited report captures Innova's 360-degree approach to insights on trends. Innova's approach incorporates trends monitoring of consumer attitudes and behaviors, product launches, ingredient and flavor innovation, packaging, and category shifts.

In this instance, there are several trends that apply to the growing hydration beverage market.

Innova's #1 trend, "Ingredients and Beyond," highlights the importance of quality ingredients that help products differentiate themselves from competitors. In beverages, we see that the addition of functional ingredients can elevate a beverage beyond solely hydration. "Precision Wellness," the #2 trend for 2025, gives a nod to personalization and the ability of consumers to choose from products—including beverages—that meet their particular nutrition needs. Our #3 trend, "Wildly Inventive," captures the excitement around flavor mash-ups in foods and beverages. Hydration beverages—whether in seltzers and waters, sports beverages, or functional drinks —are no exception.

Continuing onward, we see how "Climate Adaptation," the #6 trend, demonstrates recognition of climate change and the importance of sustainability in practices, products, and packaging. US hydration trends, with their balance of hydration, functionality, and sustainability, exemplify these Top 10 Trends 2025 and others.



No Athletes Needed! PepsiCo said new Gatorade Hydration Booster is Gatorade's first electrolyte powder developed "specifically for people's everyday lifestyles." It features a blend of electrolytes from watermelon juice, sea salt, sodium citrate and potassium salt. It also contains 100% daily value of essential vitamins A, B3, B5, B6 and C with no artificial flavors, sweeteners or added colors. Credit: PepsiCo

Hydration Plus...

US consumers increasingly are aware of the importance of hydration to health and well-being. Demand is high for beverages with hydration claims, and this helps push the industry toward innovation. As part of a healthy lifestyle, they seek to incorporate food and beverage products that boost energy, support immunity, improve gut health, and benefit brain function. Simply put, US consumers want more than hydration from their beverages; they also want sports nutrition and functional benefits.

Innova describes the functional beverages category as consisting of sports nutrition drinks, some dairy drinks, and many types of soft drinks. In the US, soft drinks clearly lead the way, accounting for about two-thirds of functional beverage launches. Among soft drinks, energy drinks are the most active subcategory, followed by ready-to-drink sports beverages, functional flavored bottled waters, and carbonates.

Functional beverages can incorporate a number of benefits, including, in alphabetical order, added calcium or iron, anti-aging and aging well, antioxidants, bone health, brain health, CBD, digestive and gut health, energy and alertness, eye health, heart health, immune health, joint health, omega-3, oral health, prebiotic, probiotic, protein, skin health, vitamin and mineral fortified, and weight management.

Antioxidants, energy, immunity, and protein are the leading claims globally and we seeing growth, in particular, in energy and immune health claims. The US over-indexes compared to global launch numbers for brain health, energy, immunity, and protein claims; and under-indexes for claims regarding vitamin and mineral fortification.



Hydration—Plus! Sol-ti says it offers first USDA organic, powdered hydration sticks with superfood functions and five essential electrolytes for "superior, everyday hydration." Credit: Sol-ti Inc.

In 2024, Innova tracked a shift in the US hydration beverage marketplace toward rapid hydration through readily absorbed electrolyte drinks. These hydration beverages particularly appeal to athletes and fitness enthusiasts for consumption during or after their workouts to help prevent dehydration and maintain electrolyte levels. Alkaline water with a controlled pH was popularized several years ago to enhance water absorption and improve overall health. Since then, US launch numbers have been stable.

Energy drinks appeal to US consumers. While some beverages contain classic energy ingredients such as caffeine and sugar, others feature alternate energy-providing ingredients such as green coffee bean extract, green tea extract, ginseng, and guarana. Processors also tout organic caffeine and caffeine "from natural sources." Consumer sentiment against added sugar is helping catalyze innovation in reduced sugar and sugar-free hydration beverages.

On the flip side of energy we find some hydration drinks talking about relaxation benefits. Even so, US hydration product launches with CBD for relaxation and stress relief have been declining during the past several years.

Hydration product launches with electrolytes and electrolyte claims are on the rise in the US. These beverages

🕊 васк

often are marketed as electrolyte drinks, with added electrolytes that can include a combination of sodium, potassium, calcium, magnesium, and chloride. Associated claims include hydration, muscle contraction, metabolism, fluid management, thirst regulation, prevention of dehydration, and physical performance support.

Several other functional claims often are incorporated into hydration beverages. Immune health claims gained prominence during the pandemic and continue to be featured in many new hydration products. The mineral zinc has long been associated with immunity. Brain health and mental health are highly desirable among today's stressed consumers.

Innova is monitoring the addition of ingredients such as L-theanine and the adaptogens lion's mane mushroom, chaga, and ashwagandha. Gut and digestive health benefits have been aided by the increased availability of prebiotic ingredients, which are soluble fibers that are readily incorporated into beverages. Prebiotic sodas and kombucha beverages are popular in the US.



Healthier Hydration. Soccer star Lionel Messi said he developed Más+ by Messi "because he wanted a drink that had quality ingredients without compromising on flavor or taste." Más+ by Messi blends electrolytes, vitamins and antioxidants, with natural flavors, no artificial sweeteners or colors and no caffeine. A 16.9oz bottle contains just 10 calories and 1g of cane sugar; and 7 calories and less than 1g of cane sugar per 12oz can. Credit: Más+ Next Generation Beverage Co



Alex Cooper, entrepreneur and host of the "Call Her Daddy" podcast introduced a hydration beverage line "designed by women for women." Officials say each bottle contains more than 700mg of electrolytes, a blend of B-complex vitamins and "a gentle boost of green coffee extract to get you back in the saddle." Credit: Unwell Hydration / The Unwell Network

Flavor Fun

As highlighted in one of Innova's Top 10 Trends, "Wildly Inventive," unique flavors and flavor combinations are important in hydration products. Flavors can attract new consumers and help keep current customer-consumers excited about new launches. At the end of the day, nearly all consumers are interested healthier beverages that also taste good, stand out in a crowded market, and represent an update from traditional favorites.

Innova monitors consumer sentiment regarding flavors and flavor fusion through robust news and social media tracking and analysis. We examine the key social media platforms—including X, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, TikTok—for engagement, impressions, mentions and trends in mentions, reach, sentiment, unique users, and views.

Flavor-related hashtags we evaluated for flavor trends include #flavors, #fusionflavors, #nostalgicflavors, #flavorsfusion, #flavorsinnovation, #uniqueflavors, #innovationinflavors, #flavorscombination, and #flavormixbeverages. We merge these observations with product information, company news, industry press releases, news articles, and scientific publications.

US and Canadian consumers tell us that flavor has become a more important consideration in recent months. During the past five years, we've seen upticks in consumer interest in unique flavor combinations, beginning in the early pandemic years. When we asked North American consumers which flavor aspects most influence their food and beverage choices, about one-third said new, unique, or different flavors.

Consumers participating in Innova surveys say they are most likely to experiment with coffee flavors. On the product innovation side, we see popular flavor fusions incorporating berries, combining tropical flavors, or mixing ginger plus citrus. We also see increased use of global spice and seed flavors in beverage launches in the US. By combining functional ingredients with appealing flavors and then utilizing effective marketing strategies, including social media, brands can create a strong demand for their hydration beverage products.

sustainable choices.





Making On-the-Go Hydration Fun, Flavorful: Convenience store operator says 7-Select Replenish is popular since its s2019 debut. New offerings include on-trend, seasonal flavors and a more sustainable bottle design. Credit: 7-Eleven, Inc.

Hydration beverages, like other food and beverage subcategories, often contain and showcase <u>plant-based ingredients</u>. The number of launches of hydration drinks with a plant-based claim more than doubled between 2019 and 2020 and has remained stable since. Consumer support for plant-based products, including beverages, aligns with their desire for healthy, natural, and

Consumers increasingly are conscious of the environmental impact of their food and beverage choices. In addition to plant-based, related hydration product launches can feature claims about sustainable ingredients and eco-friendly packaging.

Speaking of packaging, convenience is a key factor for US consumers, who increasingly seek hydration options they can easily take with them throughout the day. This is reflected in formats such as single-serve pouches and convenient packaging formats such as powders that are easier and lighter to take onthe-go than are bottled drinks.

Functional Future

The hydration landscape in the US is evolving rapidly, with consumers seeking more than just basic replenishment of fluids. Functional ingredients, innovative flavor combinations, and plantbased alternatives exemplify the types of innovation in the marketplace. As US consumers continue to make health and wellbeing a priority, they may demand even more functional and personalized health benefits in their hydration drinks.

Technology is likely to impact the evolution of hydration beverages. Brands use digital platforms and technologies, including AI, to create unique experiences for existing and potential consumers. For manufacturers, AI can aid in developing new flavors, creating exciting flavor combinations, conceiving of limited editions, and optimizing added nutrients while maintaining taste. Events, celebrities, influencers, and metaverse experiences add engagement opportunities.

As the market continues to evolve, Innova expects to see even more exciting and innovative hydration products emerge in 2025 and beyond.



Hydration—On the Go, At the Ready: New hydration blend positioned to balance hectic holiday lifestyles. Supplements packed with electrolytes and vitamins, including vitamin B6, vitamin B12, vitamin B5, magnesium and potassium. Credit: Magnum Nutraceuticals

Lu Ann Williams is Global Insights Director at Innova Market Insights, provider of market research services including the Innova Database. With more than 25 years' experience in the food industry, Lu Ann is a trend expert and frequent public speaker at events worldwide. She leads a team of analysts and works with global clients. Contact her at luann.williams@innovami.com

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FOODS

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Tastes Like Chicken: Authentic Flavors in Analogs

TECHNOLOGIES

FLAVORING PLANT-BASED FOODS

The biggest hurdle to universal acceptance of plant-based replacers of meat, poultry, and seafood is authenticity of flavor.

prepared FOODS

by Yves Potvin

The plant-based food industry has made monumental strides over the past few decades, transitioning from niche products to mainstream options available in every supermarket and fast-food chain. The driving force behind this revolution has been the development of flavors that closely mimic the sensory experience of meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs—key protein sources of the human diet.

Consumers increasingly are seeking plant-based alternatives to satisfy their taste preferences and desires to reduce their reliance on animal-derived products. For product makers to successfully fulfill these consumer demands, achieving authentic flavor profiles that evoke the essence of traditional protein has become an art as well as a science.



No beef

The best example of the modern approach to creating authentic tasting red meat items is that classic plant-based analog, the veggie dog. Most traditional hotdogs use natural smoke to impart that *je ne sais quoi* that makes a hot dog a hot dog. Another element that has been crucial in the flavoring of meat products for centuries is spice. To create the first universally successful plant-based hot dog, the logical starting point was to focus on the traditional version.

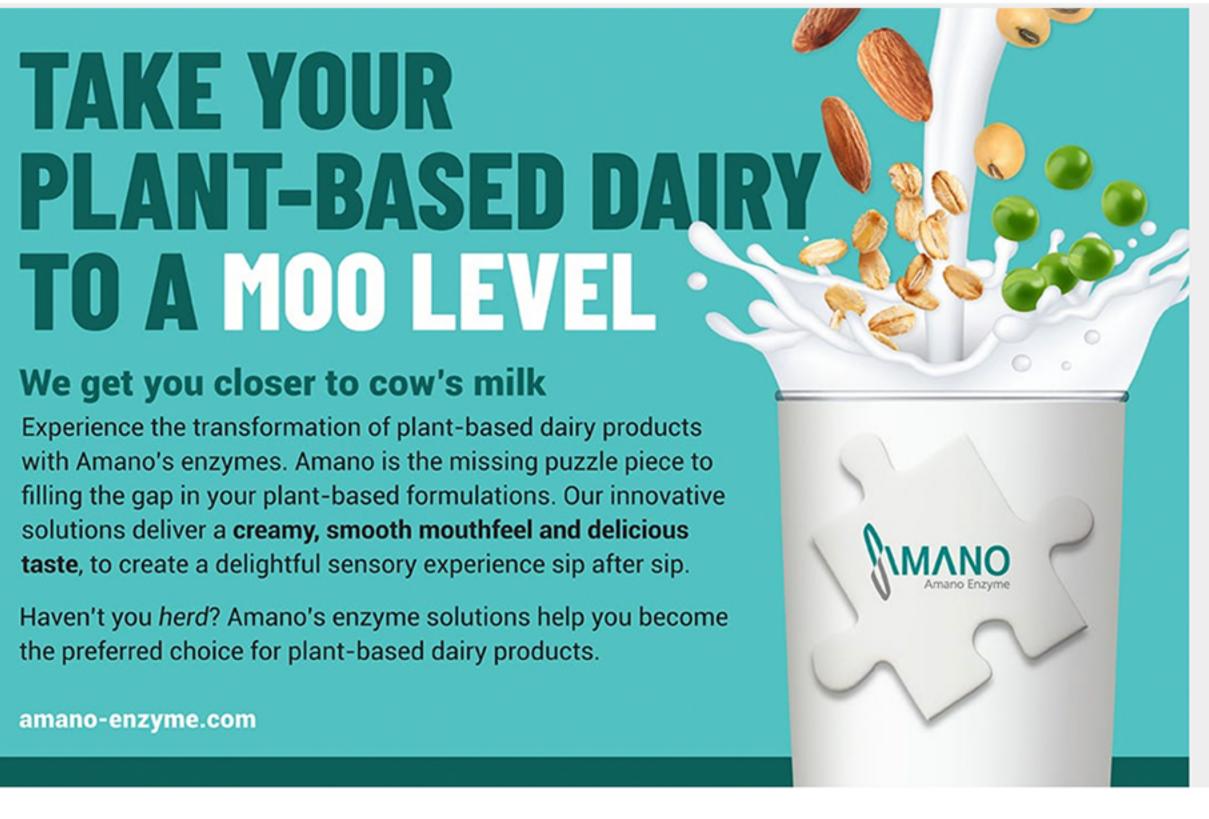
Consultations with a master butcher led to the traditional spice blends used to season a classic frankfurter. These included garlic



powder, dried mustard, white pepper, and nutmeg. But the most important ingredient was smoke. The first trials in creating the soy dog used liquid smoke, but it was too strong and left a lingering aftertaste. Tempering it, however, allowed it to bring out the smoky, grilled flavor consumers crave in hot dogs.



Today's successful meat analogs rely on the culinary artistry of blending simple, clean ingredients to create flavors that are both authentic and extraordinary. Credit: Prime Roots, Inc.



When the Yeast Will Do

With other plant-based products, there are always challenges, especially in the development of poultry analogs such as mock chicken tenders and scaloppini-style chicken cutlets. In plant-based meats, off flavor notes that can arise from ingredients like soy isolate, pea protein, and wheat gluten can pose a significant hurdle.

A preferred go-to solution for masking such off flavors is yeast extract. Yeast extract is a powerful ingredient used in many plant-based products to enhance savory and *umami* flavors. It is created through a process called "reaction flavoring," in which yeast cells are broken down to release amino acids, peptides, and other compounds that mimic the rich, savory flavor of animal protein.

Yeast extract is versatile and can be applied in a way that can duplicate almost any flavor when used with precision. In many cases, it can make a plant-based product taste so close to the real thing that it can be hard to tell the difference.

Despite its effectiveness, yeast extract is not a miracle solution. It requires careful synergy with other flavor ingredients. For example, wheat and soy isolates can contribute very strong off flavors—so much so that if not properly masked, they can completely overpower the final product. To achieve the right balance, developers often have to experiment with various spices, herbs, and extracts.



New technology uses the unique, fiberlike root structure of fungi mycelia to create extrusions ideal for mimicking the texture of chicken. Credit: VEOS Group/Naplasol, SRL.

Mushroom Power

Mushrooms and other fungi have been used to impart meatmimicking *umami* and *kokumi*—rich, savory meatiness—for ages. Modern food technologists have taken advantage of this, with perhaps chicken analogs from Marlow Foods, Ltd.'s Quorn brand of vegetarian poultry and meat substitutes. Quorn is made from *mycoproteins* derived from the *Fusarium venenatum* fungus via fermentation.

Mycoproteins commonly are derived from the threadlike roots of fungi, the *mycelium*. In Sweden, ingredient scientists took mycelium-based protein technology to the next level specifically to improve on mycoprotein-based chicken substitutes. Typically, makers of plant-based meat use high-moisture extrusion to replicate the fiberlike structure of meat. The high-moisture, hightemperature process limits the shape and size of the resulting meat analogs, especially when applied to soy or pea proteins or seed and grain-sourced proteins. You'll find dozens of articles, videos, podcasts, infographics, and other info on plant-based foods and beverages, including analogs of meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs at PreparedFoods.com. While there, catch Yves Potvin's two-part video podcast, "A Konscious Effort in Plant-Based Raw Seafood."

Flavor Force

There are a number of devices in the product developer's toolbox for creating flavors that mimic meat, poultry, and seafood. For techniques, methods such as extrusion, roasting, or searing will each impart different flavor notes. Among ingredients, a comprehensive range starts with specific protein sources, such as soy, chickpeas, yellow peas, mung beans, algae, and fungi.

Ingredients that impart *umami* and *kokumi*, of course, are high priority. Options can include various mushrooms/mushroom powders; soy sauce/soy sauce powders; yeast extracts, flakes, and powders; natural smoke; and caramelized vegetables, such as roasted onions, aged black garlic, and tomato concentrates and extracts.

To impart flavors of the sea, *nori* and other seaweed and seaweed extracts have proven to be good sources. Other sources of meaty, smoky *umami* and *kokumi* can include smoked peppers, such as *chipotlé* and Ancho chili peppers. Sulfury spices such as black salt and *asafoetida* can deliver a flavor reminiscent of egg yolk. These are just some of the ingredients and preparation techniques that can help developers create meat, poultry, seafood, and egg mimics that go beyond *trompe-l'oeil* to being near-perfect *tromper les papilles* treats.

Mycoprotein from mycelium boasts a naturally fibrous texture, with a neutral flavor. Nutritionally, it also is rich in many essential amino acids. The new technology takes the extrusion process a step further by aligning the mycelium fibers to allow for large pieces of any size or shape, making it possible to create whole-cut chicken breast-like cuts. Using less energy than traditional extrusion methods, the process also retains more moisture in the finished cuts, keeping them juicy. Other proteins can be included in the process with the mycoproteins as well to enable variations in texture and performance.



The technology for replicating the flavor, texture, color, and functionality of eggs has grown exponentially to where plant-based eggs are nearly nature identical. Credit: Yo-Egg Foods, Ltd.

Another fungus used to bring savory meaty flavors to recipes is *koji*. Koji comes from *Aspergillus sp.* mold that is used to ferment wheat or soybean. It is prized in Japanese cuisine for its replication of cured meats due to a slightly sweet back-note that comes from natural *glutamate* and the enzymatic breakdown into sugars of the starches in the wheat or soy substrate. It is ideally suited to formulations such as bacon, sausage, and deli meat analogs.

Dried *shiitake* mushroom powder is a simple ingredient that adds a deep, meaty flavor to formulations where the texture components work separately from flavor providers. It also can be used to enhance other flavor sources in an alt-meat or poultry product.



Soy is still the most prominent plant protein used in analogs, and has the longest history due to its versatility in texture. Credit: Nasoya Foods USA, LLC

Going Clean

In recent years, consumers have made it clear that they will not compromise when it comes to clean labels and natural ingredients. This is especially true when it comes to plant-based products. To survive the current backlash against plant-based analogs, developers must create plant-based options that are not only as authentic as possible in flavor and texture, but also free from artificial additives and GMOs.

This approach has been used successfully in the recent creation of plant-based sushi and other raw seafood replications. Simple, natural —and traditional —"off the shelf" ingredients including rice vinegar, organic cane sugar, and sesame oil are the foundation of rich, authentic flavors. Yet more innovative but still natural ingredients like *DHA algal oil*—an omega-3-rich oil extracted from marine algae—give seafood alternatives the "fresh from the ocean" flavor note that is so critical to plant-based seafood.



The challenge of replicating a hot dog goes beyond merely flavor and texture; it's about crafting an organoleptic profile that is familiar, yet distinctly plant-based. Credit: Hydrosol GmbH & Co.

PF, I Love You

The global precision fermentation ingredients market size, currently at around USD3 billion, is projected to reach USD36.3 billion by 2030, recording a CAGR of 44.0% by value, according to MarketsandMarkets, Inc. The research group pointed to changing consumer preferences towards veganism, increasing protein consumption, and rising investments in innovations as the major factors for market growth. MarketsandMarkets further reported that precision fermentation

is expected to become a low-cost technology generating huge opportunities in the alternative protein space.

The group also predicted that "the industry will reach cost parity with most animal-derived protein molecules by 2025" and that by the end of the decade, "the cost of precision fermentation-based protein is expected to be less than that of animal-based counterparts." The report also forecast that "modern food developed through this method will also pave way for a new food production system, moving from farms to fermentation tanks."

The report further noted that, "sustainable production method is expected to generate more opportunities for manufacturers for commercially launching animal-free products. Also included was that "the egg alternatives segment is projected to grow with the second-highest CAGR in the precision fermentation ingredients market during the forecast period."

A variety of natural ingredients from around the world were incorporated to build complex and delicious flavor profiles in the next-gen plant-based sushi. These include miso paste made from chickpeas instead of soy, *tamari*, *wasabi* powder, turmeric, spirulina, and kale. These ingredients, including the DHA algal oil, not only contribute to the flavor of seafood alternatives but also provide a nutritional benefit, such as antioxidants and anti-inflammatory compounds. This is particularly important in plant-based products, where achieving the right balance of nutrients can be nearly as crucial as flavor.



While some plant-based meat analog companies are feeling pinched in the now-crowded field, others are getting a welcome boost by expanding into the food service arena. Credit: Before the Butcher, Inc.

The Chef's Touch

While food scientists play an essential role in the development of plant-based flavors, a chef's expertise is invaluable when it comes to creating animal-free products that truly taste like the real thing. A chef's palate is trained to identify the nuances of flavor in ways that a food scientist's might not be.

A food scientist can formulate the correct ingredient combination, but a chef knows how to build flavor layers that make a product come alive. That combination of culinary acumen and scientific precision in understanding how flavors interact lead to a holistic knowledge in achieving a final product that just "tastes right."

Protein Alternatives Market Report

The global protein alternatives market is estimated at USD15.7 billion...[and] is projected to grow at a CAGR of 9.9% to reach USD25.2 billion by 2029. The protein alternatives market has experienced rapid growth and diversification in recent years, driven by increasing consumer demand for sustainable, health-conscious, and ethically produced food options. Key drivers of this market include rising concerns over the environmental impact of traditional animal agriculture, health benefits associated with plant-based diets, and ethical considerations regarding animal welfare. Major segments within the protein alternatives market include plant-based proteins, insect-based proteins, and microbial proteins. *—by MarketsandMarkets, Inc.*

In drawing inspiration from traditional cuisines, while incorporating modern culinary techniques and innovative ingredients, analog developers can construct the perfect combination of the two disciplines to attain a premier product. More than that, they can stay true to the values and consumer demands of clean labels with natural, simple, non-GMO ingredients. With a growing focus on "clean" ingredients, sustainable practices, and innovative flavoring techniques, the future of plant-based food looks promising. **PF**

Yves Potvin, the godfather of plant-based meat and seafood, created the first mainstream soy hot dog and deli slices in the 1980s. In 2003, he founded Garden Protein International, Inc. offering game-changing analogs of beef, chicken, sausage, crab, and fish. Potvin is owner of Konscious Foods Canada, Inc., makers of sushi analogs that bring the fresh raw seafood experience to vegans and mainstream consumers fighting the global devastation of marine life. Konscious products, available in more than 6,000 retail outlets, contain ingredients that can help promote natural GLP-1 production. The company is currently open to investment in its next stage of progress. Connect with Yves at ypotvin@knscious.com.

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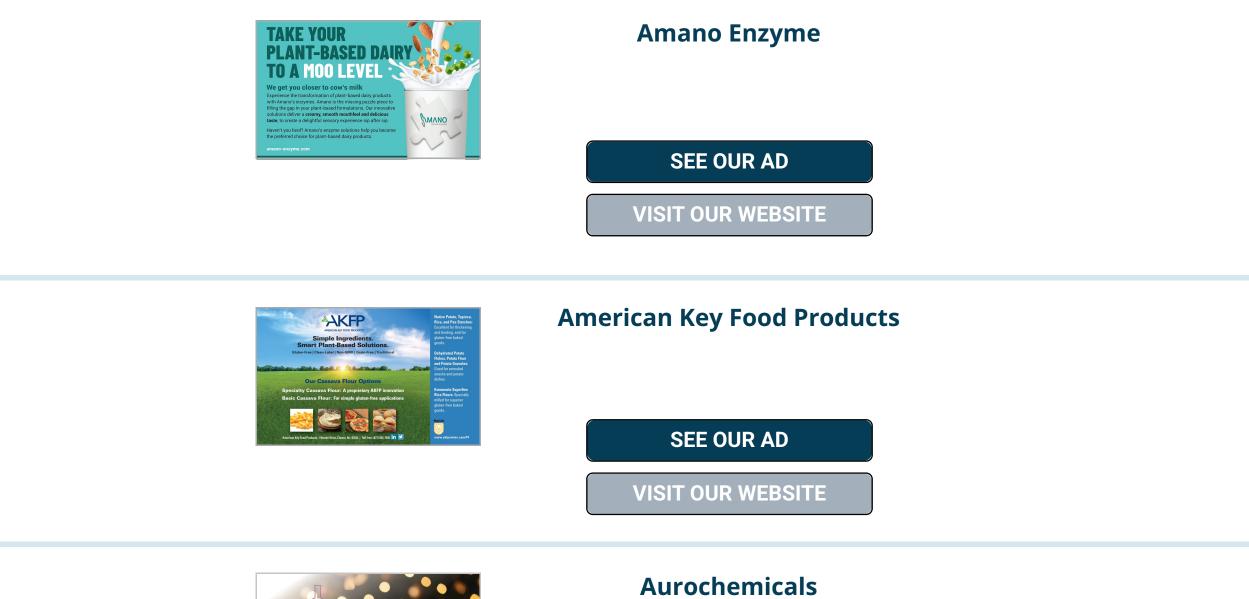
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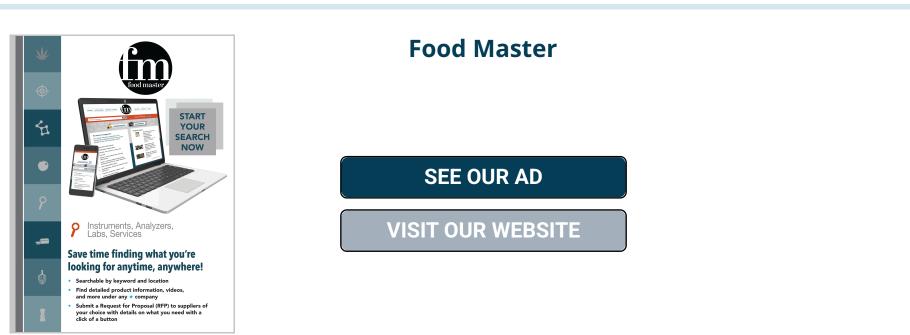


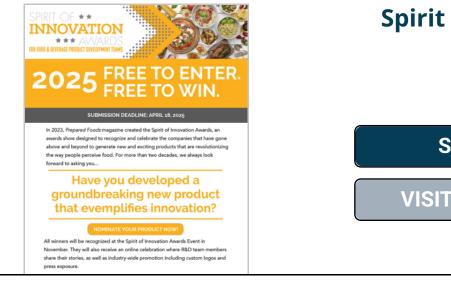






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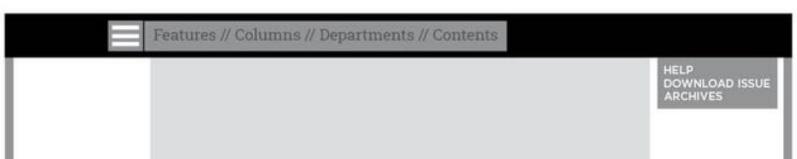
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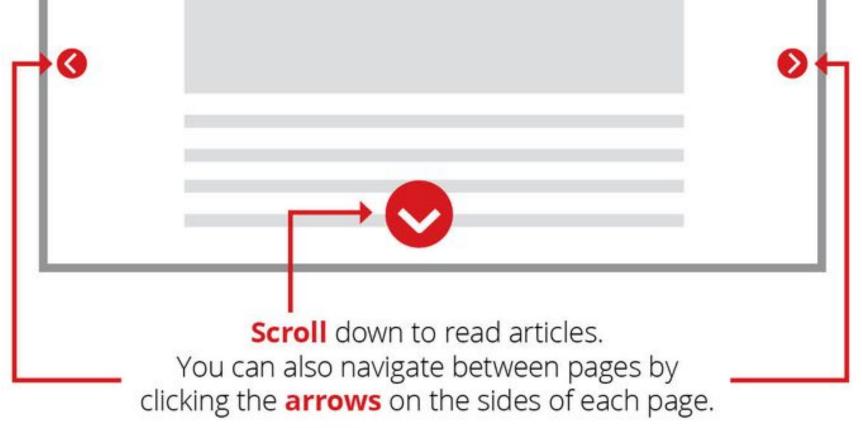


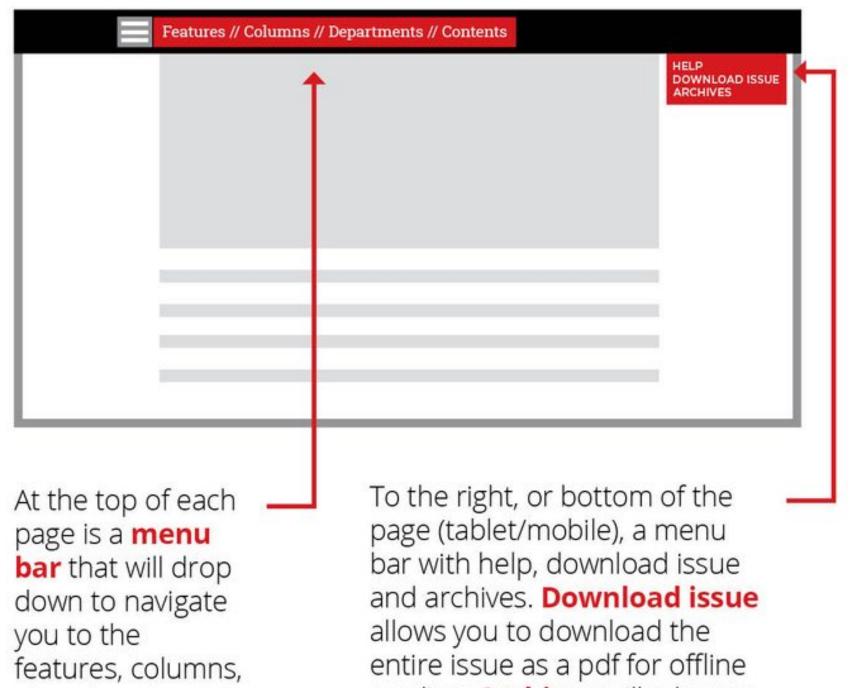


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