

# Enhancing new product innovation to meet demand

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Consumption and purchasing habits among today's consumers are evolving. For instance, brioche, as a category in the US, has been in growth consistently over the past three years. In 2018, the category was worth \$108 million, but by the end of 2020, the brioche sector had more than doubled, with category value standing at \$290 million, according to St. Pierre.

"There are myriad reasons why the market has shifted so dramatically but as category leader, St Pierre has really carved out a place in the bakery market, for brioche. An authentic, French product, we launched St Pierre into the US in 2014 and have steadily invested in building brand awareness, driving trial and loyalty. As a result, we now have a recognized brand worth more than \$100 million," says Paul Baker, founder of St Pierre Groupe, which owns the St Pierre Bakery brand.

In fact, Nielsen data (February 2021) shows that St Pierre is key to driving value for retailers. St Pierre has driven the brioche category with 63 percent brand growth year-on-year, while the rest of the category has grown at 61 percent, he shares.

Research shows that 34 percent of consumers are buying brioche every time they go grocery shopping, Baker shares, adding “what sets us apart is a unique brand story; we are an authentic brioche, we were first to market and our favored taste profile has secured us our place as category leader.

“The way people eat, the times they eat and the sense of occasion around each mealtime has changed this year. Most of us are very habitual in our choices, with an ‘at home’ menu that we recycle based on the day, the season and the guests around our tables,” explains “Covid has changed that because it altered our circumstances. It’s driven a huge shift in needs and behaviors when it comes to food. The opportunity for food companies is huge, but for the bakery sector, in particular, it’s phenomenal.”

As shoppers were asked to stay at home, new deciding factors came into play, he adds.

The first is a desire to reduce the frequency of shopping trips. Multi-pack formats that offer a solution for more than one meal are highly desirable. St Pierre’s research found that 43 percent of consumers consider brioche to be versatile, and more than a third agreed it suited every meal occasion. St Pierre has just announced distribution with Costco, where its Brioche Burger Buns will be sold in a 6-pack, twin-wrapped format, as part of catering to this trend.

The second is a desire to explore new flavors and upgrade in order to recreate restaurant quality at home. 40 percent of US shoppers are spending more on their regular food shop than pre-pandemic and 48 percent have actively looked to recreate restaurant dishes at home.

“With consumers looking to try something new and willing to put their hands in their pockets for quality that transports them to a favorite restaurant, or overseas holiday, retailers have a unique opportunity that can be delivered via St Pierre products in a way that no others can,” Baker says. “By highlighting authenticity, cross-selling with breakfast, brunch and snacking occasion products and clever merchandising to capitalize on shoppers’ desires to try new experiences in the only way they currently can, we are able to provide the tools for retailers to maximize sales and basket-spend.”

## Equipment innovations

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There are other important factors to examine in this discussion, including the vital role that bakery equipment plays in driving new product innovation for retail bakeries.

Megan Pettit, food machines marketing specialist, Hobart Food Equipment Group, points out that it is important that a bakery’s equipment gives them the flexibility to try new things and perfect them.

Hobart is offering VFDadvantage variable frequency drive technology on the new Legacy+® mixers it is releasing this summer. The technology gives bakers the ability to jog and pulse to get that “just right” finish to doughs and batters.

Another great feature on these mixers is the SmartTimer™. This timer was built for recipe creation. It allows the operator to count up, when building a new recipe to determine how long it needs to be mixed, and count down, for existing recipes since they know the appropriate mixing time. Additionally, this timer remembers the last time set for each speed of the mixer, so it's perfect when mixing multiple batches.

"Beyond that, it is important that equipment can keep up with product innovation. It may be appealing to purchase equipment that is lower in price, but this may not be a great idea in the long run. While a piece of equipment may be higher in price initially, oftentimes it will have more features that help with product innovation and will last longer," Pettit says.

It is crucial for kitchens to have a mixer that is versatile and can handle increased capacity for growing bakeries and for those bakeries reopening from the pandemic to a potentially higher volume of business, particularly takeout. The new Legacy+ maximum heavy-duty mixers have a PLUS System that provides as much as 30% more mixing capacity in the same size bowl, so bakers have more power to incorporate ingredients.

Food processors are also crucial to success. They help prepare the chocolates, nuts and other ingredients needed for bakeries today. Because bakers can process onsite with this equipment, it saves money and improves quality. They are processing in-house versus buying pre-prepped bulk.

Pettit says that some things to consider are whether you need a planetary or spiral mixer. Planetary mixers are more versatile and can be used in a variety of applications, like bread dough, cookie dough, icing, meringue and more. Spiral mixers are for more niche operations and are perfect for mixing dough for artisan bread and bagels.

Another aspect to consider is the batch size. Choosing a mixer that is too small or too large can have a bigger impact on quality than you think. It all has to do with the agitator-to-bowl ratio. If the mixer bowl is too big, the agitator will likely not be able to reach and incorporate all the ingredients. A mixer like the Legacy+ can help solve that issue by offering greater capacity in the same size bowl for a given model.

## Consumer attributes

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Attitudes toward food are also changing – as new audiences try new flavors – and there's also likely to be a shift in attitudes towards whether a functional food can be decadent at the same time, shares Baker at St. Pierre.

"Increasingly, there are more products which might once have been considered more 'luxurious' or 'decadent' appearing in the convenience sector. Consumers will no longer accept that the two are mutually exclusive. We're a generation of shoppers who know what they want and then want it immediately. There's no reason to compromise quality for convenience or vice versa anymore.

“That’s part of the reason I believe that premium brands should not shy away from being premium. When it comes to food and drink, consumers are more discerning with their spending. Times are hard, but if you’ve got to spend the money – which when it comes to food, you have – then you might as well buy premium. The reality is that shoppers will continue looking for ways to treat themselves well, at home, because the luxuries of dining out or travelling will be harder to achieve.”

Linked to the idea that food can be both functional and decadent is the idea that events over the past few years have driven accessibility of flavors, he adds. Millennials are more exploratory in their tastes and account for a huge proportion of the consumer food market. The idea that certain flavors or foods are “not for me” is fading – new flavors are easier to try, and consumers are driving the demand for weird, wonderful and whimsical combinations. The “foodie elitism” that we might have encountered a few years back is no longer a factor.

“St Pierre can attest to this. Brioche is now widely recognized as a way to elevate everyday meals – recreating restaurant quality at home,” Baker says. “It’s the number one brioche brand in America and has grown 63 per cent year on year. Lockdown added to the momentum – people not able to dine out, decided to embrace the ‘big night in’. That has benefitted the brand in a way that demonstrates that our products are suitable for new, previously untapped audiences.”

Multi-pack formats have become more popular due to the change in consumer behavior. People shopping less frequently, will opt for products that offer multiple uses, or that can be versatile in the purpose they serve. Savvy brands and producers will highlight versatility in their offering to make the most of the opportunity. St Pierre has been creating new recipes to inspire different ways to use brioche products for years, but this ‘education piece’ is more important than ever.

“Any developments to the St Pierre product range are always borne of consumer insight and driven by retailer demand. We have new packaging formats due to launch later in the year that perfectly demonstrates this combination of insight, but I can’t say much more on that just yet.”

## Holistic health

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John Powers, marketing director, Snacking and Baked Goods, ADM, explains that one of the most influential consumer trends is the interest in foods that support holistic health and well-being. In fact, almost 60% of consumers are seeking healthy and nutritious snacks, according to The Hartman Group, Snacking: Emerging, Evolving and Disrupted, October 2020.

For some, that means limiting sugar, salt, fat or other undesirable ingredients. As ADM Outside Voice<sup>SM</sup> research shows, eight out of 10 consumers are reducing their sugar intake, with 79% cutting back sugar in bars and snacks. Other consumers are focusing on what’s

included in a product, like the 69% of shoppers who say simple, recognizable ingredients influence their purchasing decisions.

Additionally, ADM research finds that 30% of consumers are willing to pay more for products that are made with higher quality, healthier ingredients. Above all, consumers want snacks that taste great.

“Consumers are reaching for snack bars packed with nutrient-dense ingredients that can sustain energy and help them feel fuller longer,” Powers explains. “Plant proteins are incredibly popular because they meet these consumer needs. Ancient grains, nuts and seeds also resonate. These wholesome ingredients provide taste and texture and give product developers flexible formulation opportunities.”

ADM is also seeing growing interest in ingredients that are a natural source of functional benefits like added protein and fiber. For instance, ADM offers quinoa, flax seeds, hemp hearts and hemp powders that deliver fiber, plant protein, omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. Berries and botanicals are often added to nutritional bars, both enhancing flavor and signaling immune function support through natural antioxidants. We can also incorporate other functional ingredients, like ADM’s Fibersol® line of dietary fiber ingredients that are easily formulated in baked snacks. Fibersol is better tolerated than other alternative fiber solutions, helping consumers feel full without concern for digestive discomfort. Plus, Fibersol can help reduce added sugars while maintaining great flavor.

Foods that support the microbiome are also gaining momentum as more consumers are aware of its connection to immune function, gut health, and overall wellness.

Nutritional bars can provide consumers with healthy snack and meal replacement options that taste great. Developers that emphasize simple, nutritious ingredients can position their bars with clean-label appeal. Trend-forward nutritional ingredients like plant proteins, ancient grains and pulses, functional ingredients that add a boost of fiber or vitamins, and sweetening solutions that replace sugar while rebalancing flavor and rebuilding functionality can all add value. At ADM, we help our customers test new concepts and get to market faster with our broad portfolio of ingredients and technical expertise.

“Bakeries can target health-conscious consumers with better-for-you bars that feature functional and wholesome ingredients, as well as health-signaling flavors like berry, citrus and mint,” Powers explains. “With extra fiber and plant protein, these bars have the fortification needed for convenient meal replacements. In addition to energy bars, brands are also developing bars with benefits for brain health or ingredients that are keto-forward. At the same time, consumers are looking to support emotional wellness through permissible indulgences. Developing bars with rich, dessert-like flavors like cookies and cream or chocolate peanut butter can deliver on this demand.”

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