

Supplier perspectives: Chip trends

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Consumers search for clean-label attributes within the chips category.



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While snacking is the new normal, sales of salty snacks in particular saw notable increases over the past few years. This sales boom has included potato chips, the top segment within salty snacks. For the 52 weeks ending April 17, 2022, according to IRI, Chicago, the potato chips segment grew 6.2% to \$8.9 billion, with most companies in the top 10 showing positive sales for the year (see “[State of the Industry 2022: Chips continue to reign supreme](#)” for more).

Alternative chips, such as extruded types developed with substrates nutritionally enriched with better-for-you ingredients like vegetables or pulses, are also trending forward. IRI categorizes these products with other extruded products in its “other salted snacks” category,

which grew 18.4% to \$6.6 billion over the past year (see “[State of the Industry 2022: Puffed and extruded snacks offer variety, healthy options](#)”).

In order to learn more about prevailing R&D trends in the expanding chip market, we reached out to John Powers, marketing director, snacking and baked goods, ADM, and Daniel Luna, processing solutions specialist, tna solutions, North America.

Douglas J. Peckenpaugh: What do you see as some of the top trends in the chips category?

John Powers: Consumers are increasingly focused on holistic well-being, including physical, mental, and emotional wellness. While snacking certainly fits the parameters for indulgence and enjoyment, it can also be an opportunity to get some extra nutrients. In fact, six in 10 consumers are seeking what they consider healthy and nutritious snacks—those with low fat, less sugar, and high in protein and fiber—at least weekly, according to The Hartman Group’s “Snacking: Emerging, evolving, and disrupted” report from October 2020. The chip category is in lockstep with this trend, with products like dehydrated potato, dried avocado, chickpea, lentils, baked kale, multigrain pita, and seed- and bean-based chips coming onto the market. These unconventional “better-for-you” options play well in the snack space, as many shoppers turn to snacks as a low-risk opportunity to experiment with new formats, textures and flavors. Additional formats like puffs and straws also drive interest, adding to the full sensory experience, which is important for consumer acceptance, from eye-catching colors to an audible crunch.

Besides novelty and nutrition, snack consumers are looking for quality with offerings that are fresh, simple in composition, minimally processed, free of artificial components, organic, or local, according to The Hartman Group report. Wholesome, close-to-nature plant-based ingredients, such as beans, pulses, nuts, and ancient grains are also in high demand. These clean-label attributes appeal to parents and conscientious consumers and should prominently feature on chip packs to stand out in the snack aisle.

Daniel Luna: Recently, we’ve witnessed the evolution of the “curious consumer,” or those interested in more-adventurous crisp varieties. And while traditional potato chips still dominate the space, there has been an increase in the popularity of pulse, vegetable, and bread chip varieties. Flavor combinations have also become more adventurous with novel assortments, including poutine and donair inspired by popular Canadian dishes, hitting the supermarket shelves.

Original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) must support brands to adapt accordingly, by offering solutions that enable them to react to these evolving trends. When it comes to seasoning, the freedom to adapt and exercise precise recipe control are essential factors to ensuring flexible and efficient operating practices. The latest on-machine seasoning solutions

include independent scarf feeders and separate tumble drums to accommodate alternative product varieties on a single production line. Meanwhile, seasoning systems that offer fast changeover times and minimal clean down requirements are vital to maximize efficiencies.

DJP: How can better-for-you chip producers attract new customers?

DL: Oil quality is hugely important when it comes to creating better-for-you products. The selection of a quality, high-stability frying oil can help minimize or remove *trans* fats entirely, as well as providing additional benefits, such as prolonged shelf life and superior taste. This translates to on-pack messaging and therefore supports a move away from processed foods containing high amounts of unhealthy fats.

Producers are also looking to new ingredients as a possible solution to improve the health credentials of chips. Recent recipe innovations have seen alternative ingredients including quinoa, lentils and whole seeds. Vegetable and even fruit chips, such as mango or apple, have also become more popular among consumers in recent years and there is a chance here for producers to re-energize consumers by adding these healthy twists to familiar favorites. Using flexible machinery capable of adapting to suit different raw materials is therefore crucial for manufacturers to stay on top of these ever-evolving trends.

DJP: What are some of the top flavor trends in chips today?

JP: The Hartman Group research shows 70% of consumers rank new and interesting flavors as important snack purchase criteria, and 58% of consumers prioritize global flavors when selecting snacks. Bolder flavors are currently trending, including spicy, smoky, and ethnic flavor profiles. Berbere and za'atar blends, Aleppo chili, smoked paprika, and gochujang bring strong notes to all varieties of chips. Smoky and sweet combinations are elevating the familiar sweet-salty approach, including smoked caramel, chocolate and maple. Zesty lemon crisps and fermented black lime-infused bean chips boast brightness and crunch. Additionally, honey is incredibly versatile, ranging from sweet hot honey to floral lavender honey to fruity pink peppercorn honey. For shoppers seeking comfort in the familiar, chip flavors such as Cheddar cheese, ranch, dill, and barbecue are classic and consistently in demand.

DL: Currently, firm favorites in North America appear to be “hot” flavors, as consumers attempt to replicate exciting culinary experiences they may have previously enjoyed on vacation. Of these, we’re seeing jalapeños, habanera and wasabi coming out on top time and again. In addition, some chip brands have started to introduce regional flavors that cater to the specific tastes of different geographical areas. For instance, in the U.S. we’ve seen a rise in demand for flavors, such as crab and lobster, alluding to popular dishes in Northeastern states, and Cajun seasoning in the Southern states.

DJP: How should the flavor strategy change when working on a better-for-you vs. a standard product?

DL: The increased demand for better-for-you products that contain lower salt and fat content is leading the industry to a more automated, recipe-driven approach. For instance, intelligent seasoning systems incorporating integrated controls and monitoring solutions can accurately monitor the quantities of salt or oil being applied. This ensures brands offer consumers a greater sense of transparency, while enhancing efficiencies. Digitally enabled systems also allow manufacturers the freedom to adapt recipes and follow the latest trends, flexibly switching between better-for-you and standard products. This is as simple as adding in a pre-set recipe at the beginning of each batch.

JP: With 51% of U.S. consumers believing healthier versions of chips don't taste as good as the originals, according to Mintel's "Potato & Tortilla Chips—U.S. Report" from 2019, snack brands have an opportunity to impress consumers with new "better-for-you" product launches. More intense flavors can help disguise bitter notes from plant proteins, for example, and compensate for lower sodium levels. Formulators need to watch out that chips too low in salt don't prevent the triggering of salivation, which may negatively affect the eating experience. Incorporating enough salt to meet functionality needs while also achieving sodium reduction targets is key. Low-sodium chips will pop with flavor if using spice blends like harissa, chipotle, or garam masala. Additionally, a holistic approach to formulation is key to winning with consumers. Using flavor modulation technology in salty and savory products can help with any loss of mouthfeel for reduced-fat chips or enhance the perception of saltiness. Using umami-rich flavor types may also add back a fuller taste to rebalance products that are "healthier" versions of the classics.

Recent Articles by Douglas Peckenpaugh

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