

# Dairy Foods Messaging: Emphasize the Simple, the Delicious and the Quality Protein

[berryondairy.blogspot.com/2019/09/dairy-foods-messaging-emphasize-simple.html](http://beyondairy.blogspot.com/2019/09/dairy-foods-messaging-emphasize-simple.html)

It was a busy week of conferences and expositions. Bakers were in Vegas while natural products people headed to Baltimore. A select group gathered in Chicago for Hartman Group's Food Culture Forecast 2019. There were many dairy processors and dairy ingredient suppliers in attendance. Great to visit with you in my hometown!

While plant-based innovation dominated the conversation at all events, it was the consumer element discussed at the Hartman Group conference that I cannot shake off.

Sarah Marion, director of syndicated research, explored the historical role of plants in the human diet—bread is one of the original plant-based foods—and the many definitions of plant based. Did you know that back in the day, women who made too much use of plants in the diet were deemed witches? Men who preferred plants to meat were considered weak, inferior?

While plant-based processed foods are not going away any time soon—think lentil pasta, pea protein smoothies and veggie burgers—Sarah did emphasize that today's consumers are smart. They are asking questions and reading labels. She fears that the term "plant based" is quickly being diluted much like "natural" and even at times, "organic."

I've said it before and I'll say it again. An organic sweet potato fried in extra virgin olive oil blessed by the pope and seasoned with sea salt from the Mediterranean is still a high-fat, high-sodium junk food with very little redeeming nutritional value. It's unnecessary calories in the diet. It's also a plant-based food.



Attendees explored many varied types of plant-based innovations in the marketplace with

Sara and Iva Naffziger, director-marketing research and strategic insights at Hartman Group, and discussed the limits of the positive halo of plants in products and what happens—or will happen as consumer awareness is raised—when overly processed, taste and price come into play. There was also a sampling of alternative animal proteins, namely crickets.

I brought up the topic of protein quality and essential amino acids, something currently largely ignored—or maybe the better term is avoided by marketers of these products—in the plant-based protein conversation. I also brought up that per capita consumption of “all dairy” and “all meat” continues to increase in the U.S., which the speakers confirmed. They explained that in many instances, plant-based foods are simply add-ons to the diet. Dairy and meat are not going away.

Food for thought: might we be entering another Snackwells crisis of the fat-free craze of the late 80s/early 90s? This is when the term fat-free provided permission to indulge, when consumers had a guilt-free conscience after finishing off a box of Snackwell’s Devil’s Food Cookie Cakes simply because they contained no fat. Just because it’s plant based does mean it’s a smart nutritional or caloric choice.

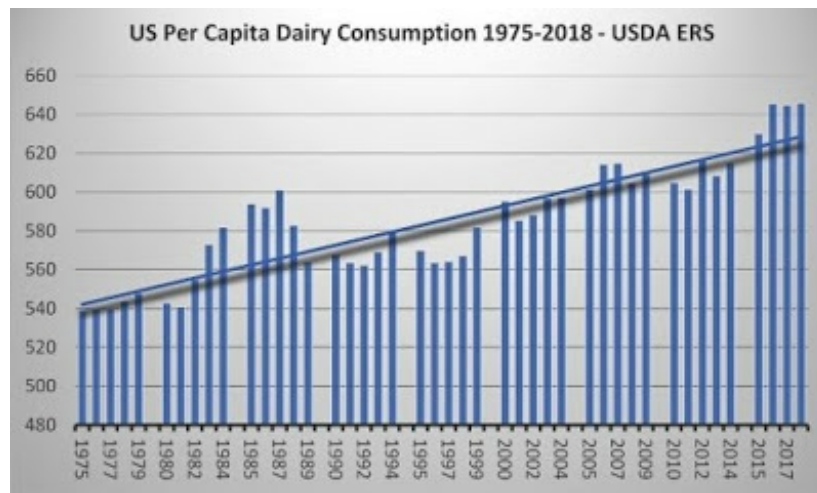
Photo source: McCormick

Shelley Balanko, senior vice president-business development at Hartman Group, summed up key take-away messages from the day. The number-one was that consumers continue to idealize fresh, less processed foods.

With that said, we are curious creatures. Today’s consumers like to play around with their diets. It’s important that food and beverage marketers satisfy their inquisitive tendencies, but...chicken and salmon were served at the lunch. Impossible Burger was cost prohibitive to include on the menu. The reception buffet included mini hot dogs with all the Chicago-style trimmings. That means no ketchup, but yes to celery salt and bright green relish. There were also mini deep-dish pizzas with lots of great real cheese, as well as a charcuterie and cheese tray. And I shared a giggle with a few over the question: how do you best enjoy your Impossible Burger? It’s with a slice of cheese and a strip of bacon.



Dairy foods messaging must emphasize the simple, the delicious and the quality protein.



Data from the Economic Research Service at the U.S. Department of Agriculture confirms that U.S. dairy consumption continues to grow. (See graph.) This is something that often goes unreported or is misreported. The fact is that dairy consumption, inclusive of milk, is growing in the U.S.

Cheese is a major contributor to this growth. Bacon is likely what keeps many consumers from going vegetarian. Cheese is what keeps vegetarians from being vegan. It's just too darn delicious, nutritious, simple, affordable and convenient.

Earlier this year, Hartman Group provided some customized research for Dairy Management Inc., on cheese and snacking. The report explained that while cheese holds a prominent place in quintessential American diets, the variety, processing and flavor of cheese available to consumers has dramatically expanded over the past 10 to 15 years. Americans have become sophisticated cheese consumers, and now look for a wide range of quality cues in cheese. However, there is a cultural attachment to classic "American cheese" and it remains a significant factor in how consumers balance taste, price and other priorities.

## Consumers look for fresh, less processed cues during cheese occasions, but also highly value easy, quick preparation and cleanup

- Cheese in the U.S. is both a commodity food and representative of interest in broader global flavors and traditions, so it makes sense that consumers seek out both convenience and flavor distinction during occasions that include it.

% Important	TOP NEED STATES FOR CHEESE OCCASIONS	Top 2 Specific Need States	% Important	Index to Total
63%	FRESH LESS PROCESSED When this is important, it's about...	Short ingredient list	51%*	114
		All/100% natural	47%	116
59%	QUICK AND EASY When this is important, it's about...	Few dishes to clean up	39%	137
		Not many steps needed to prep	34%	126
53%	FLAVOR DISTINCTION When this is important, it's about...	Regions/countries with distinctive food traditions	30%	161
		New/interesting flavors/spices/herbs	29%	147
51%	POSITIVE NUTRITION When this is important, it's about...	Protein	64%	121
		Fiber	41%	113
50%	MODERATION When this is important, it's about...	Total calories	46%	108
		Amount of sugar	35%	114
47%	SPENDING THE BARE MINIMUM			
43%	SPECTAL HEALTH BENEFIT When this is important, it's about...	Improving heart health	36%	107
		Lowering cholesterol	31%	112
43%	MADE FROM SCRATCH			
41%	ABSENCE OF NEGATIVES When this is important, it's about...	Sugar	42%	116
		High fructose corn syrup	37%	108
39%	ICONIC BRAND EXPERIENCE When this is important, it's about...	Brands I keep coming back to	48%	109
		Brands I loved as a kid	38%	119

\*For example, read as: 51% of cheese occasions that reflect a need for something "fresh and less processed" demonstrate an need for having a short ingredient list.

Source: Hartman Group/Dairy Management Inc.

The report suggests a number of avenues by which cheese products can continue and strengthen their relevance to consumers. This includes through products, packaging and messaging (Think high-quality protein!) that respond to today's consumer drivers for cheese consumption and are in-tune with modern food trends.

This includes being fresh, less processed. Consumers are looking more often for cheeses made with real, simple ingredients and those made without negatives such as growth hormones, antibiotics, fillers, added sugars and artificial ingredients. Dairy attributes indicative of higher quality include heritage cow breeds or cheeses from other types of animals, raw, aged, artisan craftsmanship, and local or regionally specific cheeses.

Combining cheese with other nutrient-dense foods in snack packs provides variety. Snackable slices and cubes offers convenience and even portability.

The fact is cheese is an inherently nutrient-dense product. Cheese can provide consumers with the healthy fats, protein and additional nutrients they desire. Remember, cheese it's what makes plants taste better!



**ON=THE=GO**



**SNACKERS**



**SNACK PACKS**



**PROTEIN PACKS**

