

Beyond meat protein

With consumers limiting meat intake, the use of protein fortification is growing

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Oatmeal and drink mixes have not always been common products consumers turn to for protein, but increasingly consumers are looking for an additional protein from sources other than meat.

Health benefits such as weight management and satiety are driving the trend, but consumers also often are looking to limit the amount of meat they consume.

Shannon Koski, account manager for the U.S. Dairy Export Council, said about one-third of U.S. consumers are reducing their meat consumption or already follow a diet that seeks to reduce meat consumption.

Ms. Koski said many challenges the industry faced 10 years ago with protein fortification recently have been overcome, such as the ability to use whey protein in a clear beverage. In the past it was difficult to keep a beverage clear after adding whey protein, but ingredient innovations have improved the task. She said dairy proteins have a mild flavor profile that does not overwhelm the product and may be masked if necessary.

When a company decides to fortify with protein, Ms. Koski said it first has to decide how much protein to include.

“We are seeing an increase in the desire of companies to go with protein levels that are targeted more for the mainstream consumer and are not quite as extreme,” Ms. Koski said.

She said 10 years ago bars appeared on the market with 40 grams of protein, but that protein level only appealed to a niche market. Today companies are going for a more mainstream approach to meet the needs of an everyday active person.

A manufacturer also must consider that the body processes different types of proteins differently, Ms. Koski said. Whey protein is a very fast-absorbing protein whereas casein is more slowly absorbed by the body. Therefore, Ms. Koski said if a company is making a recovery beverage, whey protein more likely will be used. A food or beverage developed for consumption before exercise more likely would use milk protein for more long-sustained benefits.

Products that use whey protein fortification include Special K Protein Shakes, Kellogg’s Special K20 Protein Water Mix Iced Tea, Crystal Light Hunger Satisfaction, True North Pistachio Crisps and Almond Cranberry Crisps, Wheaties Fuel Energy Bars, Quaker Weight Control oatmeal and Quaker True Delights instant oatmeal.

In terms of future innovation with dairy protein, Ms. Koski said ready-to-drink coffee may be an area of development.

Companies might choose a vegetable protein instead of an animal-based protein due to higher levels of cholesterol and incidents of allergies with animal-based proteins, said Harshal Kshirsagar, the product manager of Roquette's Nutralys vegetable protein. Nutralys may be used in baking, prepared meals, pastas, ready-to-drink beverages and more. Many sports nutrition brands use Nutralys.

"The biggest challenge is striking the right balance between achieving either a good source or excellent source of protein claim on your label while keeping the costs down and functional properties acceptable to the consumer," Mr. Kshirsagar said.

He said positioning of the product needs to be the first consideration of a manufacturer before fortification as well as the price point as both of these factors help determine what source of protein to use. He said in the future some proteins may be developed to have therapeutic properties such as the ability to help reduce blood sugar.

Tandoor Chef produces ethnic Indian products, and in order to ensure satisfying protein levels in their vegetarian products they use chickpeas, beans, soy and lentils.

"The biggest challenge frankly was texture," said Mike Ryan, vice-president of marketing for Tandoor Chef. "When you are enhancing something with soy, for example, you are potentially going to change the traditional texture someone would expect to have in a dish...you have to come up with a balance."

Mr. Ryan said experimentation was required to make sure the products maintained a texture still acceptable to consumers. He said the issue of taste alteration is easier to handle through the use of spices.

Mr. Ryan emphasized combining different sources of protein as several different amino acids make up protein and it may be difficult to find replacements for all in the same product.

Mr. Kshirsagar echoed this idea of using multiple sources of proteins, saying in the future he sees diversification with protein fortification as it's no longer enough to have just one protein source. As an example, he said it's a good practice to couple a slow-digesting protein with a fast-digesting protein.