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Diversifying the Plant-Based Portfolio

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Evolving from a niche fad into a full-fledged lifestyle for consumers, the plant-based portfolio has tremendously expanded in recent years to include a variety of everyday products for consumers to fit their daily needs.

This expansion has come on the back of the adoption of the flexitarian diet, which is a mostly vegetarian diet with occasional consumption of meat and fish. According to a plant-based consumer survey, 4 in 5 consumers globally adopted or are on the way to reducing meat consumption in their lives.

The rise in flexitarian diets has been driven by an increasing consumer focus on health, wellness, and the environment. Simultaneously, many governments have also been advocating for the plant-based movement due to climate change goals. A recent report found that in order to reduce carbon emissions and achieve the Paris Agreement goals, Asiaâ??s 10 biggest economies must diversify between 30% to 90% of their protein production to include alternatives by 2060.

Nevertheless, consumers are unlikely to purchase without proper consideration. In uncovering the primary drivers for flexitarians when purchasing meat and dairy alternatives, considerations include how natural the ingredients are, whether they help them take care of their bodies, and the variety they deliver to diets. It is not surprising that taste also emerged as a leading factor for repeat purchases.

Broadening the Plant-Based Toolbox

On the back of this widespread adoption, meat and fish alternatives have proven to be popular plant-based substitutes for consumers looking to diversify their diets. But while there is strong interest from Â manufacturers to add these alternatives to their portfolio, many companies are struggling to cope with scaling up their operations to meet mass consumption needs and remain competitive in the market. This is because speed is one of the most vital determinants to success, and food developers who optimise and streamline their R&D and production processes will stay ahead of the curve.

Furthermore, such substitutes must also align with consumer preferences for taste and texture. The good news is that recent advancements by ingredient manufacturers have enabled the plant-based market to evolve immensely, with alternatives having a similar taste and texture to original foods â?? a crucial factor for consumers, especially flexitarians, when selecting plant-based options. This is due to an increased focus on a productâ??s organoleptic profile (its taste, sight, smell, and touch), which is often about the combination of different plant-based ingredient solutions. Keeping this in mind, BENEO uses faba bean protein concentrates and flours, which are suitable for enriching foods such as baked goods, snacks and pasta with protein as well as texturising solutions for meat, fish and dairy alternatives. They can also be used as an alternative to eggs in plant-based baked goods as well.Â

With its portfolio of textured wheat protein (BeneoPro W-Tex) BENEO offers an ingredient which is especially ideal for use in meat analogue products. It contains at least 65% protein (on dry matter) and has a unique alveolar structure that allows for the development of a meat-like juicy texture. In addition to enabling the creation of meat-free products with a meaty texture and a granular, fibrous structure, BeneoPro W-Tex can be flavoured with a variety of tastes, herbs, and spices â?? making it a flexible meat substitute.

Additionally â?? with the acquisition of the Dutch company Meatless B.V. â?? BENEO now offers textured plant-based ingredients derived from different raw materials (i.e., rice, faba beans, wheat, pea, and quinoa). This range fully complements its ingredients portfolio and allows for exciting new combinations with regard to the development of meat and fish alternatives.

As more consumers look for ways to incorporate sustainability into their lives, the time is ripe for manufacturers to play a leading role in creating a more environmentally friendly and socially responsible food system while satisfying consumers â?? and especially flexitarians â?? sophisticated taste buds.