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Cleaning up labels

8/13/2014 - by Donna Berry

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Food professionals from around the world gathered in New Orleans for the Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) 2014 Annual Meeting + Food Expo this past June where suppliers showcased numerous innovations and technological breakthroughs designed to clean up and shape up retail packaged foods. Many ingredients displayed were designed for better-for-you formulating, as well as better for the environment and for all of mankind. All of this plays into the concept of clean-label formulating.

Defining clean label

With the definition of health and wellness broadening, the concept of clean-label formulating continues to grow in popularity among food formulators. They recognize today's consumers are increasingly interested in learning about the quality and nutritional value of food and are not shy about expressing concerns regarding what goes into the products they eat and drink. In fact, social media's expansive influence on the food industry has manufacturers revisiting many product formulations to better align with today's consumers' rants and raves. In the past year or so, food manufacturers learned that unrecognizable ingredients can invite criticism from online petitions and bloggers, with the threat of damaging publicity serious enough that many companies are reformulating top-selling products. This includes deli-style luncheon meats, in particular pre-packaged products where consumers have easy access to ingredient legends.

"We know families today want convenient foods that have no artificial preservatives and a simpler, more recognizable ingredient list, and Kraft is working to deliver more of these options for some of our most beloved brands," said Brian



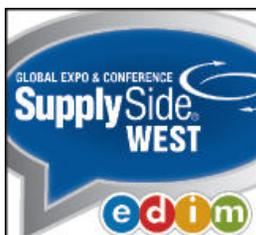
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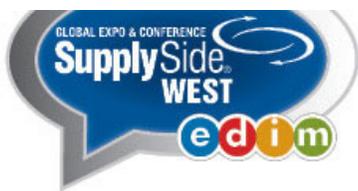
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Gelb, senior associate brand manager at Kraft Foods Group, Northfield, Ill., when the company announced earlier this year it would be removing all artificial ingredients from its Kraft American Singles process cheese.

“The clean-label ingredient space includes those products that are all-natural, certified organic and free from chemical additives,” said Aaron Edwards, director-global wholesome ingredients, Ingredion Inc., Westchester, Ill.

That space excludes ingredients recognized as being artificial by the food-manufacturing community, such as certain colors, flavors, preservatives and sweeteners, plus chemically modified or synthesized ingredients. Many formulators also rely on Whole Foods Market’s list of unacceptable ingredients to qualify or disqualify ingredients as clean label.

For some consumers, the clean-label space includes better-for-you levels of nutrients where excessive intake is associated with negative health implications. One such nutrient is sodium.

Sodium content tends to be a hot spot with deli-style meats. Salt and other sodium-containing ingredients have long been used as a form of preservation in deli-style meats, plus sodium also influences taste and texture. But too much sodium in the diet can cause high blood pressure.

Some suppliers offer proprietary sodium-reduction technology that leverages particle size and shape to optimize sodium content. Cargill Salt, Minneapolis, uses patent-pending compacting technology to combine and agglomerate potassium chloride with regular table salt or sea salt. The resulting particles are homogeneous, low in bulk density and highly soluble. The company has had success with up to a 50 percent sodium reduction in many different applications, including deli-style meats and bacon.

Nu-Tek Food Science, Minnetonka, Minn., offers an advanced formula potassium chloride sodium-reduction system that functions as a 1:1 replacement for traditional sodium chloride salt. It allows deli-style meat processors to reduce sodium levels by up to 50 percent while maintaining the taste and functional attributes of traditional sodium chloride salt.

Other suppliers address the reduction of sodium in ingredients other than salt. In applications that require strong water-holding capacity, it is possible to replace sodium phosphates with potassium phosphates. This approach can make a significant reduction in sodium while achieving excellent moisture retention, according to research by ICL Food Specialties, St. Louis, Mo.

Replacing ingredients

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Nitrates and nitrites are ingredients traditionally used to manufacture sausage-style deli meats, plus ham and bacon. They contribute flavor and color while preventing growth of *Clostridium botulinum*, the bacterium that causes botulism. They are also on Whole Foods Market's unacceptable ingredient list.

Clean-label alternatives to pure nitrates and nitrites are ingredients that are inherently concentrated sources of these compounds. Celery and spinach both contain nitrates. Celery juice, as a liquid or dried into a powder, specifically, has been shown to be effective in controlling bacterial growth. Because the US Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) defines an uncured product as one that has been preserved without the use of chemical agents, these products can be labeled "uncured," "no nitrites added" or "no nitrates added."

To control the growth of *Listeria monocytogenes*, manufacturers now can use specialty vinegar ingredients produced by the fermentation of corn sugar with specifically selected food cultures. These ingredients help keep labels clean by being declared simply as "vinegar."

L. monocytogenes readily grows at refrigerated temperatures and growth goes undetected, which is why deli-style meats are highly susceptible to contamination. Products most prone to contamination are cut-to-order meats purchased through the deli or in a hand-prepared sandwich, as these products are repeatedly exposed to microorganisms in the environment.

Corbion Purac, Lenexa, Kan., launched two new vinegar solutions to inhibit *Listeria* growth and extend shelf-life naturally at the IFT show. The new ingredients were developed to satisfy consumer demand for simpler ingredient statements while maintaining quality and safety in fresh and ready-to-eat meat products.

One ingredient provides a balanced flavor for taste-sensitive products, while the other is free of sodium and therefore ideal for products with a healthy positioning. The latter is also the lowest-use level liquid vinegar available on the market, making it a cost-effective solution for a variety of meat applications, said Simone Bouman, director of business development.

"More consumers are paying close attention to labels and looking for natural ingredients," she added. "Guaranteeing adequate shelf-life and safety for food can be particularly challenging for manufacturers who are seeking natural solutions."

Phosphates have historically been used in marinades to assist

with retaining the tenderness of products after thermal processing. For some consumers, phosphates don't make the clean-label cut.

Flavor systems that go into marinades or added directly or topically to deli-style meats are also under scrutiny. "When we develop flavor systems for deli-style meats, clean label usually means no monosodium glutamate [MSG], no hydrolyzed vegetable protein, no disodium inosinate and disodium guanylate [I+G], and no autolyzed yeast extract," said Dafne Diez de Medina, vice president of innovation, research and development, InnovaFlavors, Lombard, Ill.

Some herbs and spices can assist with extending shelf-life because of their ability to function as antioxidants. Rosemary extract is a concentrated source of carnosic acid, a potent antioxidant that slows the development of oxidative rancidity in raw and cooked meat. It can be dispersed in brine and injected into various meats or dispersed into a solution with other flavors and sprayed onto meats.

Green tea extract is another natural, plant-derived antioxidant. The dried ingredient contains as much as 40 percent of the antioxidants classified as catechins. It also contains an array of other chemicals with antioxidant activities.

Familiar ingredients are the future of food. Options exist to keep deli-style meat labels clean. Now might be the time to clean them up.

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