

Nutek Salt celebrates UK shift on potassium chloride

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04-Dec-2017 - Last updated on 04-Dec-2017 at 16:50 GMT

Potassium chloride can instantly cut sodium by 50% without affecting taste, and with the UK's government advisory committee now saying the benefits outweigh the risks, US supplier NuTek Salt has cause to celebrate. "The situation was overblown erroneously," says the firm's president.



Nutek salt can cut salt levels in cheese by around 30% and in bakery products by 50% with proteins falling in between depending on the protein source, with taste parity. For snacks, such as crisps, a 40% reduction is standard.

Unlike many other potassium chloride-based salt reduction ingredients, which can have a bitter aftertaste and need flavour masking agents to cover this – *"dirtying up the label"* in the process, said Nutek president and chief operating officer Brian Boor, the US-based supplier has a number of patents protecting its wet chemistry processing technology that removes the bitterness without affecting the sodium reduction capabilities.

SACN backs potassium chloride (KCl)

Nutek, which uses Barentz to distribute its products in Europe, already sells its potassium salt throughout Eastern and Western Europe but was at Food Ingredients Europe last week celebrating the beginning of a regulatory shift in the UK, which it believes will open up the entire UK market for its ingredient.



Brian Boor

The UK government has previously advised against potassium chloride as a sodium reduction tool because of the risk to sufferers of chronic kidney disease (CKD).

CKD patients in stage three to five are unable to manage potassium levels in the blood, putting them at risk of heart failure and death. This includes potassium that has been added to food fortified for health

reasons, potassium-chloride based sodium replacers, preservatives such as potassium sorbate or naturally occurring potassium in foods such as bananas, avocados and beans.

Last month, however, the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) and Committee on Toxicology (COT) **published a report concluding that**, at a population level, *"the potential benefits of using potassium-based sodium replacers to help reduce sodium in foods outweigh the potential risks. The beneficial effects at an individual level are likely to be small in size but will impact a large proportion of the population"*.

"The government should consider encouraging food companies to explore the use of potassium-based sodium replacers to help reduce sodium levels in foods," it added.

Boor told FoodNavigator the situation has until now been *"overblown erroneously"*.

Kidney patients in the first two to three stages of CKD could actually benefit from reduced sodium in food, he said, because it would help them lower their blood pressure, and help prevent them from reaching stages four and five.

Current EU labelling requirements for potassium are voluntary, and may be labelled on packaged food nutrition tables if it is present *"in significant amounts"*, with the nutrient reference value for potassium set at 2000 mg.

Food industry group FoodDrinkEurope has published **labelling guidelines** to aid manufacturers on the subject.

"The best way to help people with renal disease – as well as the 99.6% of the population who want to get more potassium – is putting it on the label," said Boor.

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) made potassium labelling mandatory on-pack, with the National Kidney Foundation one of the key campaigners to make it happen, and campaigners in the UK have launched similar **petitions to the government**.

Stealth reformulation 'loses an entire generation'

"We are going to put a great deal of time and effort into the UK market now that they've changed their stance."

"The UK policy has been to dumb down the salty taste in bread and change the nation's palate [as part of state-coordinated reformulated targets and then the Responsibility Deal], and my issue with that policy is that there is no major shift. Every two years manufacturers might take sodium down two or 3% but you use lose an entire generation of people.

"Instead, do a 40% reduction with salt replacement and maintain the same taste. You'll instantly get the huge health benefit of added potassium and lowered sodium, the consumer and manufacturer don't lose anything, and from there you can gradually lower the salty taste. Get the benefit now, not in 20 years."

Worth its salt

A white, crystalline, free-flowing powder, manufacturers can use NuTek salt the same way they do standard sodium chloride.

If a food maker wants to cut 2 kg of sodium chloride from a 10 kg recipe, it can simply replace this with 2 kg of potassium salt without affecting yields, shelf life or preservation.

Snack companies have shown most interest in using Nutek salt to cut sodium, Boor said, even though - in the US at least - this category contributes to around 15% of sodium intake in the diet compared to 40% from bakery and 35% from processed meat.

NuTek is more expensive than commodity-based potassium and around 12 times price of sodium but "*significantly cheaper*" than similar technology-driven potassium solutions, Boor said.

Given the small amounts needed, a 33% salt reduction in a product might work out at a cost-in-use of less than one tenth of a cent per serving.

Many people are potassium-deficient

According to official recommendations from the World Health Organisation (WHO), adults should consume less than 2000 mg of sodium and at least 3510 mg of potassium per day.

In many countries, however, populations are well off these targets. A [16,000-strong four-nation survey](#) published last year found only 0.5% of people in Mexico, France the US and UK, meet guidelines at best.

However, the authors of the same study also said that reformulation or fortification was not suitable for increasing potassium intake and people should instead try to eat more potassium-rich sources such as beans, dark green vegetables, dried fruit and fish.

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