

The free-from future of food and meat production

In the US alone, 3.1 million people follow a gluten-free diet. 72% of these are classified as PWAGs – people without coeliac disease avoiding gluten. Whether avoiding a certain food type is due to an allergy, or a preference, retailers around the world are embracing the growing free-from culture.

by Miguel Campos,
Export Sales Manager,
Advanta, Cannock, UK.
www.advantapack.com



According to food packaging supplier, Advanta, the future is free-from.

Across the pond, Britain's shopping baskets are also containing more free-from products. In fact, Brits are dodging dairy, gluten and grains at a growing rate, having spent an extra £230m on free-from food and drink in the past year. The dietary landscape is morphing quickly, due to intolerances and allergies, doctors' orders and personal preferences.

Free-from aisles tend to focus on gluten-free, wheat-free and dairy-free, yet if you wander further afield in the supermarket, you will spot many more examples of products appealing to different nuances.

So, which of these growing dietary trends should food manufacturers keep an eye on?

Non-GMO

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) refer to any living thing that has had its DNA altered using genetic engineering. Currently, the US accounts for about two-thirds of all the GM crops planted on Earth. While there is no real evidence to suggest GMO food is harmful, former President Obama signed Bill 764 in 2016 creating a new federal standard in the USA with regards to GMO labelling. This means all packaging sold in the US will need to have proper labelling to highlight GMO contents clearly.

Organic produce

Organic 3.0 is the name given to the most recent organic movement. The document sets the new standards for the organic food

industry up to 2028 and is all about making organic produce mainstream. Demand for organic food is at its highest for more than a decade, according to industry leaders.

Andrew Monk, CEO of Australian Organic, which owns Australia's largest organic certifying group, says demand is still outstripping supply in many sectors.

Palm oil free

Avoiding palm oil is less about what consumers are putting in their body, and more about the environment and deforestation.

Iceland was the first major UK supermarket to remove palm oil from all its own-brand foods, but what does this mean for the future? Perhaps more retailers will follow suit. Maybe we will see more product labels boasting a lack of palm oil to attract the conscious consumer.

Vegan

Australia is now the third-fastest growing vegan market in the world, after the United Arab Emirates and China. In fact, the vegan food market value down under is set to reach \$215 million this year. Popularity is highest among young people, particularly millennials – the world's largest generation.

However, it is not just vegans that are buying vegan-labelled food these days, it is also the people who aim to eat a mainly plant-based diet. The flexitarians, flexi-vegans and pescatarians also want an

occasional piece of the vegan pie, in Australia and around the world.

Low sodium

We have long understood the havoc that sodium can wreak on our bodies and reduced salt products are continuing to rise. This trend is less of a free-from, and more of a kind-of-free-from, but it does address the growing concerns of consumers with regards to health. In fact, REWE, a German chain of 15,000 supermarkets, launched a programme to reduce the amount of salt and sugar in its own brand products.

South Africa has been a trailblazer in the global battle to reduce salt intake, with new legislation that limits salt in processed food.

A handful of countries have opted for this mandatory legislation, including Portugal, Belgium, Finland, Greece, Argentina and Paraguay. It means more food developers will need to create meals that are preserved effectively, but require less salt.

Conclusion

Wherever you are in the world, consumers are more conscious about what they eat, and will no longer claim ignorance on what they are ingesting. From organic-only, to PWAGs and flexitarians, the trend is less about categorising people, but about providing the necessary product options for everyone. The future is not about labelling diets, but about labelling products with the right information to cater for these diets. ■