

# INGREDIENTS REPORT



***In spite of the “better-for-you” movement, the market for salty snacks is flourishing. Candy & Snack TODAY delves into the reasons consumers crave them — and reach for more.***

## Seasoning Strategies Build Loyalty

CONSUMER SNACKING, whether between or in lieu of meals, is on the rise, and salty-savory snacks dominate the field, according to research by FONA International, Inc., which reports sales of chips, nuts, popcorn and dips reached \$21.8 billion in 2013. While more than 55 percent of consumers buy salty snacks as treats, an equal number concede they should be eaten in moderation.

Jean Gallagher, FONA solutions manager, grain, says: “If you have the right balance and intensity of flavors, it will entice you to want more.” Saltiness helps achieve that objective because it plays a key role in how flavors bloom and balances the taste profile, whether savory or sweet-salty, adds Gallagher’s colleague Sharon Van Horn, scientist, grain.

The preference for salty snacks has a great deal to do with how well sensory cues align with what the consumer anticipates, according to Blue Pacific Flavors Inc. CEO Donald Wilkes. He explains that the eating experience is multi-sensory — all five senses are involved — and the interaction needs to match consumers’ expectations. For example, he says: “Too little salt will be as disappointing as too much. If the flavor is crisp bacon, the level of aroma released should be in tune with that of real breakfast bacon.”

Wilkes tells **Candy & Snack TODAY** that when there is a disconnect between the flavor and the type of food, such as bacon-flavored ice cream, consumers will likely be turned off because the reference points, ice cream and bacon, don’t fit together. He notes the growing trend toward food with less salt, sugar and fat is challenging ingredient manufacturers to develop alternatives that overcome the disparity between the sensory cues and the ingredient performance in recipes.

### DEFINING THE LIMITS OF FLAVOR

“People want the crunch and the salt,” Polly Barrett, Kalsec, Inc. director of applied research and development, explains, adding that while consumers are more adventurous about flavors,

they’re also not abandoning familiar favorites.

Noting flavor is the number-one driver for snacks, Kelli Heinz, director of marketing & industry affairs at Bell Flavors & Fragrances, Inc., tells **Candy & Snack TODAY** that snacking allows consumers to experiment with flavor profiles more cost-effectively than in restaurants or when cooking at home. As a rule, she says, flavor preferences follow the economy. “When it’s bad, people prefer home-based, nostalgic flavors; when it’s good, they’re willing to experiment.”

Known for their adventurous palates, millennial consumers’ habit of snacking throughout the day opens opportunities for functional and healthy snacks that offer satiety, Heinz says, and suggests flavor will fill two roles in this new world of snacks: offering a unique take on traditional items and making healthful products taste good.

Jill McTeague, Kalsec market development manager, observes: “In general, snack flavors are bolder, bigger, ethnic and more complex than other foods. They’re multidimensional. Snacks are where consumers look for flavor innovation.” For example, she says, lemon crackers are one-dimensional: not very interesting. Lemon-horseradish crackers, on the other hand, have complexity; they intrigue consumers and prompt trial.

But she cautions, the zeal to present consumers with a unique flavor experience can go too far, so she advises pairing a familiar flavor with something unexpected. Further, McTeague notes cultural differences shape flavor preferences, and flavors have to be authentic to connect with consumers: “Many people have grown up with a flavor, and they know how it should taste.”

Bell Flavors Corporate Executive Chef Christopher Warsow explains that while spicy-hot foods are popular in Texas and the South, the level of tolerance is very different in the Midwest and New England: “It explains why regional manufacturers do well, and why some

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