

# INGREDIENTS REPORT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 34

flavors don't translate well on a larger scale."

In addition to ethnic and regional preferences, the pervasiveness of celebrity chefs, food trucks, cooking shows and the "foodie" culture is a powerful influence on consumers' palates. "There's a whole progression of how flavors move through consumers' awareness and acceptance, from independent restaurants to regular and quick-service to fast casual, and there's a lag between restaurants and packaged foods," McTeague explains. "Food trucks and shows make trying new flavors low risk for consumers."

Warsow cites the craze for sriracha, which was introduced by Korean taco trucks and spread through social media.

Jasmine Hodari, vice-president of marketing at Paramount Farms, says the company's consumer insights team constantly tracks shopping habits and taste preferences, and sweet chili and salt-and-pepper turned up as significant consumer trends. "Sweet-and-spicy has been popping up all over the food industry, ranging from chips to fast food items," she says.

"We meet regularly with our retail partners to learn which items resonate with shoppers and understand store-level needs. We also collaborate with our in-house social and digital media teams to engage with consumers and receive feedback on products," Hodari notes.

Will some flavors plateau? Bell's Heinz responds: "I don't know that there is a point when a flavor stops being interesting."

One strategy for piquing consumers'

attention is layered flavors. "A lot of flavor trends are predictable, but layers add different, unexpected interest," Gallagher says, adding FONA conducts sensory testing to find the balance of oils and seasonings that entice consumers to want more and to share the item.

In addition, Warsow, of Bell, says, the composition of the matrix, the texture and density of the substrate and the amount of salt and sugar contribute to the way flavor displays in the mouth. Baked, puffed and delicate bases work best with light, bright flavors, whereas kettle chips and similarly dense, textured bases can carry more powerful seasonings.

Further, whether the seasoning is in the dough or applied to the surface affects how and when flavor and heat are perceived: beef jerky and pretzels deliver flavor through the substrate, while popcorn and nuts are externally seasoned.

Barrett, of Kalsec, adds: "You have to account for the product's flavor profile when you're formulating seasonings. Potatoes are fair game; they're a neutral matrix, so you can go the full spectrum. With flax and whole wheat, there's a strong, predominant grain profile, and that takes more work to get a good balance between the seasoning and the matrix."

Serving size also influences the eating experience, Warsow claims. A small portion has to offer more flavor to elicit the same sensory impact as a larger amount, he notes.

Wilkes, of Blue Pacific, warns too much flavor can impart a chemical or inauthentic taste, while too little can be unappealing. "One of the difficulties in formulating is understanding consumer preferences based on their ability to taste," he says. "It can be a challenge to develop an ideal flavor or salt level when you have a wide range of consumers."

FONA research indicates salty snack devotees eat the products more frequently than other types of consumers and they tend to select quick, easy, value-priced items that can be shared. Thus, items made with expensive formulations and processes could remain on shelves as less pricey options move.

According to Wilkes, vegetable oil is commonly used for frying because it has minimal aroma and is cost-effective. Other common oils, such as sunflower, have similar composition so the stickiness required for plating seasoning is comparable. "In general, fat drives preference, and while snack companies try to reduce the fat level to make a healthier snack, the eating experience could suffer," he notes.

## EQUIPMENT PLAYS A KEY ROLE

Of as much importance in the snack experience as seasoning blends, matrices, oils and cooking



*'In general, snack flavors are bolder, bigger, ethnic and more complex than other foods. Snacks are where consumers look for flavor innovation.'*

**JILL McTEAGUE**  
Kalsec, Inc.

## TOP SALTY SNACK FLAVORS

Candy & Snack TODAY polled leading flavor houses about the top five seasoning profiles of salty snacks. Although the ranking differs among the experts, it's clear that savory seasonings carry the day among U.S. consumers.

### TOP FIVE SALTY SNACK FLAVOR TRENDS

FONA International, Inc.	Kalsec, Inc.	Bell Flavors & Fragrances, Inc.	Blue Pacific Flavors
Cheddar Cheese	Plain	Sriracha	Cheddar Cheese
Sea Salt	Salt	Regional Mexican	Barbecue
Cheese	Spicy	New types of chilies	Bacon
Barbecue	Cheese	Chili Con Queso (with ghost and scorpion chilies)	Sour Cream
Butter	Chocolate	Sweet-savory combinations and heat	Garlic, Onion, Jalapeño