Whether it’s low-sugar, reduced sodium or less fat, the idea of reductionism in the grocery space is nothing new. But over the last few years, brands have been using increasingly innovative techniques, ingredients, and flavor additions to ensure that these products are just as tasty and satisfying as their counterparts. From new types of sweeteners to utilizing cooking techniques and flavor additions to enhance taste, here’s how to make sure that “reductionism” doesn’t include reduction in flavor.

The top 5 consumer responses to the question “Are you actively limiting the following ingredients in your diet?” included: sugar (48%), fat/oil (46%), salt/sodium (35%), artificial sweeteners (28%) and artificial sweeteners (27%).

- INNOVA MARKET INSIGHTS

~ 9,000 PRODUCT INTRODUCTIONS WITH LOW/NO/REDUCED AND RELATED CLAIMS have been introduced in North America in the past 3 years.

- MINTEL GNPD

Source: Innova Market Insights, Mintel GNPD
Calorie counting remains a popular method for losing weight for many consumers, and low/reduced calorie foods are one way of cutting down. In fact, the global low-calorie food market size is predicted to reach 21.47 billion by the year 2031 at an 7.02% CAGR during the forecast period from 2023-2031 according to Insight Ace Analytics. But weight loss isn’t necessarily the only benefit — one 2023 Columbia University study found that calorie restriction in adults led to a “2-3 percent slowing in the pace of aging, which in other studies translates to a 10-15 percent reduction in mortality risk.”

As some consumers lean into this interest in reductionism, low and no calorie product introductions have been popping up in the food and beverage space, but regardless of health benefit, taste is key to product success. While some of these alternatives may cause taste challenges in production, flavor can be leveraged as a way to keep taste at the forefront.

MAXIMIZE FLAVOR, MINIMIZE CALORIES

Keeping things low-cal shouldn’t mean giving up on flavor. For developers, use of flavor additions can add a unique complexity to products, combatting challenges that may arise with low/reduced alternatives. In addition, cooking techniques such as grilling or roasting ingredients can provide a more intense, concentrated taste.

PRODUCTS OF NOTE

SEAFIRE ROASTED SEAWEED SANDWICH WITH BROWN RICE AND SESAME is an ultra-premium, low calorie snack that incorporates brown rice crisps and golden sesame seeds, sandwiched between delicately roasted seaweed pieces.

30% of consumers responded that they likely or definitely would buy this product.

BLUE PLATE LIGHT MAYONNAISE WITH OLIVE OIL has the same rich flavor and creamy texture of Blue Plate with the added benefits of olive oil and only half the calories and fat.

48% of consumers responded that they likely or definitely would buy this product.

Source: Grand View Research; FDA; Public Health; Mintel GNPD
Fat Reduction: Finding Alternatives

Despite its bad rap in some circles, fat is necessary for a healthy diet. And not all fat is created equal: there are two main kinds of fats that you’ll find in food. Saturated fat, which is found in ingredients like butter or beef, is the “bad” kind, while unsaturated fats like those found in avocado, olive oil or nuts, are a healthier, “good” kind. But even for good fats, they should make up a relatively small portion of your diet, which is why many consumers are turning to low fat alternatives, such as carbohydrate-based fat replacers, to keep their fat consumption in check.

But with lower fat, often comes taste challenges. By incorporating flavor or utilizing flavor technologies, developers can work to mitigate texture, taste, and mouthfeel challenges that may come with loss of fat content, while still providing a low fat alternative for consumers.

_Health-conscious Americans are always looking for ways to keep fat out of their diets: ~ 96 million Americans used low-fat/fat-free products in 2020._

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**HEALTHY FAT, FULL FLAVOR**

For an extra-flavorful punch, healthy fats like olive oil can be infused with herbs, spices or other ingredients to make dishes delicious while keeping saturated fat low and maintaining texture. For product developers, working with your flavor partner to add complementary flavors to your next product innovation can also help to meet your consumers’ taste expectations.

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**PRODUCTS OF NOTE**

**SIMPLE TRUTH ORGANIC ORIGINAL POWDERED PEANUT BUTTER** is organically grown with no preservatives and 6g protein per serving. It has 90% less fat and 73% fewer calories than traditional peanut butter.

**WILLIAMS SONOMA MEYER LEMON INFUSED OLIVE OIL** is a bright blend of California extra-virgin olive oil and Meyer lemon for dipping, drizzling and more.

20% of consumers responded that they likely or definitely would buy this product.

Source: Statista; PR Newswire; Factrr; Mintel GNPD
Sodium Reduction: Taming the Salt

While Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends that adults consume less than 2,300 mg of sodium per day — roughly one teaspoon of table salt — Americans eat an average of 3,400 mg per day, and more than 70% of that comes from prepackaged foods. With high-sodium diets putting consumers at risk for high blood pressure and heart disease, it’s no wonder that brands are increasingly offering low/no/reduced sodium options — the claim grew 5% between 2018-2022.

As salt is an important factor for taste, the development of salt substitutes that mimic the flavor of the real thing is a booming business right now. Options like potassium chloride, amino acids, and hydrolyzed vegetable protein all offer some of the same taste benefits as salt without the sodium. According to Mordor Intelligence, the Salt Substitutes Market is projected to register a CAGR of 6.71% over the next five years. While there is opportunity in this space, the reduction of salt in development can come with its challenges to be aware of such as increased bitterness and lower flavor impact.

PRODUCTS OF NOTE

**PLANTSTRONG ORGANIC SPICY CAJUN JAMBALAYA STEW** is 100% plant-based and free from added sugar, oil, processed oils, refined sugar, excessive sodium, and GMOs. It is lightly salted, with 60% less sodium than a leading competitor.

42% of consumers responded that they likely or definitely would buy this product.

**MCCORMICK BY TABITHA BROWN SUNSHINE ALL PURPOSE SEASONING** is free from salt and features garlic, ginger, pineapple and mango. It’s great on veggies, fruit and more.

47% of consumers responded that they likely or definitely would buy this product.

**BOOST FLAVOR, NOT SALT**

Give your low-salt cooking depth without increasing sodium by using umami-rich ingredients like mushrooms, tomato paste or seaweed. Complementary flavors can be added to increase the complexity in formulation without adding additional sodium.

Source: FDA; Innova; Mordor Intelligence; Mintel GNPD
While 77% of Americans are trying to limit sugar in their diets, it’s not always a success: the American Heart Association reports that “American adults consume an average of 17 teaspoons of added sugar every day, more than 2-3 times the recommended amount for men and women respectively.” And the effects of high-sugar diets aren’t trivial — it can cause weight gain, diabetes, fatty liver disease and other ailments. The main culprit? Beverages, which account for 47% of all added sugars. Because of this, the sugar substitute market has been surging in beverages and food segments alike, with a projected CAGR of 5.6% between 2022 and 2032.

PRODUCTS OF NOTE

**Q SPECTACULAR TONIC** is crisp, highly carbonated, and dry, made with agave and quinine. Less sweet means that less sugar is used than the big guys (at least 47% less than the leading brands.)

33% of consumers responded that they likely or definitely would buy this product.

**ST. AMOUR ROCKS N' ROLLS ORANGE CHOCOLATE CHIP FRENCH MUNCHING COOKIE BITES** are made from Aunt Helène’s recipe and are low in sugar and fat, as well as cholesterol- and dairy-free.

STAY SWEET WITH LESS SUGAR

When choosing a sugar substitute, taste considerations are key. Utilizing naturally sweet ingredients like dates or apple puree can increase sweetness without adding refined sugar, but should be paired with complementary flavors in order to taste their best. Manufactured sweeteners, like sugar alcohols or sucralose, are significantly sweeter than natural sugar and need to be carefully balanced to avoid an overly sweet or artificial taste.

Source: Heart.org; Health.Harvard.edu; Future Market Insights; Mintel GNPD
Reductionism is an important part of making healthier food and beverage options, but that doesn’t mean that you have to sacrifice taste. Brands can utilize multiple methods of keeping flavor front of mind, from cooking technique to selecting umami-rich ingredients, to infusing big, bold tastes through complementary flavor profiles into their products. No matter what the challenge, whether lingering bitterness, funky off-notes, or unpleasant mouthfeel, your flavor supplier can provide guidance for challenges that come with these reduced alternatives. Help consumers find a balance between “tastes good” and “good for you,” and you’ll have the key to their hearts — and their fridges.

THE TAKEAWAYS

YOU DESERVE MORE. LET’S GET STARTED.

What does true partnership look like? You deserve a flavor partner ready to turn these trends into the tangible.

Let McCormick Flavor Solutions market insight and research experts get to work for you. Translate these trends into bold new ideas for your brand. Increase market share and get to your “what’s next.” Our technical flavor, seasoning and product development experts are also at your service to help meet the labeling and flavor profile needs for your products to capitalize on this consumer trend.

From concept to manufacturing, we’re here for you — every step of the way.
Contact your sales representative or chat us up at www.mccormickflavor.com/en-us/contact-us

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- Grand View Research
- NCBI
- Harvard Health
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