

PRESS RELEASE

Industry faces UPF challenge – and a ‘real food’ opportunity

Consumers’ expectations that convenient, packaged foods should be simpler and less processed are set to become more important over the rest of this decade, predicts food industry expert Julian Mellentin.

He says there’s growing evidence that consumers are increasingly shunning ultra-processed foods (UPFs) and looking for more ‘real foods’. In a recent survey of consumers¹ by *New Nutrition Business*, of which Mellentin is director, 20% of Americans and 40% of Spanish consumers said they were trying to avoid UPFs², the highest numbers since the consultancy began asking this question.

“The growing consumer interest in ‘less processed’ has grown out of the clean label trend of identifying something undesirable in our food and avoiding it,” says Mellentin. “What’s different is that we are entering a new phase. Brands will have to do more to reinvent “ultra-processed foods” and to deliver products that get closer to consumers’ expectations of ‘real food’.”

Avoiding UPFs means, to a growing number of consumers, choosing fresh and natural foods. When the International Food Information Council (IFIC) asked Americans about the most common attributes of a healthy food, the top answer, given by 37% of people, was ‘fresh’, while 20% of consumers said ‘minimal or no processing’³.

“The opportunity over the next 3-5 years is for packaged food companies – gradually, step-by-step – to renovate products,” says Mellentin. “That will require a focus on ingredients and processing technology which deliver the safety, convenience and palatability people seek while doing so with as little processing as possible – or at least with a type of processing that people accept.”

“Ingredient suppliers have an important role to play in enabling this change, just as they have through the last 20 years of changing consumer preferences about clean label and free-from,” he adds.

Companies do not need to renovate their entire product line, says Mellentin: “A significant percentage of mainstream consumers want to continue enjoying their favourite foods just as they are. The result may be that companies will have some products within their portfolio that meet consumer expectations for less processed and real food – just as today they have free-from or gluten-free lines in their portfolio.”

In his recent report, *10 Key Trends in Food, Nutrition & Health 2023*⁴, Mellentin notes that there are many companies for whom ‘simply processed’ and ‘real’ are already part of strategy:

Yoplait’s French-inspired **Oui by Yoplait** yoghurt, marketed in the US, communicates simple ingredients and artisanal-style packaging and production. It was the first product of its kind from General Mills, the world’s 10th-biggest food company. The simplicity of the production process is explained to consumers. Oui achieved over \$100 million in Year 1 retail sales with 3 SKUs and has since been expanded to 26 SKUs.

Danone is responding to the trend in Spain, where it may be the most advanced. An amazing 40% of Spanish people claim to be avoiding UPFs – the highest number in Europe. The desire to avoid UPFs is partly cultural, but it also owes something to Carlos Rios, a Spanish blogger and nutrition guru with 1.5 million followers on Instagram. He is the creator of **Realfooding**, a movement which encourages people to avoid UPFs. Danone has become the first major food company to engage with the Realfooding project. One of Danone’s natural drinking yoghurts, with just 4 ingredients, now carries the Realfooding endorsement.

Technology has an important role to perform in enabling packaged products to deliver on consumer expectations. US-based plant milk marketer **Elmhurst** has developed a technology called HydroRelease, which enables it to create a two-ingredient, nutritionally-dense plant milk which delivers on consumer expectations of simple processing and few ingredients, in marked contrast to most plant milks on the market.

NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. New Nutrition Business 5-country Survey 2022. Available January 2023.
2. **There is no one agreed definition of UPF** and no scientific, legal or regulatory definition. However, university researchers and the media mostly use a definition of UPF which originated with researchers at Sao Paulo University in Brazil. They created the NOVA system, which classifies foods into four categories. The UPF category is used to describe foods:
 - a. “With little to no whole foods”
 - b. “Use many ingredients including food additives that improve palatability, processed raw materials and ingredients that are not used in home kitchens such as protein isolate, flavours, colours, emulsifiers...”
 - c. “Processing involves multiple steps – examples: packaged snacks, cookies, ready-to-eat meals, candy, soft drinks.”

“**Real food**”, on the other hand, is defined in the minds of consumers, not by university researchers or regulation. Broadly it means fewer ingredients, simpler ingredients, less processed.

3. International Food Information Council (IFIC), 2022 Food & Health Survey.
4. *10 Key Trends in Food, Nutrition & Health 2023* is available here: <https://www.new-nutrition.com/keytrend?id=261>
5. Editors can request comment or arrange an interview with Julian Mellentin by contacting:
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6. Julian Mellentin is a consultant specialising in the international business of food, nutrition and health. He is director of New Nutrition Business, which provides expert consultancy services to agriculture, ingredient and branded product companies on all aspects of nutrition and health, from science to retail strategy, focusing on concrete, implementable strategies. *New Nutrition Business* publications provide case studies and analysis of success and failure in the global nutrition business and are used by companies in 42 countries. Find out more at www.new-nutrition.com.