

Value-added Strategies for Savory Flavor Systems

Wixon's recent projects reflect the industry's move to expand services and innovate in protein products

The flavor industry faces the growing commoditization of flavors.^a As industrial clients push for price reductions, profit margins shrink. A key strategy counteracting this phenomenon is the shift from merely providing "organically equivalent" flavors to delivering value-added solutions to customers via ingredients, delivery systems and a wider range of services. Recent moves by Wixon (St. Francis, Wisconsin) provide a window into this shift in thinking.

"Companies that provide [value-added] flavors and flavor systems—specifically in the meat and protein category—have found very little downturn in the strength of their product line offerings and margins, if you can translate margins into success," says Wixon president and CEO Peter Gottsacker, adding that he sees growth in new SKU development for value-added flavors. "There's very little downturn in margins," he adds. "Little downturn in sales and margins tells me, in a recession, there's something going on there ... We can see it in our business, and I can tell you we're not alone in that category."

Gottsacker continues, "I think people want to get away from the commodity [aspect of the business]. And we're seeing new flavor systems going into commodity meat. So, adding marinades, injections and having that product already in flavor mode when it goes to market is really differentiating [customers'] products. The meat category is embracing that differentiation. It's what we're seeing in the market and what our customers are coming to us [for] in product line extensions and really trying to get that value-added product on the market. The marketplace must obviously be embracing it."

Gottsacker's comments come as Wixon inaugurates its innovation center for culinary and meat processing. The 4,200-square-foot facility, a \$2 million investment, features a commercial kitchen replicating the prep area of restaurant and food service applications. Here, corporate chef Jud McLester oversees product testing, evaluating and product formulations. "The kitchen really gives him the showcase to develop new products outside the meat category," says Gottsacker, "and allows us to [display] our culinary expertise in addition to our scientific product development."

The opening expands the company's testing, new product development, demonstrational and food product



Opening day at Wixon's new innovation center: at left (foreground) is Mariano Gascon, vice president of R&D, and corporate chef Jud McLester (background) serving samples of breakfast pot stickers.

prototyping capabilities. The meat pilot plant—led by Ron Ratz, director of protein development—allows Wixon to develop new protein products and to produce prototypes of trial products for customers. The site includes a chilled processing room, smokehouse and batch oven, and is equipped with grinders, stuffers, patty-makers, walk-in freezers and coolers, a linear cook line, a batter and breading system, and vacuum packaging and tray overwrap systems.

"[The pilot plant] allows us to do prototype meat samples using our flavor systems and seasonings directly in the application that processors use in their own facilities," says Gottsacker. "We're doing the prototype for them. They don't have to create that product in their facility and wait to schedule production time. This allows us to ... cut the product development lead time by [up to] three months."

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www.perfumerflavorist.com/flavor/application/savory

^a Discussed extensively in: M Porzio, Functionalized Flavors. *Perfum Flavor*, 34(5) 28–30 (2009).



Wixon's ribbon-cutting ceremony; from left: Peter Caputa, chief financial officer; Dean Antczak, director, national sales; Kim Holman, marketing director; Jud McLester, corporate chef (background); Peter Gottsacker, president; Chuck Ehemann, executive vice president; Ron Ratz, director of protein development; and Mariano Gascon, vice president, R&D.




Peter Gottsacker, president.

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—Peter Gottsacker

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“Mood Food” Flavors

Wixon recently launched what it terms “mood creating” snack seasonings for chips, nuts, fruits, dried vegetables and snack mixes. “Our research indicates that consumers ... are looking for foods to trigger an emotion,” says flavor chemist Mindy Edwards. “If they are stressed, they may look for a food that makes them calm. Or if they are feeling snowbound after a long winter, they may want something to remind them of a tropical vacation ... We’ve put a new twist on flavors that can influence or re-create a particular mood.” The company matched flavor profiles with desired emotional outcomes, resulting in 12 flavors, including “excited,” a combination of mustards enhanced with the sweetness of honey and brown sugar and topped with bacon flavors and spices; “cheerful,” featuring the sweetness of vanilla, brown sugar, and marshmallow flavor combined with pumpkin pie spices; “playful,” a combination of onion, garlic, and peppers with lime and tomato flavors; “happy,” a warm and aromatic blend of cinnamon and other spices; and “relaxed,” a blend of citrus flavors, mint and lavender.”