

Mariano Gascon and Kim Holman

Emerging ethnic flavor trends

More than 60 million Americans traveled abroad in 2010, a 69% increase versus 2003, says Kim Holman, director of marketing at Wixon (St. Francis, Wisconsin).^a This travel has created new taste cravings among US consumers. At the same time, Holman says, America is becoming increasingly multicultural. Mariano Gascon, Wixon's vice president of R&D, cites statistics that nine million Americans identified themselves with more than one race in the 2010 census. Meanwhile, the overall population is becoming increasingly urban and exposed to ever diversifying ethnic cuisines, which have become ubiquitous on television. "Everyone wants to try new flavors," says Holman. "Your innovators are going to be on the West and East coasts. If it's a winning flavor concept you'll see it start to make its way to the Midwest."

These macro trends are reflected in a number of flavor profile concepts for sauces and snacks recently developed by Wixon's flavor and R&D teams, encompassing tastes from global street food and specific food traditions in Asia, Latin America, the Mediterranean and beyond.

"We have an innovation group that works on interpreting these trends," says Gascon. Holman adds, "We're being asked for something unique and different, going beyond what's been the mainstay and going after unique flavor profiles."

Gascon's R&D team takes flavor trends and filters them through Wixon's internal flavor innovation initiatives. For instance, he says, "We notice 'fresh' is a word that is often [cited] with these trends—fresh ingredients. [Consumers] want to taste fresh cilantro (for example). We also get requests for new ingredients we don't normally see—spices from all over the world." The flavor initiatives capture these aspects through encapsulation technologies and flavor creation strategies. Among the



key cuisine traditions Wixon has pursued are:

Mediterranean: This growing category features the flavor of Greek yogurt sauce, hummus, mint, feta cheese and eggplant pilaf.

Indian: Wixon identified emerging Indian flavor profiles including curry, tandoori, massala, chai and vanilla.

Pan-Asian: This category is moving beyond traditional sweet and sour tastes, venturing into the palates of Korea, Thailand and Vietnam. At the same time, lemongrass has moved beyond traditional Thai and Vietnamese cuisine to the mainstream, and wasabi has found application in dips and ketchup.

"We're hearing a lot about Vietnamese food," says Holman. "I expect that to grow substantially, particularly pho [noodle] soup. That is going to be [the cuisine's] foray into American cuisine to really drive trial because it's interesting, unique and healthy. That is the launching pad." Gascon adds, "One of the things we've learned on the development side over the years ... is that we have to put new flavors with something [consumers] recognize." This, he says, creates a familiarity gateway into new flavors and cuisines. For instance, using the company's umami enhancer technology with toasted sesame, chili pepper, green onion and ginger, Wixon has created flavor profiles for Korean kalbi barbecue rib tips. "We hear a lot about ginger, but [this is] not your typical dried ginger," says Gascon. "We're talking about ... freshly peeled ginger [flavor]."

Latin America: "People want to know what's driving that heat," says Homan of the growing specificity of pepper flavor profiles showing up in applications. Popular varieties include chipotle, habanero, Serrano and ancho chiles. "We see a lot of that on the menu as well as moving into retail." At the same time, these elements are finding their way into ketchups, cream cheeses and other bases.

"I see Peruvian as a pretty big ethnic profile down the road," says Holman. Among flavors represented in this cuisine are potato dishes (ex: fried potato balls stuffed with meat), ceviche and fresh fish.

"Argentinean meat sauces are going to continue to play a big role because a lot of people have taken an interest in it," Holman says of the meat-intensive cuisine. Aside from empanadas, Wixon has experimented with asado sweet potato chips powered by paprika, red wine, cumin, onion, garlic, sea salt and sugar.

^aConsumer data provided by Mintel; www.mintel.com.

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