

The Challenge of “Natural;” Flavor and Fragrance Trends

Highlights from the WFFC fall meeting

Consumers’ desire for natural flavors often centers on the inherent goodness of foods, said Lynn Dornblaser (Mintel International) during the fall seminar of Women in Flavor and Fragrance Commerce in Saddle Brook, New Jersey. Natural, beyond a focus on diminished processing, is tied to such concepts as low fat, ethical and environmental. And so, said Dornblaser, consumers will pay more money for some natural products—but not as much as they say they do. The reality is that people often say they do what they think they should be doing, not necessarily what their behavior reflects.

Key areas in which natural claims are booming include bakery, snacks, sauces and seasonings and, notably, soft drinks. Meanwhile, “natural” is presumed by consumers in juice-based drinks. Other beverage categories are registering low or no growth in natural claims.

Dornblaser highlighted several notable natural-positioned products surfacing around the world. The United Kingdom’s *Beet It* energy shot comprises beet and lemon juice. Meanwhile, Tropicana’s *Trop50* juice features 50% less sugar than its conventional juice, thanks to stevia. This natural zero-calorie sweetener’s ubiquity is now such that stevia-sugar cubes have reached the market in France.



Paige Crist (Perfumer & Flavorist magazine), Marc Gobe (Emotional Branding), Gillian Bleimann (Berjé/The Whole Herb Co.), Alpa Roman (Flavor & Fragrance Specialties), Jake Nagel (Firmenich), Lynn Dornblaser (Mintel), Judy Kerschner (IFF), Kit Keith Yam (Rutgers), Nancy Higley (PepsiCo), Jeannie Joshi (Joshi Design), Helen Feygin (Intuiscent), Laure Moutet and Bea Hornedo (Bontoux)



Meg Pineault (AM Todd) and John Cassens (Metabev)



Nancy Poulos (Kerry Ingredients & Flavours) and Alpa Roman (Flavor & Fragrance Specialties)



Gillian Bleimann (Berjé/The Whole Herb Co.) and Bea Hornedo (Bontoux)



Pierre-Jean Hellivan (Vigon) and Melanie Williamson (Robertet)



Janice Hart and Kelli Heinz (both Bell Flavors & Fragrances)

Yet, as flavor and food companies pursue natural claims, questions have arisen about new natural flavor materials. For instance, said Nancy Higley (PepsiCo), if a traditional natural material is produced via a new extraction technology, is it still GRAS? Or would it now be an additive? Where is the transition? Which of the physical and chemical processes used to produce flavor materials can be considered natural? Which, if any, processing aids are permitted? With every new ingredient, safety assessment and interpretation is key. And, as analytical technology and techniques evolve, chemists are “chasing zero.” How much analysis is sufficient in this new world? How will the industry balance perceived vs real risk? However these questions are resolved, Higley noted that consumers will always look to food safety authorities for reassurance. As a result, laws will continue to be driven by technological changes and social and political pressure, and regulations will continue to be an amalgam of social values and circumstances.

Flavor Trends

Today's flavor customers require brand-supportive, low-cost, quality, natural/simple, low-in and reliable solutions, said Judy Kerschner (IFF). As a result, these customers will require flavor suppliers to tackle the sensory hurdles presented by whole grain, low-sodium

and low-fat foods and beverages, necessitating masking agents, taste modulators and sweetness enhancers, sodium replacers, and mouthfeel agents. In addition to natural claims, Kerschner explained that customers increasingly call for controlled-release flavors, flavor systems that maintain freshness and cost-effective ingredients.

Among key flavor trends, Dornblaser identified several highlights, including street food, coconut water, ginger, smoked salt, umami profiles and “experiential” flavors with bold sensory profiles. Emerging food and beverage ingredients, she concluded, include stevia, kombucha tea, beetroot and dark spirits.

Fragrance Trends

In-store, fragrance is the top non-functional decision driver in home and personal care products, said Dornblaser. As a result, brands such as Gain have positioned themselves on fragrance, even encouraging consumers to smell the product before they buy.

In Mintel surveys, Dornblaser said, 60% of women claimed to get their fragrance from body lotion, 50% from body sprays and 45% from perfume. Twenty percent of respondents claimed to use no scented products. Seventy percent of US consumers are motivated by samples from stores, said Dornblaser, and nearly 40% are motivated by ads in magazines.

Among key trends identified by Mintel were energizing aromas, familiar scents, rhubarb, lemon and lime. Meanwhile, Kerschner noted growing popularity in floral scents among women and fougere, woody and oriental scents among men.

In closing, Dornblaser urged: Focus on familiarity, excite, soothe, energize and hint at the functionality within products.

Fragrance ingredients in fine and functional products increasingly must be high-performance, offering formula-tors malodor activity and unique delivery options, said Kerschner, and must be regulation-friendly and offer unique olfactory facets. These ingredients may include new molecular structures to provide replacements for banned materials and boost sustainability. Here, Kerschner offered the example of IFF's Helional, the use of which made the harvesting of sassafras trees unnecessary. New naturals research, Kerschner concluded, will focus on new botanicals, mechanization of processes, new molecules, activated freshness, heightened fragrance experience and surprising effects, and research on metabolism and genetics.

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