

Flavors and Healthy Eating

Highlights from the British Society of Flavourists' event in Singapore.

Southeast Asia's food and beverage market is valued at \$49 billion, according to data provided by international trade consultancy Socialwalk (www.socialwalk.com). The region is led by Malaysia (\$12 billion) and Indonesia (\$9.5 billion). Close behind is Singapore (\$9.1 billion), which recently hosted the British Society of Flavourists' (BSF) debut event in Singapore.

BSF FlavourTalk

The two-day April event included presentations and a raw material exhibition. Featuring 153 attendees from 74 companies, the event featured representatives from Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and Indonesia. The exhibition included 21 exhibitors displaying essential oils, flavor extracts and distillates, oleoresins, flavoring substances, reaction bases and hydrolyzed vegetable proteins.

Flavor and Human Health

Mintel's Jane Barnett noted that consumers in the region suffer from malnutrition via over- and under-nutrition, complicating product development. In India alone, she said about 65.1 million people are affected by diabetes. As a result, interest in eating healthier is increasing, with some consumers willing to pay more for more nutritious/health-improving aspects. As many as 79% of Indonesians and 69% of Indians consume functional foods on a regular basis. Popular functional claims in Southeast Asia include digestive, bone, brain and heart health.



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With the impact of food and beverage choices, consumption patterns and other facets affecting the health of these and global consumers, the event's speakers sought to address the role that the flavor industry could play in producing good-tasting and healthy foods and beverages to ensure moderate energy consumption.

Spicing Things Up

Asia's economic boom in recent decades has greatly impacted what and how people in the region eat. Speaker Jeyakumar Henry (Singapore Institute for Clinical Sciences) noted that many contemporary foods are high in calories and engineered to have highly pleasing sensory characteristics for consumers. This combination has contributed, to some degree, to the growing incidence of obesity and related diseases. However, it also points to a potential solution, one that puts the flavor industry center stage.

Henry suggested that the application of spices in flavor systems could provide a positive impact on consumers' sensory experience, but also in their satiation and overall health. Spices have historically been functional in nature, offering cooks and formulators digestive-stimulant, cholesterol-lowering and other benefits. Henry highlighted one study that showed an increased metabolic response in research subjects that ingested a meal infused with spices. These ingredients could potentially modulate the balance of energy input and output, he concluded. On a practical level, Henry noted, these materials could be added to food products as ingredients, rather than functional ingredients requiring separate labeling.

Complexity of Flavor and Texture Relationship

As Henry showed, taste and aroma are a powerful influencer on consumer experience and behavior. In a BSF presentation, Ciarán Forde (Singapore Institute for Clinical Sciences) noted that flavor can impact everything from selection to portions and can actually be manipulated to shape preferences and consumption behaviors.

Long after a food or beverage has been consumed, Forde argued, sensory cues impact what the food/beverage "means" to



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the consumer. The problem, Forde said, is that contemporary consumers have developed appetites that have divorced the sensory and nutritive aspects of foods.

All is not lost, however. Forde noted that food preferences can be reshaped over a lifetime, which can be exploited to improve dietary choices. Flavor companies can increase palatability while also promoting satiation that limits caloric consumption.

Interestingly, Forde noted that odor alone has little or erratic impact on food/beverage intake, though aroma intensity can encourage smaller bite sizes. Meanwhile, umami boosters simultaneously stimulate appetite and increase satiation.

Texture of foods must also be taken into consideration, Forde noted. Historically, the introductions of soft foods made possible via processed food production, have increased the speed of consumption and total amount ingested. This phenomenon has been replicated in a standard meal vs. mashed meal study highlighted by Forde. On the other hand, satiation for protein-rich drinks can be increased by boosting the creaminess and thickness of the beverage.

As the event showed, insights into the impact of sensory aspects on eating behaviors is growing, opening up new potential avenues of innovation for the flavor industry.

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