

2022: a time for transformational performance

HAVE we reached the tipping point? With the emergence of Omicron this question is playing on my mind. It certainly feels like we might soon be able to proclaim the COVID-19 crisis over and allow ourselves to tolerate the virus as part of our lives, much like the yearly flu.

Last year - after a year that forced us to reconsider our expectations and assumptions for our lives - we trialed new ways to live and work that felt right and sustainable amid the ongoing pandemic. We learned to embrace a certain level of imperfection and a tolerance for ambiguity: in the way we do our jobs, with the proliferation of remote and hybrid work; how we socialise and consume; how we spend our free time and plan in a world that has taught us that uncertainty is a force to be reckoned with.

Even though - at the time of writing - we are not quite there, we have made great progress! And in 2022, we will continue to refine our behaviours and systems to adapt to this new environment.

WHAT'S ON THE MENU IN 2022?

Since it has become something of a tradition for the Forewords of the Spring editions, this time I am again looking into some of the food sector trends that will influence consumer buying decisions and find their way into the R&D departments of snacks makers and suppliers.

SUSTAINABLE DIETS

Our food systems are continuing to change at a dizzying pace as consumers become more interested in the stories behind the foods they eat and how they are sourced. One of the most pressing questions they have is: 'How can my food choices have a positive impact on nature?'

Global warming has undoubtedly transformed what we eat, both because of increased consumer awareness of sustainability and climate change and because of its growing impact on our wallets. These

factors will deepen acceptance of sustainable food alternatives and increase consumer desire for more environmentally friendly products. Shoppers are now seeking local and more sustainable alternatives and are willing to pay more to feel they are helping the environment.

Consumers' support for sustainability also extends beyond the physical environment and into social issues. Many of us believe it is important that people working in food production, retail and food service be treated fairly and equitably. Support for 'social sustainability' is only expected to grow, as it has found particular resonance among younger consumers. With the stronger focus on environmental sustainability, new eating patterns such as 'reducetarian', 'climatarian' and low-carbon will emerge. This in turn will further increase the interest in diets that rely on meat-less and plant-based alternative proteins, paving the way for the cell-based industry - currently in its infancy - where labs grow agricultural products directly from animal and plant cell cultures.

Increased desire to 'go green' also gives rise to more planet-friendly food processing and packaging. If you want to keep up a competitive edge that will earn you a loyal clientele and extra profits, you may want to consider shifting your perspective sooner rather than later.

STAY ON TOP OF YOUR TECH

Technology will continue to accelerate at a fast pace in the food industry and permeate every



We're not there yet, but **Sebastian Emig** predicts that 2022 could see us emerge from the pandemic, complete with a range of new consumer attitudes and snacking preferences



sector and process. Innovations such as drone deliveries, autonomous vehicles, AI-derived flavours, robots planting corn or potatoes, precision farming and Blockchain all mean that our industry has become one of the new high-tech industries.

There will be a stronger interest in the smart use of sensors producing relevant data along the value chain. Meanwhile AI models with strong prediction capabilities will provide the digital tools to promote increased sustainability, safety and efficiency.

With food production operations - from planting to packaging - becoming more digitally integrated, this might also create drawbacks in the form of fears around data breaches and a lack of capacity to meet the workforce needs of the future.

As part of increasing digitisation we will see that direct-to-consumer (D2C) will continue to outpace all other distribution channels. D2C models have been around in the food industry for a while now. However, with more people working from home and less enthusiasm for crowded grocery shopping trips, D2C shopping has become the go-to method for many snackers. According to Ernst & Young's Future Consumer Index, which is based on a survey of around 15,000 consumers globally, 48% of respondents believe the way they use technology will change in the long term. Some 31% of consumers will spend more on grocery delivery services after the pandemic.

NEW NOSTALGIA, IMMUNE-BOOSTING AND 'TRAVEL FLAVOURS'

Nostalgia and retro flavours will follow us into 2022. We saw the start of this trend at the beginning of the pandemic, when home-cooking and baking family recipes rose in popularity. With the outside world still riddled with uncertainty from COVID, climate change and political upheavals, many of us will continue to crave home comforts, even if more of us are able to get together. This will be reflected in the flavours that consumers are choosing. Expect to see people seeking out classic flavours as



a way to bring more comfort and familiarity into their day-to-day lives.

Another trend likely to gain steam is in flavours that have functional benefits around immunity and related issues such as sleep, mood, depression, inflammation and gut health. Consumers will increasingly opt for products that can improve their health and help them avoid illness. We have had time and motivation to educate ourselves about active ingredients that benefit our health, especially our immune system.

Ingredients like turmeric, ginger and citrus are trending, as well as products with added vitamins that promise to strengthen our immune defences. We expect to see these flavours gain more popularity, even when products do not contain the actual ingredients, because even their flavours are associated with a healthier choice.

Consumers reluctant to travel in 2022 but still craving adventure and new experiences will be looking for new ways to spice up everyday routines with a sense of excitement. One option is to let their taste buds experience exotic foods and flavours that remind them of far flung places.

So it is no surprise that international flavours have grown in popularity in recent months. They offer excitement to consumers who have been stuck at home during the pandemic and were unable to enjoy experiences such as travel or restaurant dining. This trend will continue in the form of home flavour safaris, staycation foods to include even bolder global flavours, flavour mash-ups and unusual flavour combinations (or even fantasy flavours and mystery flavours in limited editions).

Do not forget that during the pandemic social media channels have become one of

the biggest influencers in foods. Food and flavour experiences are achieved through 'virtual travel.' Consumers learn about trends and then buy the ingredients in pursuit of that food experience.

I recently read that TikTok is launching a delivery-only service that will serve recipes that have gone viral on their platform. About 300 'TikTok kitchens' are supposed to open across the USA by March, before expanding to 1,000 locations by the end of the year.

SNACKEX - WE ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO WELCOMING YOU IN JULY



After postponing SNACKEX to 6-7 July this year, we are looking forward to welcoming you warmly in Hamburg!

The show floor is nearly fully booked. At the time of writing we have literally four stands left and will be completely booked soon. It is so motivating to see that we have exhibitors from all around the world, which will be matched by visitors and delegates who are eager to meet face-to-face to do business, exchange ideas and network. It is incredibly energising to think about meeting you all in person again in a few months!

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*in his capacity as permanent representative of Prime Consulting BXLBCN SL

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