

PRESS RELEASE

2020: The year of inulin?

The prebiotic fiber inulin is having its moment in the sun thanks to strong consumer desire for less sugar, for more protein and for products that support digestive wellness, says food and beverage consultant Julian Mellentin.

“The confluence of the protein, low-sugar and digestive wellness trends is causing inulin to power ahead,” says Mellentin, whose new report *10 Key Trends in Food, Nutrition and Health 2020* highlights the key consumer trends driving growth in the industry.

“Inulin has become a success as a natural sugar replacer, used in an ever-growing number of products, and its presence means that companies can also flag up the enhanced fiber content on the label,” he adds.

Sugar reduction plus more protein is a big driver – as pioneered by brands like Halo Top ice-cream, which grew from nothing to \$350 million in retail sales in five years on the back of offering these twin benefits.

“Protein is now a ‘permission to indulge’ ingredient, increasingly widely used in ice-creams and desserts – where it is often paired with inulin,” Mellentin says.

Sales of breakfast cereals have suffered in recent years, both from the lower sugar and lower carb trends, but many brands are discovering that they can gain sales in a challenging market by using inulin to offer both a digestive wellness benefit and a low sugar promise – “two of the biggest consumer growth trends,” says Mellentin.

Troo Granola, for example, uses inulin syrup in its products because it serves both as a prebiotic fiber and a sweetener, giving a more appealing taste to consumers while keeping the sugar low.

“For companies who choose to use inulin in their brands for digestive benefits, a big plus is that it delivers a ‘feel-the benefit’ effect – one of the most compelling reasons for someone to keep buying a product and one of the biggest marketing advantages you can have,” says Mellentin.

“These benefits have caused demand for inulin to surge – the number of products launched that feature inulin doubled between 2012 and 2019,” he adds.

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Here are three examples:

In the US, Koia's plant-based keto-friendly drink range uses a combination of monkfruit and "chicory root fiber" to deliver a no-added-sugar product that's high in protein.

Mondelez-backed Uplift Foods products use inulin as a 'transporter' for probiotics and flag up 0g of sugar on pack.

In the UK, Graham's Family Dairy's Graham's Goodness ice-cream is "an 'indulgent' ice-cream that you can enjoy without the guilt!". The salted caramel flavor for example, has (per 450ml tub) 22g of protein and 320 calories (with a calorie count front and centre of the pack) – roughly a quarter the calories of regular ice-cream. The brand is lower in sugar, resulting in about 8g of fiber per pack. Sales have out-stripped the company's expectations, with consumers buying as many as six or eight tubs of product in each shop.

What is inulin?

Inulin is a type of soluble fiber found in many fruits and vegetables, such as bananas, onions, wheat and chicory root. It is made up of chains of fructose molecules that are linked together in a way that cannot be digested by the small intestine. Instead, it travels to the lower gut, where it functions as a powerful prebiotic. But few brands mention the term 'prebiotic' on their label. The name "prebiotics" has been a problem because consumers don't know what they are – and confuse them with the better known "probiotic". Sometimes brands refer to their prebiotic ingredients by their source, such as 'chicory' or 'chicory root', in an effort to avoid confusion and make a connection to their natural origin.

NOTES TO EDITORS

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3. The report "10 Key Trends in Food, Nutrition and Health 2020" is available at www.new-nutrition.com