

# An Eye on Savory: Trends & Flavors

Key suppliers offer their thoughts on read meal trends. How far can we go in terms of convenience without sacrificing taste, quality & naturalness and how is technology helping?



**AGNÈS GUÉMÉNÉ JØRGENSEN,**  
DUPONT, APPLICATION SPECIALIST

## On fat, sugar and salt reduction technologies...

“DuPont Nutrition & Health has years of accumulated, in-depth knowledge of the industries that tap into ready meals. We are applying this base of expertise to facilitate discussions and drive development processes to reduce salt, sugar and fat. For example, in our most recent pasta concepts we’ve developed high fiber vegetarian bolognese, pasta filata/mozzarella for lasagna and cheese flavored pasta sauce, allowing our customers partial or total cheese replacement, just to name a few innovative options. In order to enable our customers to align with consumer demands, we also offer competent advice on ingredient functionality and interactions during processing and product shelf-life.

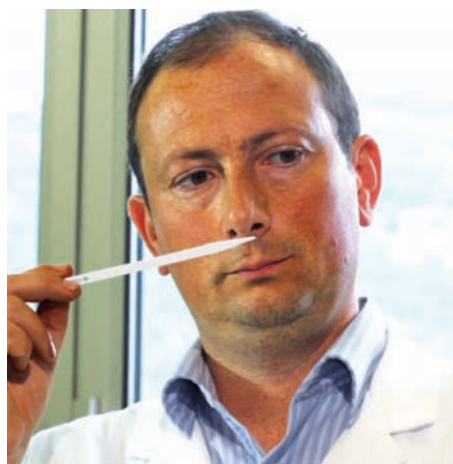
Technology used alongside humans is also fundamental to overcoming formulation challenges. Human taste buds are directly connected to the brain. Using electroencephalography (EEG), a technique commonly used to diagnose epilepsy, we can measure electrical activity in the brain when the taste buds are stimulated. A current study is investigating the effect of sugar, salt and fat on the brain. By pinpointing the brain’s response to these stimuli, we can then identify alternative ingredients that produce an identical gustatory effect. This holds great potential for developing foods in healthier, reduced-calorie formats that are just as satisfying as the original products. So far, we have looked at the gustatory effect of sugar.” ■

**ERIC DAVODEAU, MANE**

CATEGORY DIRECTOR SAVOURY EMEA

## On savory trends and stealth product reformulation...

“Consumers want to understand what they are eating and make more sense of what they are buying. Using the names of ingredients they could be cooking with or using the word ‘natural’ seems to be the panacea, although answers to this demand for naturalness cannot solely be expressed in this way. Agricultural origin, additives cleansing and kitchen related ingredients demands are all concepts following the same expectation to restore the intimate and social relationship between consumers and their food. Our industry needs to avoid confusion and I am convinced that there is room for flavoring, particularly for natural flavoring, as well as for traditional ingredients. Clean labeling is even more important in ready meals than in any other segment as the reference is clearly “homemade.”



Mane is producing concentrated extracts based on agriculturally sourced by-products, perfectly in line with a zero waste food objective. From those extracts, Mane is producing stocks which are really close to the traditional “fond” and sauces that consumers crave in ready meals.

Mane has been working with a panel called M2P (for Mane Proprietary Panel) for more than a year. We recently conducted a survey on this panel to understand major tonality trends. Unsurprisingly, traditional Mediterranean ingredients such as rosemary herb and sundried tomatoes are very popular.

Certain spices such as chili or pepper are also becoming a very appealing trend among European consumers who want more diversity in terms of origin, species and taste. To answer that demand, our industry needs to create strong links with raw material sources, to develop bespoke flavoring preparations. Through the majority stake that MANE has taken in Kancor, an ingredients manufacturer specialized in spices & oleoresins, we are creating a unique global technology hub for high quality food and beverage ingredients.

Reformulation is much more complex than simply reducing salt and fat as it needs to tackle the overall product performance, while addressing cost constraints.

Our industry is able to develop highly sophisticated flavoring preparations to help the food industry avoid the fading of their products’ taste, when undergoing salt, sugar or fat reduction processes.

In my opinion, restoring complexity are key words since you need more salt, fat and sugar when your base-line is impoverished.” ■



**ROGER LANE, SENSIENT FLAVORS,**  
MARKETING MANAGER, SAVORY FLAVORS

### On comfort flavors and hot & spicy experiences...

“Consumers are really looking to the past for inspiration in a trend we’re calling ‘comfort & joy.’ It is manifesting in a couple of ways. First, we’re seeing a return to simpler, more comforting foods like meatloaf, meatballs and macaroni and cheese. We’re also seeing it play out in putting an adult spin on foods typically eaten by kids. Peanut butter is being flavored by ingredients like harissa and restaurants are featuring corndogs, but doing them with unique, artisan sausages like duck or lamb. There is also a continued interest in more globally authentic flavors. Consumers are looking for products that can mimic cuisine they could find in someone’s home in a foreign country.

Of course, spicy is still trending, but we’re now seeing it fused with other flavor experiences; things like sweet or bitter flavors being mashed up with it. We’re also seeing more regional heat experiences being driven by consumers looking for the ‘next big thing’ when it comes to heat. Whether that be Korean gochujang or other regionally based pepper sauces, customers want flavor with their heat, not just burn-off-your-tongue spicy. Korean food is finally having its moment with more and more mentions every single day in the blogosphere. It’s a convergence of several trends - regionality, authenticity, a renewed interest in fermentation and spicy flavors. Middle Eastern food is also getting more time in the spotlight.” ■



**SASCHA THAENS, RAPS GMBH**  
DIRECTOR SALES MANAGEMENT & STRATEGY

### On the rise of the vegetarian trend into the mainstream...

“Important consumer trends for the savory and ready meals sector are, for me, vegetarian products. Plant-based is the way to go, as more and more people are choosing vegetarian diets. Plus, the rise of part-time vegetarians who have reduced their meat consumption because of health, sustainability and animal welfare concerns is also having a major effect on new product activity. This includes the technological development and promotion of better-tasting products that are more reminiscent of meat, as well as the use of alternative protein sources. Therefore, almost all veggie variations are of interest for food companies, including meat substitutes, reductions and convenience meals.

Manufacturers and meat companies are now using their expertise to address vegetarian nutrition issues. Another key driver is fresh convenience products. The desire for fresh and semi-processed foods is an additional factor that is shaping what and how consumers eat. However, some applications have only a limited shelf-life and must be carefully processed. Therefore, fresh ingredients and those that need to be frozen have to be handled with extra care to produce ready-to-eat and semi-finished products. Whether it is pestos, sauces, chutneys, fillings or toppings, RAPS offers a wide variety of “Fresh Line” products for the entire industry, knowledge about the latest technology and custom solutions for partners from all over Europe.” ■



**ADAM ANDERSON, DSM FOOD SPECIALTIES,**  
INNOVATION MANAGER

### On the rise of the “free from” and “clean label” trends...

“The ‘free from’ trend (with foods lower in salt, sugar and fat) is increasingly prevalent as consumers become more aware of the ingredients in their products. For example, a survey we conducted in 2013 showed that around two thirds of consumers check the ingredient labels for salt levels. Governments, particularly in Western Europe, are playing a crucial role in reducing the population’s intake of salt, sugar and fat. For example, the UK has just approved a sugar tax on beverages. Food producers are responding to this trend and we are working with them to find solutions that can reduce the salt, sugar and fat levels, without compromising on taste.

Another trend is ‘clean label,’ which can have a number of connotations, such as natural, label simplicity and removal of certain ingredients.

Convenience is also of increasing importance to consumers. Ready meals, by their very nature, follow this trend. However, many innovations involve developing convenient products without effort, cooking profiles, or taste complexity.

‘Natural/authentic’ is also a high activity trend, as consumers are looking for more authentic profiles and ingredients. This translates into the development or use of recognizable ingredients, which have the perception of being ‘natural.’

Another, somewhat newer, trend is “clear label,” which is more focused on transparency and creating labels that consumers can understand.” ■



**TOM VAN ZEEBURG, AKZONOBEL**  
BUSINESS DEV. MANAGER ONEGRAIN



**CASEY THOMAS, FONTERRA**  
DAIRY FOODS MARKETING DIRECTOR



**JOHANNES TONAUE, MOGUNTIA**  
MANAGING DIRECTOR

### On clean & clear labeling in ready meals...

“Just as in any other segment, the consumer wants to understand the label. This conscious group of consumers is growing. The ingredients list should contain a clear description of ingredients that can also be found in the kitchen. When a total product range meets the clean and clear label requirements, the brand owner can use it to differentiate from others and find added value.

Stealth reformulation on salt is still the most important way to reduce salt without risking that the consumer will notice differences in taste. Since labeling of the amount of salt on the packaging was harmonized in December 2014, it has become a lot easier for consumers to compare products on salt content and make conscious choices. Reduced sodium salt combined with flavors that are currently available in the market, are very good and effective ways to reduce sodium and keep the taste.

Consumers do not want to sacrifice taste, quality or naturalness, and neither do we. We see great new products that allow reducing sodium levels up to 50% without sacrificing taste, quality, naturalness or shelf-life. New available technologies which combine different salts with a flavor in one salt grain make it possible to reach targets of up to 50% reduction while at the same time contributing to lower total costs of ownership. This means one solution for all products and no changes needed in processing or equipment.” ■

### On consumer trust and savory applications...

“Clean and clear labeling is now a well-established pathway to build and reinforce trust in food and food source – it certainly shows no sign of lessening in value. A limited number of easily read and known ingredients is a start. However, there is an increasing desire by many consumers to know more about the ingredients that are part of the meals they buy and consume. Stating product origin or farm method (for example, the province/country of origin or whether the raw ingredients are free-range or organically farmed) can effectively convey a trusted source or premium quality.

When looking at the dairy portfolio, cheese plays an important role in a wide range of applications in the savory and ready meals sector – whether it be in pizzas, salads, sandwiches or other pre-cooked meals. The desire and value of stronger and more distinctively flavorful natural cheese continues to build. This is not a new trend, rather one that is established and remains important to tap future potential. Distinctive cheeses can bring character and differentiation to meals and snacks. At the very least, they should enable the formulator to reduce cost per serve thanks to their delivery of more flavor punch for every dollar spent. There are some great new and improved cheeses in the market, our chefs recommend seeking a full flavored cheese with fruity top notes if you want a product that can work across a wide range of meal and snack occasions.” ■

### On the rise of natural and real food ingredients...

“First and foremost, consumers want tasty products. Nevertheless, there are a few contemporary trends influencing people’s product choice to a high level. Ready meals have to be as natural as possible. Natural ingredients as well as short ingredient lists are becoming more and more vital. At Moguntia we try to avoid the use of aromas. Our first choice are natural spices, carefully selected and steam-treated in order to bring down viable count in a natural way. In case the formulation avoid the use of added flavors, we only use natural aromas. Short ingredient lists go hand in hand with clean and clear labeling.

A major and ubiquitous topic within our NPD is consumers’ strong wish for healthy meals. Having expelled MSG from all our pastes, powders and granules for sauces and soups as well as seasonings many years ago, more recent trends are kicking out yeasts and HVPs. One of our latest product series is even avoiding all kind of flatulant vegetables. When we are talking about the ‘free from movement,’ we definitely have to think about allergens. Moguntia has banned most of the 14 EU allergens from their premises. Together with state-of-the-art production technology, we can guarantee the highest standards in the industry within this sensitive field. Gluten free and lactose free are definitely major trends, but we are also focusing on smaller details like mustard free, celery free or coriander free.” ■



**KEVIN MCDERMOTT, SAVOURY SYSTEMS,** VP & DIRECTOR OF SALES

### On transparency marketing and going GMO free...

“I think the consumer is currently caught at a crossroads. There is much less time available for planning meals, shopping and cooking. However, authors, film makers, and internet bloggers are raising a level of skepticism over industrial food ingredients, industrial utilization of sugar, fat and salt in food, as well as concerns over factory farming practices. I believe that increased education and transparency from the food processing industry will help consumers better comprehend what is in packaged foods, assist in removing any of the false threats that exist, and allow consumers to independently assess the balance of dieting for convenience, sustainability, indulgence, and overall health. The biggest consumer trend at the moment is the need to meet GMO free claims and compliance. Even companies who carry major brands are starting to become more transparent about GMO labeling as well as complying with the GMO labeling laws of Vermont in the US.

Bold flavors and fearlessness in using spice is gaining a strong footing. Central American, Caribbean, and Southeast Asian flavors are finding a unique place in the ready meal sector. Flavor combinations which are built around bold and high impact seasonings provide a go-to solution. Flavor enhancers like MSG and I&G are being replaced by natural and fermented ingredients such as yeast extract, anchovy, as well as tomato or mushroom extract.” ■



**CHRISTER ANDERSSON, AVEBE** MARKET MANAGER FOOD

### On addressing flavor trends and supplier collaboration...

“Various ethnic flavor and cuisines are driving the ready meal industry. The buzzwords are ‘exotic’ and ‘new experience.’ For us as a texture supplier, the objective is to ensure that natural and authentic flavors become true and optimal and don’t get masked or hidden. Our potato-based ingredients with their blend and pure origin makes any flavor shine through. The challenge for us is to build authentic textures, which lift the flavors.

Clean label and cleaner label is becoming much broader than only E-number free nowadays - it’s about authenticity, tractability and recognizability. Consumers like to know what’s in their food and why, they want to recognize the origin. This is where we as a farmer’s cooperative can bring great value since we have full traceability of each of our ingredients back to our owner’s potato fields in Holland and Germany.

As long as we have a close connection with the food manufacturer, ingredients supplier and R&D society, this drives jointly for innovation, meeting consumer needs and demands.

Avebe recently launched a new clean label starch under the Eliane brand, which enables food moisturizing for ready meals and microwavable food. It provides a feeling of fresh cooked with a great texture, no splashing when cooking and an excellent eating experience, without sacrificing on well-balanced nutrition.” ■



**IVO GAMMAROTA, CAMPUS SRL** SALES MANAGER

### On the future for on trend ready meal solutions...

“Consumer habits are changing very fast! In the last 20 years, the food industry has completely changed the way a product is presented on the market.

Not only from a packaging point of view, but also from the deepest part of its production. So a very well-known product like a dry cured salami is now a real concentration of technology. Food ingredients play a great part in these changes and they are still contributing to them. Meat free products, free from E-numbers and salt reduction can be considered to be the most important trends for the years ahead.

Ready meals are a very common product in our daily life nowadays. The never-ending fast pace of life is the main reason for their uptake. If an acceptable combination of taste/ease of handling were considered the highest ranking until a few years ago, nowadays it is not enough. We are at the new frontier, what we call ingredients 2.0. It is our challenge to give the food industry answers on how to clean the labels, while maintaining all the well-accepted features of the food.

There is a general request to improve the processed food under the health point of view. Consumer’s consciousness about labels, composition and calories is growing very fast.

Already a few years ago, we introduced a full range of solutions onto the market to partially replace salt and fat in several final applications.” ■

