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Danisco®

Meet the Taste Makers

The science of plant-based product formulation for profitability

A business briefing by Taste Maker Rosa Sanchez

Sensory science isn't just about what happens in labs. The product innovations and refinements that emerge from sensory labs have a direct impact on products, profitability and market share. There are plenty of pitfalls—and opportunities—along the way, as Taste Maker Rosa Sanchez reveals.

Customers tend to come to us with two kinds of questions. They want to achieve a higher output or reduce costs—without affecting what consumers love about their product. And they want to safeguard their profitability and gain market share against other brands.

In both cases, getting a plant-based product's formulation right is crucial. And challenging. Here are four key things to consider.

Are you improving a product?

Are you willing to change the label i.e. the list of ingredients? That's often what needs to happen if you're looking for significant improvements. Little tweaks might not have the impact you're hoping for.

How much leeway do you have when it comes to ingredients? Are there ingredients you absolutely cannot include? What about your cost structure? What are the pain points—with the ingredients or the process or both?

Is gaining market share important? If so, consumer testing is going to be crucial to confirm that the changes you're making will have the desired effect.

Be prepared for surprises. We're often asked to solve problems with beverages that seem unstable. Our customer notices serum at the top and keeps adding stabilizers to make the problem go away. In many cases, the separation is due to too much stabilizer, not too little.

Are you replacing ingredients?

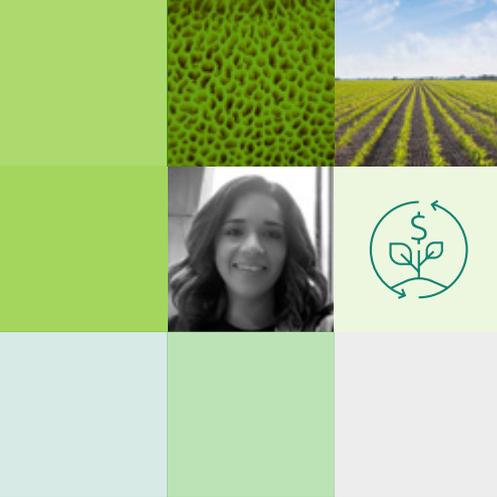
It's really important to know what consumers love about your product. What are the characteristics you must *not* change? Once you know that, you can begin considering your options.

For example, if your consumers love the mouthfeel—the way your beverage slips down their throat with no aftertaste—that will limit the range of ingredients you can choose from. Some colloids and stabilizers are slimier than others. Others leave a residue in the mouth. None of these will be appropriate.

Be willing to be swayed by the evidence. We once helped a customer reduce costs substantially by replacing expensive dairy proteins with cheaper soy proteins. To the customer's astonishment, consumer testing proved that people actually preferred a blend of soy and dairy. What's more, they couldn't tell the difference between a formulation that was 25% soy and one that was 35% soy.

**Planit**

Your recipe for success
in plant-based



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Finally, think carefully before tweaking old favorites. While consumer testing may indicate that the new product tastes as good, loyal consumers may resent the change. Familiarity can be a significant element of liking.

Are you creating new products?

Make sure you have a well-defined market niche. A common mistake is to focus more on how the new product will fit into your existing portfolio than on your target market. If you don't have a well-defined consumer in mind (women in a certain age group, for example), your consumer testing will turn up misleading data.

How important is keeping your list of ingredients short? In our experience, consumers are often less concerned about an extra ingredient than marketers are. In situations where an ingredient is needed to ensure the product's stability, this requirement will overrule a desire to keep the label short.

Do you want to emulate certain characteristics of other products on the market? If so, be prepared for the fact that it may not be possible to replicate elements of a label without also using the same or similar processes as your competitors.

Forging a profitable partnership between marketers and scientists

There's a productive tension between the demands of marketing departments for particular labels or lists of ingredients, and the properties of those ingredients. What's crucial though is the fact that science is key to profitability—whether it's a matter of tweaking a product

to improve throughflow in a factory or working to produce the sensory properties that drive liking with the most cost-effective ingredients and processes.

The best part of this intersection between science and business is the way solving problems can have an immediate and significant effect on our customers' bottom line. Our customer-partners know they can call us at any time with production or product issues. Getting to the root of their problems is what makes this job so rewarding. (And so much fun!).

Check out the other articles in the Taste Makers series:

Meet the Taste Makers: [Introducing the DuPont sensory scientists cracking the code of plant-based success](#)

Using neuroscience to discover the next plant-based blockbuster: [A sensory analysis briefing by Taste Makers Stine Moeller and Camilla Arndal Andersen](#)

Creating the perfect plant-based product: [A greenfield briefing by Taste Maker Kimberly Hogan](#)

Or if you think there's something the Taste Makers could help you with, [get in touch](#).