

How do specialty food ingredients and their manufacturers contribute to healthier diets and healthy ageing?

What are specialty food ingredients?

Specialty food ingredients typically preserve, texture, emulsify, colour, help processing and add an extra health dimension to produced food. They are all key to guarantee the wide range of processed foods as offered today to the consumer. With their technological, nutritional and health related functions they make the food tasty, pleasant to eat, safe, healthy and affordable.

Position of specialty food ingredients industries in the food chain



A technical and market response to public health needs

4-5 % of the annual turn-over of the European specialty food ingredients industries are invested in research and development. For ingredients companies that are committed to invest in research, innovation represents actually a technical and market response to existing public health needs. To take a few examples:

- **Healthy ageing**

The strategy Europe 2020 includes as one of the key initiatives the Pilot European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing. In the forthcoming years, due to Europe's ageing population, health care costs will increase. National campaigns promoting prevention through a healthier diet form an important part of this strategy. Existing products such as calcium and Vitamin D enriched dairy products can already contribute to this goal, but our industry is now looking beyond vitamins and minerals to explore what further innovation can help support the goal of

healthy ageing, including contribution to e.g. maintenance of normal blood cholesterol concentrations; maintenance of tooth mineralisation by decreasing tooth demineralisation; reduction of post-prandial glycaemic responses; normal lipid metabolism; maintenance of normal vision; normal cognitive and neurological function; maintenance of normal cardiac function. The efficacy of ingredients is assessed by the European Safety Food Authority (EFSA) and recognised by a specific health claim according to Regulation (EC) 1924/2006.

- **Compensating for changing diets**

As dietary fibre intake, essential to a healthy diet, has declined, interest has grown in the role that dietary fibre as an ingredient can play in filling the gap left by changing diets. Ingredients used also for technical purposes such as the stabilisation or thickening of foods can offer an additional valuable source of fibre. Ingredient manufacturers seek to retain the functional benefits of fibre rich ingredients, but remove those characteristics e.g. roughness that may not appeal to consumers. This can improve the quality of the products, while enhancing their nutritional content.

- **Replacing less healthy alternatives**

The causes of overweight and obesity are manifold: a balanced diet is part of the solution to tackle the challenge. Ingredients manufacturers seek to introduce ingredients into a wide range of food products that can contribute to reducing body fat mass. The challenge for manufacturers is to ensure that, in order to have a significant impact on obesity, the ingredients are sufficiently versatile and palatable to be used in a wide range of food products. For example low calorie sweeteners combined with bulk sweeteners help replace sugar in sweet tasting foods; fibres and low calorie fats can be used as a fat replacer.

- **Combating allergies**

Allergies and intolerances such as coeliac disease (intolerance to gluten), can limit food choice and lead to unbalanced diets. Ingredients manufacturers strive to find novel ingredients which can ensure the normal appearance, characteristics and health benefits of foods, but remove the allergenic properties. Novel approaches involving prebiotics and probiotics and alternative protein sources are now emerging, but developing adequate replacements for wheat and rye flour remains a major challenge.

The European specialty food ingredients industries spent in average € 2 billion on R&D every year. They do have the potential to develop innovative ingredients in order to increasingly contribute to healthier diets and healthy ageing in future.

June 2014

EU Specialty Food Ingredients represents a united voice for the specialty food ingredients industry on scientific, technical and regulatory issues relating to food products in Europe. It is our aim to ensure that all stakeholders - from manufacturers and retailers to regulatory authorities and consumers - are correctly informed of the use, safety and benefits of specialty food ingredients. In total, more than 200 international and national food ingredients companies are currently involved in the Federation's activities through direct membership or an association. 3-8% of EU specialty food ingredients manufacturers' turnover is dedicated to research and development.

EU Specialty Food Ingredients' Identification number in the Transparency Register: 6160532422-38

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