NFFOODS Spectrum
perspectives on food technologies & business
ASIA

Consumers open to â??Healthier Product Reformulation in Thailandâ??

19 June 2019 | News

According to a new report by Food Industry Asia (FIA) and research firm IGD, almost all consumers in Thailand (99%) are interested in improving their diets and a majority (82%) are happy for products to be reformulated, provided that taste is not compromised.



The industryâ??s efforts are in sync with consumersâ?? perception of receptiveness towards reformulated products

According to a new report by Food Industry Asia (FIA) and research firm IGD, almost all consumers in Thailand (99%) are interested in improving their diets and a majority (82%) are happy for products to be reformulated, provided that taste is not compromised.

The first of its kind in Thailand, the report titled ‘Healthier Product Reformulation in Thailand’ surveyed both consumers and food and beverage (F&B) businesses to better understand industry efforts on delivering improved nutrition through reformulation, as well as consumer behaviours and perceptions of products that have been tweaked to become healthier.

Thailand is facing a double burden of malnutrition, leading to a rise in obesity and non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes and heart diseases, now the top cause of death among Thais. In light of this, the Thai government and food industry have been actively working to improve the health of its population with efforts ranging from the clear display of nutrition information to physical activity action plans. However, the report also highlighted that reformulation can provide significant support in this area without relying on the change of consumer behaviours.

Matthew Kovac, Executive Director, FIA, said, “Thai food companies have been supporting the national health agenda through greater product innovation – 88% of companies surveyed have embarked on reformulation to improve the nutritional value of their products and 5% have already completed their plans, thus bringing about positive changes to the landscape in Thailand.”

The industry’s efforts are in sync with consumers’ perception of receptiveness towards reformulated products as 8 in 10 agree that companies should be actively working on this. However, consumers remain unwilling to compromise on taste for health benefits, with 82% of respondents indicating that they are willing to accept reformulated products if companies can retain the existing flavour profile.

As a result of the increased demand for healthier products, there is a strong commercial incentive for companies to invest in reformulation. However, the report also found that more can be done in conjunction with the government as 82% of companies felt that greater fiscal incentives would help to encourage R&D activities.

“In order for us to accelerate the industry’s efforts, multi-stakeholder collaborations will be crucial in driving greater R&D activities for new product development and reformulation,” Mr Kovac added.

Susan Barratt, Chief Executive, IGD, said, “At IGD, we work closely with industry players to help them meet the needs of the public through our research and best practice. The results of our recent joint study with FIA highlight the importance of health to Thai consumers, who are calling on companies to play a part through their reformulation efforts.

“We believe there is a substantial opportunity to enhance healthier product development and address key challenges facing the industry. The research provides insights into how the industry and government can work together to achieve this, and I look forward to seeing how they can inspire change among consumers.”

The report also found that:

- Consumers are paying greater attention to the quality and taste of products: 94% of respondents indicated that the quality of products was important when selecting food and beverages, while 80% felt that taste was crucial. The clear display of nutritional information on packaging (83%) was also featured as one of the top 3 drivers of product choice.

- The industry’s reformulation agenda has shifted: While F&B companies previously focused on the removal of trans-fats and reduction of calories, current efforts are now geared toward salt and cholesterol reduction, removal of artificial colours/flavours/preservatives followed by the addition of fibre, vitamins and minerals.

- Maintaining product taste was identified as the top reformulation challenge: While the challenges for different nutrients may vary, maintaining the taste profile of products and budget limitations emerged as the top concerns for businesses. Consumer acceptability was also identified as a key challenge for the industry.