

Indian consumers keen on healthier diet but without compromising on taste

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A new study by Food Industry Asia (FIA) and research firm IGD has found that a majority of consumers in India (99%) are interested in adopting a healthy diet while more than eight in 10 (83%) are happy for products to be reformulated as long as the product remains tasty.



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Launched at the 12th FICCI Food World 2019 in Mumbai last week, the report titled ‘Healthier Product Reformulation in India’, 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.

India faces a double burden of malnutrition with high rates of undernutrition coexisting alongside rising rates of obesity and non-communicable diseases (NCDs). In light of this, the government has launched various national nutrition programmes such as the ‘Eat Right Movement’. The food industry has been supportive of such initiatives, with more than half (55%) of companies having committed to the ‘Eat Right India’ pledge, and an additional 32% planning to join the pledge to improve public health by nudging healthier eating behaviours.

Matthew Kovac, Executive Director, FIA, said, “Food companies in India have taken great strides in reformulating their products to encourage healthier diets. Our report revealed that 92% of companies have completed, started or are planning to embark on their reformulation journey, and 81% of them are driven to reformulate to improve public health in India.”

While a vast majority of companies recognise the industry's role in driving consumer choices by providing healthier products, more can be done with the support of the government to further the current efforts. The report indicated that 73% of companies felt that greater fiscal incentives from the government would accelerate research and development (R&D) activities for new product development and reformulation.

"With 90% of companies conducting their R&D in India, government support can go a long way in accelerating the industry's reformulation efforts," Mr Kovac added.

Susan Barratt, Chief Executive Officer of IGD, said, "At IGD, we work closely with the F&B industry 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 consumers and the industry in India. The majority of consumers are keen to adopt a healthy diet and the industry's reformulation efforts can play a part in supporting this.

"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 the landscape transforms in the future."

The report also found that:

- **Consumers are paying more 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 83% chose taste as the key driver influencing their purchase decision. The clear display of nutritional information on pack (81%) was also one of the top three drivers of product choice.
- **Reformulation priorities are shifting:** While the industry has previously focused on the fortification of vitamins and minerals as well as increasing protein, efforts are now centred on the removal of artificial colours, flavours and preservatives, followed by the reduction of saturated fat, removal of allergens and sugar reduction.
- **Consumer acceptability was identified as the top reformulation challenge:** While the challenges for different nutrients may vary, consumer acceptability and maintaining the taste profile of products emerged as the top concerns for companies. Budget limitation and shelf life were also identified as key challenges for the industry.