

Natural colour, global impact: GNT helps shape China's new food colour standard

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As consumer demand for clean-label and plant-based food solutions continues to rise globally, regulatory clarity is becoming increasingly essential. China has recently made a significant move by officially implementing a new Industry Standard for Colouring Foods, transforming what was previously a voluntary guideline into a legally recognised benchmark. This significant development brings consistency and transparency to the market, representing a crucial step forward in promoting natural alternatives to synthetic food colours.

To explore the broader implications of this regulatory shift, NUFFOODS Spectrum speaks with Daniela Brahushi, a Regulatory Affairs expert at GNT Group, a global leader in plant-based colour solutions through its EXBERRY product range. With a legacy of advocating for Colouring Foods since 1978, GNT has played a pivotal role in shaping the new standard alongside China's CNFIA and MIIT. In this exclusive interview, Brahushi shares insights on how the regulation aligns with GNT's clean-label mission, the differences between Colouring Foods and other natural colourants, and what this milestone could mean for global food and beverage markets.

What is the core significance of China's new industry standard for colouring foods, and how does it reflect GNT's long-standing commitment to clean-label colour solutions?

There are already clear guidelines for Colouring Foods in the EU and many other parts of the world. In India, for example, the FSSAI implemented an official standard in 2021. However, that's not yet the case for all countries.

In China, the food and beverage industry had been relying on a voluntary Group Standard for Colouring Foods since 2017. The new Industry Standard now means it has official industry endorsement and it applies to Colouring Foods' production, inspection and sale across China. We're delighted that it's now been implemented as it provides legal certainty for stakeholders and we expect it to help Colouring Foods to increase their momentum across the country.

Considering GNT's pioneering work with Colouring Foods since 1978, could you share details on how your team collaborated with CNFIA and MIIT to shape this new standard?

The CNFIA and MIIT developed the industry standard together with experts and relevant stakeholders, including GNT, due to our decades-long expertise in Colouring Foods. As global leaders in Colouring Foods, we frequently work to support global regulatory developments to help allow both manufacturers and consumers to benefit from their use.

In what key ways do the physical processing requirements of the standard distinguish Colouring Foods from other natural colourants available in the market?

Many natural colours are made by separating and selectively extracting the pigments from the raw materials, which can involve the use of organic solvents. Colouring Foods are edible concentrates that retain the colour, aromatic and nutritional qualities of their raw materials as they're made using only physical methods such as chopping, grinding and heating. They're based on the concept of colouring food with food and can be eaten by the spoonful.

Could you explain the advantages for both manufacturers and consumers resulting from the classification of colouring foods as 'ingredients' rather than 'additives'?

Colouring Foods might be listed as "carrot colouring ingredient" for a colour with a single source or "colouring ingredient (carrot, pumpkin, blueberry)" for those with several raw materials. In contrast, colour additives must be labelled with the function "colour" and the name of the food additive or the INS number. For example, "colour: INS No. 120" or "colour: carmine". Colouring Food ingredients allow for simpler label declarations that help give consumers confidence that the products are natural and safe.

Did GNT face any specific challenges in ensuring the EXBERRY product range aligned with the new regulatory expectations in China?

The Chinese standard covers colours made from edible fruits, vegetables, plants or algae using physical processing methods and that meet various technical and safety requirements. This means we can already offer a complete spectrum of EXBERRY Colouring Foods that support the new standard.

Looking forward, what impact do you foresee this regulatory clarity having on the broader adoption of plant-based colour solutions in other markets worldwide?

We believe it's important to promote clear regulatory standards that empower consumers to make positive choices. China has become the latest country to take a significant step forward in providing both manufacturers and consumers with the clarity they need. The Chinese market has vast potential and this is another big milestone in helping Colouring Foods to achieve widespread global adoption. Â Â

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