

New Soy Heart Health Claim Opens Growth Opportunities in Australia and New Zealand

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Will McNair, Director of Soy Foods, Oil, and Global Team Development at the U.S. Soybean Export Council



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With food and beverage manufacturers increasingly focused on delivering products that combine nutrition, functionality, and consumer appeal, soy protein is gaining renewed attention as a scientifically backed ingredient for heart health. The recent approval of a new general-level soy heart health claim in Australia and New Zealand marks a significant milestone for the global soy industry, opening fresh opportunities for manufacturers to position soy-based products as credible, heart-healthy options in a rapidly evolving plant-based nutrition market.

In this interview with NUFFOODS Spectrum, Will McNair, Director of Soy Foods, Oil, and Global Team Development at the U.S. Soybean Export Council, discusses the significance of this regulatory development, the science underpinning soy protein's cardiovascular benefits, and how it aligns with global consumer demand for plant-based, functional, and heart-healthy nutrition solutions. He also shares how the council, alongside Soy Nutrition Institute Global, plans to drive awareness and support innovation across the soy value chain.

What is the significance of the newly approved general-level soy heart health claim for the food and nutrition industry in Australia and New Zealand?

Recognition of this new general-level soy heart health claim required the submission of robust scientific support and adds to the growing global recognition of soy's heart health benefits. Food and supplement manufacturers of qualifying products across Australia and New Zealand can include the heart health claim language on food labels, including on the front of the package, and in marketing materials.Â Â Â Â

How do you expect this claim to influence consumer perception and adoption of soy-based foods and beverages in these markets?

We expect the claim to boost the recognition that soy foods and ingredients offer high-quality protein that is a healthy addition to the diet. Soy is a staple food across Asia, and this new soy protein health claim can encourage higher adoption of soy in markets like Australia and New Zealand.Â Seeing a health claim on a package will assure consumers they're making a smart choice and one that is backed by science. Â

Can you elaborate on the scientific evidence supporting soy protein's role in cholesterol management and heart health?

Evidence published over the past four decades shows that soy protein lowers blood cholesterol levels. Throughout this period, the effect of soy protein on cholesterol was statistically significant. More recent research has highlighted soy's broader cardiovascular benefits. For example, soy consumption has been linked to improved blood vessel function and reductions in inflammatory markers, both important in managing long-term heart health.

What opportunities does this development create for food manufacturers, particularly in plant-based, functional, and fortified beverage categories?

Soy is currently one of the only plant proteins recognised with a general health claim for its heart health benefits. Soy is also one of the few "high-quality" plant proteins, meaning it contains all 9 essential amino acids in amounts required by the body. These functional and nutritional benefits give food and supplement manufacturers the unique opportunity to label and market their qualifying soy products as "heart-healthy." It is a real point of differentiation, especially considering the rise in demand for protein among all types of consumers.Â Manufacturers of soy-based high-protein beverages, dairy alternatives, nutrition bars, snacks, cereals, and other plant-based foods may benefit from the use of the claim.

How does this approval align with global trends in plant-based nutrition and the demand for heart-healthy solutions?

Over half of global consumers are seeking to add protein into their diets, according to Innova Market Insights's Global Protein Trends report. Interest in plant-based nutrition has been trending for over a decade. As people seek to add protein to their diets, they're looking to add protein-rich snacks such as meal replacement bars and beverages, most of which can be formulated with soy protein ingredients.

According to Innova, consumers are adopting a more positive approach to food, focusing on the nutritional value of products and functional ingredients that will enhance nutrition. Health claims such as "heart-healthy" can be strong indicators that a product is not only healthy but also brings nutritional or wellness value. Sustainability is also a trending global priority, and U.S. soybeans are the most sustainable in the world. In fact, USSEC's "Sustainable U.S. Soy" label is now used on over 1,200 products across 22 countries.

What strategies are the U.S. Soybean Export Council and Soy Nutrition Institute Global planning to adopt to promote awareness of soy protein in light of this new claim?

The U.S. Soybean Export Council and the Soy Nutrition Institute Global are sharing the news via their websites, social channels and contacts in the food space. We hope that expanding awareness about this new claim and the supportive science behind it may raise interest and help other countries and their food manufacturers benefit from soy protein. We are also working with Dietitian Connections in AU to educate health professionals about the scientific support for the new claim. Additionally, the organisations are sharing the news about the claim with health professionals who are part of the SNI Global network, member partners, and stakeholders along the soy supply chain, from growers, exporters, importers, and international companies and customers.Â

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