

China's Regulatory Shift Opens New Opportunities for Colouring Foods

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As consumer demand for clean-label, naturally derived ingredients continues to reshape the global food and beverage industry, natural colours are emerging as a key area of innovation. China, one of the world's largest and fastest-evolving food markets, is witnessing growing interest in plant-based colouring solutions, driven by changing consumer preferences, supportive regulatory developments, and increasing focus on health and transparency.

Against this backdrop, GNT Group, a global leader in plant-based colouring solutions, has strengthened its presence in China with the launch of its first dedicated office and application laboratory in Shanghai. The move marks a significant milestone in the company's long-term growth strategy for the region and underscores its commitment to supporting local manufacturers with tailored technical expertise and faster innovation capabilities.

In this exclusive interaction with NUFFOODS Spectrum, Andreas Thiede, APAC General Manager, GNT Group, discusses the strategic rationale behind the company's expansion in China, the opportunities created by the country's evolving regulatory framework for Colouring Foods, key market trends driving demand for natural colours, and the future outlook for clean-label food and beverage products across the Asia-Pacific region.

Strategic Expansion into China: What strategic factors influenced GNT Group's decision to establish its first dedicated office and application lab in Shanghai, and how does this align with your long-term growth plans in China?

GNT is one of the world's leading natural colour brands. Our EXBERRY colours are all made from non-GMO fruit, vegetables, and plants. They can deliver bright, stable shades in almost any food and beverage application and allow for clean and clear label declarations.

We're hugely excited to be stepping up our operations in China now. It's one of the most dynamic and demanding markets globally, and its food and drink industry is huge.

Our timing was influenced by both consumer demand and regulatory changes. Chinese consumers increasingly look for natural ingredients in their food and drink, and Government initiatives such as 'Healthy China 2030' are helping to accelerate that shift.

To succeed in this market, though, we know that we not only have to deliver quality plant-based colours but also speed. China's manufacturers move fast – and that means we have to be able to respond fast. Our Shanghai office and application lab will bring us closer to our customers, allowing us to react quickly and ensure our EXBERRY colour solutions deliver on their highest expectations.

Clean-Label Opportunity in China: With China's new classification of colouring foods, how do EXBERRY solutions fit into the country's evolving regulatory and consumer landscape around clean-label and natural ingredients?

We offer a complete spectrum of concentrates that are classified as Colouring Foods under China's new industry standard. That means they qualify for clean and clear label declarations such as 'concentrated vegetable juice (carrot)' or 'turmeric colouring ingredient'.

Our founder was responsible for coining the term 'Colouring Foods' – it describes colour concentrates made from edible fruits, vegetables and plants using physical processing methods. Because they're based on the concept of colouring food with food, they make it easy for consumers to understand where the colours come from and how they're made.

We helped introduce Colouring Foods to the Chinese industry and have collaborated with local authorities in China to bring about more transparent regulation on their use.

Role of Localised Application Support: How will the new application laboratory enhance collaboration with Chinese food and beverage manufacturers, particularly in terms of product innovation, formulation, and speed-to-market?

Local application support brings local expertise. Manufacturing processes and storage environments can vary across countries, and it's the same for consumer preferences. Having a dedicated Chinese team in place helps us understand these factors and deliver tailored solutions.

The physical proximity of our team is another important advantage. We can share information through local communication channels and deliver our application insights and solutions more quickly.

The lab will also enable more face-to-face meetings with customers and prospects, and that's crucial in Chinese business culture. It's a collaborative space where we can educate customers about EXBERRY as well as brainstorm new concept ideas together.

Market Trends Driving Demand: What key trends are you observing in China's food and beverage sector that are accelerating the demand for plant-based and naturally derived colours?

There's been a clear shift toward more conscious consumption across China's food and beverage market. Consumers are paying closer attention to ingredient lists and increasingly associate natural, recognisable ingredients with quality, safety, and wellness. This is driving strong momentum for plant-based, naturally derived colours.

We also see strong growth in premiumisation and product storytelling, where brands want colours that support a clean label positioning while reinforcing authenticity, natural origins and cultural relevance.

Together, these trends are accelerating the adoption of Colouring Foods, particularly in categories such as beverages, dairy alternatives, confectionery, and modern snacks.

Technical Challenges & Solutions: Natural colours often come with formulation and stability challenges. How is GNT supporting manufacturers in China to achieve vibrant, stable shades across diverse applications?

Achieving consistent, vibrant colour performance with plant-based colours requires both technical expertise and a deep understanding of specific applications. At GNT, we support manufacturers through a combination of application know-how, robust ingredient portfolios, and close local collaboration.

Our EXBERRY Colouring Foods are produced from carefully selected fruits, vegetables, and plants using gentle physical processing, resulting in stable performance across many applications.

Beyond the ingredient itself, our local technical team in China works directly with customers on formulation optimisation, addressing challenges such as heat treatment, pH variation, and light exposure to ensure successful results throughout the shelf life.

With the opening of our China office and application lab, we can now provide faster, hands-on support, trials and application guidance tailored to Chinese production conditions. This allows our customers to confidently develop clean-label products while still achieving excellent colour intensity and consistency.

Future Outlook for Natural Colours in APAC: Looking ahead, how do you see the adoption of colouring foods evolving across China and the wider Asia-Pacific region, and what role will GNT play in shaping this transition?

Colouring Foods have a huge appeal for consumers worldwide because the concept is very easy to understand and is naturally very appealing. We've seen important growth across the APAC region over a number of years now, and that's been supported by evolving regulations that help consumer understanding. In India, for example, the FSSAI introduced new regulations for Colouring Foods a few years ago. We're seeing the industry respond to that by offering colourful products with clean and clear labels.

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