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Why Taste and Digestibility Matter in the Next Phase of Protein Innovation

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Alternative protein sources, gut health, product digestibility and flavour are shaping the next phase of category development



Amit Monteiro, CEO of Happy Cultures

Protein is steadily moving beyond the traditional sports nutrition and fitness segments to become an integral part of everyday diets among Indian consumers. Growing health awareness, changing food habits and demand for convenient nutritional solutions are driving innovation across the protein and functional nutrition market. At the same time, alternative protein sources, gut health, product digestibility and flavour are shaping the next phase of category development. As consumers increasingly seek science-backed products that combine nutritional value with taste and accessibility, brands are exploring new formats and distribution channels to expand their reach. In this interview with NUFFOODS Spectrum Asia, Amit Monteiro, CEO of Happy Cultures, discusses the evolving protein consumption landscape in India, the growing

acceptance of yeast and plant-based proteins, opportunities in Tier 2 and Tier 3 markets, the influence of quick commerce and the role of scientific innovation in building consumer trust in the wellness industry.

Protein is increasingly moving beyond the traditional fitness and sports-nutrition segment. What is driving the shift towards protein as an everyday nutrition habit among Indian consumers, and how is this changing product development?

Protein is increasingly becoming a part of everyday nutrition rather than being limited to just fitness enthusiasts and athletes. As Indian consumers are becoming more aware of their health, they are actively looking at nutrition, with a greater focus on prevention, balanced diets and long-term well-being. At the same time, busy lifestyles and changing food habits have made it important to find convenient ways to meet daily nutritional needs.

At Happy Cultures, we believe protein should be accessible and enjoyable for everyone. This shift is also changing how protein products are developed. Consumers are looking beyond traditional protein powders for options that fit naturally into their everyday lives. These can be a snack, a quick breakfast or an easy nutritional addition to their routine. This is creating opportunities to explore different formats, plant-based and alternative protein sources, and flavours that make protein more appealing to a wider audience.

Our focus is on making protein easier to incorporate into daily diets by combining nutritional value with taste, convenience and accessibility. We believe that protein becomes enjoyable and easy to consume.

Happy Cultures has expanded from probiotics and microbiome-led wellness into yeast protein, plant protein, and targeted supplements. How are consumer expectations around alternative proteins evolving, particularly in terms of taste, digestibility, nutritional quality, and convenience?

Consumer expectations around alternative proteins are evolving beyond just protein content. Today, people are looking for products that offer good nutritional value, are easy to digest, taste good and fit conveniently into their daily routines. At Happy Cultures, our journey from probiotics and microbiome-led wellness into yeast protein, plant-based protein and targeted supplements reflects our focus on addressing these changing needs through science-led nutrition. One of the biggest barriers to regular protein consumption is taste. Our research and product development efforts have therefore focused on creating great-tasting protein products without compromising on nutritional quality, digestibility or convenience, making protein something people enjoy consuming rather than simply adding to their diet out of necessity.

We also encourage consumers to use the LIGHT framework when choosing a protein powder: **L for Less ingredients, I for Independent lab testing, G for Gut-friendly, H for High-quality protein, and T for Taste.** These are important considerations when evaluating a protein product, as consumers should be able to make informed choices about what they include in their daily diets.

With Happy Cultures now reaching consumers across Tier 2 and Tier 3 markets, what differences are you seeing in nutrition and wellness adoption beyond the major metros? What will be required to make protein and functional nutrition more accessible across India?

We are seeing nutrition and wellness become increasingly relevant beyond the major metros, with consumers in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities showing greater interest in taking care of their health and making more informed food choices. The opportunity now is to make quality nutrition easier to understand, afford and access. Protein, in particular, needs to move beyond being seen as a product only for fitness enthusiasts and become a part of everyday diets.

Wider distribution, consumer education and products that offer good nutritional value, taste and convenience at accessible prices will be key to this shift. The growth of quick commerce is also helping bridge the availability gap by bringing products closer to consumers in smaller cities and towns.

Festive periods often bring a tension between indulgence and healthy eating. What opportunities do you see for protein and wellness brands to create products and consumption occasions that allow consumers to balance celebration with their nutritional goals?

We believe festive eating and mindful nutrition can go hand in hand. Consumers should be able to enjoy their favourite festive foods while remaining mindful of their nutritional needs. We have been seeing customers experiment with recipes that incorporate protein- and fibre-rich ingredients into traditional dishes, showing how nutrition can become part of familiar food habits.

At Happy Cultures, we are also exploring flavours that appeal to Indian taste preferences, such as Kesar Pista and our Dubai Kunafa-inspired yeast protein, to make daily protein consumption more enjoyable. These products can also serve as thoughtful gifting options for friends and family who are conscious about their health and wellness. We see an opportunity for protein and wellness brands to bring together taste, nutrition and convenience through products that fit naturally into festive celebrations, allowing consumers to indulge while staying mindful of their overall well-being.

Quick commerce now contributes around 40 percent of Happy Cultures' revenue, alongside marketplaces and your own website. How is the rise of quick commerce changing the way consumers discover, evaluate, and purchase protein and wellness products?

Quick commerce is making protein and wellness products more accessible by allowing consumers to purchase them whenever they need them, with delivery times as low as 10 minutes. This is changing consumption habits, as people can now easily add a protein bar, a supplement or other nutrition products to their daily routine without having to plan their purchases in advance. While marketplaces such as Amazon and Flipkart help consumers discover brands and compare products, a brand's own website plays an important role in helping them understand the ingredients, benefits and science behind the products.

At Happy Cultures, we see these channels working together, with quick commerce adding convenience and immediacy to the purchase journey. As consumers become more familiar with protein and wellness products, the combination of easy availability, product information and convenience can help make daily nutrition a more regular habit.

As India's wellness market becomes increasingly crowded and consumers become more informed, what do you believe will differentiate successful nutrition brands over the next three to five years, particularly regarding scientific formulation, consumer education, innovation, and measurable health outcomes?

The next phase of India's wellness market will be shaped by how well brands can back up their promises with evidence. Consumers are no longer looking at claims alone. They want to understand what goes into a product, why particular ingredients are used and what benefits they can reasonably expect. For nutrition brands, this means investing in research-led formulation, being transparent about ingredients and avoiding exaggerated claims. Education will be just as important as innovation, helping people make informed choices rather than simply follow trends.

We also need to look beyond launching new products and focus on whether they address genuine consumer needs and deliver the intended benefits when used as directed. At Happy Cultures, we believe the brands that can bring together credible science, meaningful innovation and measurable results will be better placed to earn consumer trust over the long term.