



## THE WELLNESS REPORT

# RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Top-selling functional beverages are more than a simple mix of ingredients • BY RAM CHAUDHARI

Crowded shelves and the continued onslaught of new product introductions present functional beverage marketing and R&D professionals with a daunting task – how to make their beverage products stand out. These days a growing number of manufacturers are looking to differentiate their products by addressing health concerns through fortification, specifically by combining multiple ingredients into drinks. This trend is fuelling the emergence of many new drink categories to serve specific demographic audiences and to address health concerns.

The functional beverage category continues to generate new and exciting concepts, such as energy and functional drinks with value-added ingredients. Many of these ingredients, particularly antioxidants, B-complex vitamins, minerals and herbal extracts, are now available to meet specific needs of beverage manufacturers. However, developing a drink goes beyond adding a few functional ingredients and mixing them up. Formulation concepts, ingredient selection, processing, packaging and test marketing are all key to creating

a quality product that is stable and tastes good.

A beverage concept is defined in terms of target population and a particular nutritional profile, such as meal-replacement drinks, soft drinks, juice-based blends, sports/performance drinks, flavoured coffees and teas, and pre- and probiotic drinks and dairy beverages. The acceptability of a product is an important predictor of product success in the marketplace. However, it's a subjective process, as acceptability can change according to the targeted consumer. For example, meal replacement drinks should be palatable to someone on a liquid diet, but not as pleasurable as a sugar-laden, fruit-flavoured tea or energy beverage aimed at younger consumers.

The speed of product innovation and new product introduction has significantly increased as functional drinks have become more mainstream. Even with fast track product development, many companies are using ingredients that have a scientific foundation and a strong safety record to back them up rather than using “ingredients of the moment.” This is in part because consumers are demanding that the products they buy actually deliver on health claims. Examples of high-demand ingredients being used in drink formulation are taurine, caffeine, antioxidants, lycopene, pre/probiotics, whey protein isolates containing branched chain amino acids and botanical extracts.

So how should a manufacturer approach drink formulation, considering today's needs? Start by prioritizing the benefit of a particular ingredient in a given beverage. To be credible, a drink should offer a minimum concentration of active components to ensure a measurable benefit. It's also easy to focus on active ingredients and overlook the importance of the underlying foundation properties of the drink. Many of the active ingredients contribute metallic or bitter flavours. Therefore acidity, saltiness and sweetness should be carefully balanced to optimize a drink's taste and flavour profile. Despite the quest for functionality, the single greatest predictor of a new drink's success is taste, not its functional ingredients.

When identifying ingredients, it's also important to consider usage of multi-functional ingredients. For example, sugar functions as both a sweetener, osmotic-balancing agent and energy source. Similarly, glycerol is a sweetener, energy source, osmotic-balancing agent and muscle dehydration preservative. Phosphate salts contribute free phosphate molecules, isotonic balance and buffer acid important for microbial and colour stability and flavour release.

By working closely with an ingredients supplier manufacturers can develop the appropriate custom nutrient system to differentiate their product, while meeting label claims, formulation challenges and processing requirements. Through rigorous testing and collaboration, it is possible to determine and manufacture the correct premix combination for a broad range of drink products and troubleshoot any nutrient application for optimum success. [FC]

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