

Concept Testing U.S. Dairy Protein Snacks



OBJECTIVES

- Conduct consumer research to gain an outside-in perspective on local-friendly new product concepts developed by the U.S. Dairy Export Council in Southeast Asia.
- Utilize the research findings to pinpoint best prospect ideas and areas for future improvement in developing winning product positions and messaging.

METHODOLOGY

Our research partner, BASES NielsenIQ Singapore, conducted an online quantitative idea testing research in 2021 among n=1,600 adult consumers in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand. The sample was composed of key decision makers for grocery purchases from mid- to high-income urban households. Other criteria considered included age, gender, city, health consciousness and parenthood status. Consumer feedback is based on product images and descriptions; they did not taste the products.

KEY LEARNINGS

Nutritional Information Matters

Nutrition is one of the many components in a consumer's wellbeing journey, alongside hydration, exercise, vitamins, sleep and mental health. Nutritional information is a key influence in food and drink purchase decisions and is further dialed up among health-conscious consumers.

In Indonesia, 59% of those surveyed strongly agree that "nutrition information strongly influences what I buy."

We Eat First with Our Eyes

Although consumers read nutrition labels, product visuals matter, too. When asked to highlight concept likes and dislikes, consumers' reactions to images are included in many of the responses. This, analyzed together with open-ended comments, shows that images attract consumers and influence taste perceptions.

Comments from consumers include "Mouthwatering pictures" and "The photo is quite aesthetic and appealing."

The Health Benefits of Protein Rank High

The multipronged health benefits of consuming protein resonate strongly with consumers, who say that protein benefits that tie into their health goals include building and maintaining muscle for a healthy, active life; toned appearance; supporting children's growth needs; weight management and more.

Optimizing Long-Term Health Is Key

Topping the list of reasons why consumers try products containing whey proteins are its potential to reduce risk of chronic diseases, composition as a nutritionally high-quality complete protein and ability to be easily absorbed by the body.

In Singapore, 76% of respondents state that they are likely to buy a product containing whey protein, which some felt can help reduce the risk of chronic disease.

Emphasize the Core, But Don't Forget the Rest

The benefit of higher protein content is attractive, with 40–50% of consumers stating this is something they seek when looking for healthier snack options. Consumers evaluate a product in its entirety and are especially sensitized to sugar content claims. Low sugar content and natural ingredients are the top benefits they seek from healthier snack options.

In Thailand, 41% of surveyed consumers state that higher protein content is one of the top three benefits they look for in healthier snacks.

PRODUCT CONCEPT HIGHLIGHTS

High Protein Mango Pudding

Purchase appeal is high for this mango dessert, whose benefits include quality dairy protein and reduced sugar—although consumers want more details on the reduced sugar aspect.

One respondent said, “Puddings with protein. Eat dessert without feeling guilty.”

In Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia, more than 90% of consumers express a willingness to purchase high-protein mango pudding.

Crunchy Protein Mocha Bar

Dairy protein, chocolate, mocha and almonds make this a winning combination. Some suggest offering a caffeine-free variant to make it kid-friendly.

One person surveyed said, “Good to have something to provide energy and promote healthy snacking.”

In Indonesia, 89% of those surveyed state that they need/want a product like crunchy protein mocha bars.

In Malaysia, 88% believe this product can deliver on its claims.

Longan Goji Berry Protein Bar/Ball

This product's combination of nutritional ingredients drives consumer appeal. In Singapore, the combination of ingredients accounts for 57% of product likes. While the addition of dried fruits is mostly a plus, concern regarding sugar content does come up, reflecting an opportunity to explore reduced sugar options.

“I like the taste of longan and goji berry. The combination makes me think of delicious Chinese herbal soup. I believe it will be beneficial to my health.”

Spicy Mango Protein Chewy

This bite-sized treat performs high on uniqueness. The surprising flavor combination has polarizing reactions, with some excited to try it and others unsure if the pairing works without trying it.

Reactions ranged from “Stimulates the taste buds plus added protein—sounds delicious,” to “Will the mango and chili flavors go well together or not?”

In Thailand, 81% of those surveyed find the spicy mango protein chewy “Extremely/Very New and Different.”

Protein Matcha Azuki Mooncake

The unexpected pairing of protein in a mooncake with trendy ingredients evokes curiosity. What's more, the possibility to produce the product as bon-bons, featured in the product visual, showed interest as a bite-sized treat. However, the term azuki is not very familiar in Indonesia and Malaysia, so it would need to be clearly explained that it refers to red beans.

Comments ranged from “Natural sweetness and whey protein make it full and healthy,” to “Azuki paste feels foreign to my ears—I don't know what it is.”



The appeal for the other ready-to-eat snacks stems from different aspects. Consumers liked **Matcha Protein Crisps** because of their energy-boosting appeal and texture. Despite concerns about sugar, the Gula Melaka in **Sesame Protein Crisps** generates excitement. Satiety and weight management benefits are the key appeal for **Milk Tea Protein Bites**, especially in Thailand. And the portability of individually packaged portions is a bonus.

One person surveyed said that milk tea protein bites offer “a mixture of protein and milk tea, making them suitable for the elderly and for those who want to control weight.”

The study also evaluated two protein-fortified variations of traditional comfort foods: **High Protein Instant Chicken Mushroom Rice Porridge** and **Instant Purple Yam Protein Dessert**. Consumers appreciated the ease of preparation, protein health benefits and lower sodium content. The purple yam dessert resonated as a late-night snack with two-thirds of those surveyed in Malaysia interested in purchasing it.

One person surveyed said, “You had me at late night food! I love snacking before I hit the sack, and this looks like something that I'd likely go for.”

IMPLICATIONS

- Products fortified with U.S. dairy proteins show promise for consumer interest and acceptance in Southeast Asia. Pairing whey and milk proteins with other naturally healthy ingredients—especially those that keep sugar content low—has great potential for success.
- Convenience-driven, protein boosted snacks, including options that offer bite-size portions and on-the-go portability, can tap into unmet consumer needs. There are many possibilities for innovation with U.S. dairy proteins, as demonstrated by consumer responses to the varied product formats, ingredients and flavor combinations.

Looking for more insights and information about U.S. dairy ingredients?

Please visit our website or contact USDEC Southeast Asia.



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