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#ISMingredients #ISM #ISMfamily

ISM Ingredients 2026: Meet the challenges of the sweets and snacks industry with sustainable raw materials and innovative ingredients

New trade fair format places the focus on ingredients. Exhibitors will present solutions for more resilience and sustainability.

The world of sweets and snacks is innovative, colourful - and full of challenges. Because the preferences of the consumers and the latest developments on the raw materials markets are questioning established industry processes. Together with ProSweets Cologne and ISM, ISM Ingredients is presenting itself as the biggest global meeting point of the sweets and snacks sector from 1 to 4 February 2026. From individual recipes through to market success: The solutions presented at the Cologne fair grounds range from innovative and sustainable ingredients, the development of alternative raw materials, through to resource-saving processes.

Fruity or chocolatey? Soft or crunchy? Product developers are faced with a host of challenges, when it comes down to creating individual sweets and snacks. On top of that, the consumers are increasingly opting for natural alternatives as snacks. Sweet flavours are also becoming increasingly popular according to Innova Market Insights. Based on advanced extraction processes, a variety of natural, sustainable and E-number-free fruit flavours are available to help brand owners reformulate without compromising on taste. Recent advances in natural colours and flavours are enabling confectionery and snack producers to create brighter colours and more intense flavours using ingredients of natural origin. Colouring concentrates are at the heart of potential clean label positioning. They are obtained from a variety of plant-based raw materials such as vegetables or fruits with colouring properties.

Reformulation as a technological challenge The exhibitors of ProSweets Cologne are putting the current trends into practice by enabling the sweets manufacturers to pick up on their customers' wishes and needs regarding product development with innovative technologies and tailor-made solutions. "Whereby it is not purely about the visual appeal, but about products that excel with their enjoyable taste, irresistible textures and healthy ingredients," said Guido Hentschke, Director of ISM Ingredients and Pro Sweets Cologne. More and more sugar-free or sugar-reduced and fat or salt-free and salt-reduced sweets and snacks are reaching the shelves of the supermarkets. "Here the reformulation of the recipes always proves to be a challenge, because one has to strike a balance between enjoyment and health aspects," stated Hentschke.

This is precisely where the portfolio of the ingredients specialists comes into play, who will be represented at ISM Ingredients at the beginning of February 2026.



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Whereas ProSweets Cologne will concentrate more strongly on the sections machines, systems, packaging solutions as well as food safety and quality, the new, eagerly awaited ISM Ingredients places the focus specifically on raw materials, functional ingredients and semi-finished products for the sweets and snacks industry. Freeze-dried fruit and vegetable products, plant-based proteins, fibre and ingredients for more taste, colour and texture. The wide assortment of exhibitors such as Brenntag, Döhler, Dreidoppel, Freeze-Dry Foods, GNT, Olam Food Ingredients, Sethness Roquette or SternEnzym enables a huge selection of different positionings at the point of sale. Here for example a growing number of products advertise that they contain less sugar.

Sweet, but with less sugar

But sugar doesn't just sweeten products. It also brings out the aroma, ensures a pleasant texture and improves the mouthfeel. It is thus always a particular hurdle reducing or actually replacing sugar in sweets and snacks. To compensate for the sweetness, the product developers optionally implement classic sweeteners such as agave syrup or coconut blossom sugar or raw materials like stevia - a calorie-free alternative of natural origin. Steviol glycosides that are extracted from the leaves of the stevia rebaudiana plant form the basis of the corresponding sweetener systems. They are around three times sweeter than sugar.

In Cologne, the exhibitors will demonstrate how sugar reduction and sugar replacement can work as holistic solutions. The ingredients manufacturers are also treading new paths by positioning fibre such as inulin, which is extracted from chicories or agaves, as a multifunctional ingredient, which both reduces the sugar content in sweets and snacks and can also improve intestinal health. In addition to this, natural aromas are implemented that round off the taste profile and enable new recipes to become a multisensory experience. Sugar boosters are available especially for sugar-reduced reformulations. The natural aromas give the product a "sweet kick" without having a negative effect on the texture or mouthfeel.

Natural rich colours and enjoyment

The sweet aromas are according to Innova Market Insights increasingly popular. Based on advanced extraction methods, a host of natural, sustainable and e-number-free fruit aromas are available that support the brand manufacturers with their reformulation - without compromising the taste. The latest progress with natural colourants and aromas enables sweets and snacks producers to create brighter colours and more intensive aromas using exclusively ingredients of natural origin. Food colouring products are the focus of possible clean label positionings. They are extracted from a range of plant-based raw materials like vegetables or fruits with dyeing characteristics.

Natural colour formulations that are individually tailor-made to suit the applications and manufacturing processes of the sweets and snacks industry will be on display at the Cologne fair grounds. Manufactured from natural ingredients, the comprehensive portfolio covers the entire colour spectrum and thus creates a connection between appearance and taste. Liquid concentrates extracted from violet sweet potatoes that are grown in compliance with EU and US organic standards and with the aid of physical processing methods are an example of this. The shade offers a bright pink

colour and is suitable for instance for applications with a low pH value like fruit gums, toffees and fruit preparations.

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Solutions for more resilience and sustainability

The climate change is also presenting the industry with challenges. Ongoing volatile markets as well as high raw material and energy prices continue to be a cause of concern for the companies, so that the focus is increasingly being placed on the sustainable production of sweets and snacks. The result of the latest disruptions: Environmentally-friendly, fair and resilient supply chains of for example cocoa and palm oil are gaining significance - a development that will be reflected at the Cologne fair grounds. Especially the price for cocoa, the basic material for all chocolate creations, is at an historic all-time high. Hentschke: "Many sweets manufacturers are currently seeking alternative ingredients that allow them to imitate the characteristic taste of chocolate for instance. Parallel to this, start-ups are stepping up their efforts to sustainably supply the industry with important ingredients."

With the strategic realignment of ProSweets Cologne and the introduction of ISM Ingredients, Koelnmesse GmbH is setting targeted new impulses in this future-oriented growth section. The new B2B platform presents the raw materials of the future and strengthens the Raw Materials and Ingredients section, which is becoming increasingly more important due to the rising prices and global challenges. The high demand in the early bird phase confirms the market's strong interest: Around 70% of the available exhibition space was already booked within the first eight weeks after the registration period began - a clear signal for the industry's confidence in the new trade fair format. Here innovative start-ups can present their solutions and engage in a dialogue with investors. In addition to the presentation of raw materials, semi-finished products and functional ingredients, ISM Ingredients also offers a congress and event format that will bring the suppliers and manufacturers together. The Ingredients special show is a further highlight in Hall 10.1, which is being organised in cooperation with the future agency, [Haute Innovation](#). Here forward-looking innovations from the sweets industry are presented - from functional food and new vegan products, through to creative start-up ideas for a sustainable future.

New paths on the cocoa front

Among the high-profile market players exhibiting at ISM Ingredients is Döhler. Together with the London-based start-up Nukoko, the Darmstadt-based ingredients supplier is currently developing a technology that mimics traditional cocoa fermentation to produce the characteristic chocolate flavors from fava beans. The goal of the collaboration is to scale up production from pilot scale to industrial scale. Using a patent-pending process, the fava beans are fermented similarly to classic cocoa beans and then roasted and ground into powder, which can be used to make baked goods, confectionery, and all kinds of desserts. In addition to the environmental benefits – such as up to 90% lower CO₂ emissions – this chocolate alternative promises around 40% less sugar and a higher content of proteins and dietary fiber.

"All these developments are signs of a growing awareness for the ecological and social impact of the production of sweets and snacks and accentuates how the

industry is reacting to the growing demand for sustainable and ethically manufactured products," said Guido Hentschke.

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From 1 to 4 February 2026, the trade fair trio comprising of ISM Ingredients, ProSweets Cologne and ISM will underline how important it is for the food industry to place the focus on sustainability.

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