Press release

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ISM Ingredients: New recipes for trusted indulgence

Sugar reduction, alternative raw materials and natural colours are transforming the product development of sweets and snacks.

Less sugar, more fibre, a wider range of raw materials and natural colours are extending the scope in the sweets and snacks development sector. To ensure the products deliver a convincing sensory experience and can be reliably processed, the ingredients have to complement each other perfectly. ISM Ingredients will bring suppliers and product developers together in Cologne from 31 January to 3 February 2027. The focus lies on ingredients and application concepts for the reformulation of established products as well as for new sweets and snacks concepts.

A crunchy biscuit, a piece of chocolate that melts in your mouth: Sweets offer moments of everyday indulgence - and modified recipes shouldn't change that either. At the same time, more and more consumers are seeking a more conscious approach to consumption. According to an analysis by Innova Market Insights published in August 2026, nearly one out of two people worldwide states that they are consuming less sugar to maintain a healthier diet. Whereby the manufacturers are combining the sugar reduction with increased fibre. Around every sixth new product in the food and beverage sector that claims to be low in sugar, sugar-free or sugar-reduced additionally highlights a reference to fibres.

Consumer acceptance of such products depends on the sensory characteristics. "We frequently observe a discrepancy between consumer intentions regarding sugar and sodium reduction and their actual behaviour - especially when it comes to compromising taste," underlined Lu Ann Williams, co-founder of Innova Market Insights. This means for product developers: Even if a biscuit contains less sugar, it has to retain its familiar crunchiness and the filling still has to melt on the tongue. To achieve this the ingredients in the modified recipe have to be reformulated so that they are perfectly balanced.

Replacing sugar, while maintaining texture
BENEO demonstrates how sugar reduction and increased fibre can be combined with concepts for biscuits, including chocolate chip cookies. Orafti inulin and oligofructose extracted from chicory roots replace part of the sugar and take on texture-enhancing functions. Their selection and dosage influence the impression of sweetness, the dough processing and crunchiness of the biscuits. "Since different fibres interact very differently with food matrices, formulation expertise is crucial," explained Kyle Krause, who is responsible for functional fibres and carbohydrates at BENEO in North America.

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Formulation is one of the focal topics at ISM Ingredients 2027. Overall, around 110 exhibitors from 31 countries are awaited, including Brenntag, Döhler, Barry Callebaut, Bühler Food Equipment, Fuji Oil Europe, GNT, ofi and Paradise Fruits. "Product developers want to know which ingredients are suitable for their applications and how they behave under the respective production conditions. They can discuss these issues directly with the suppliers at ISM Ingredients and find partners for the further development of their recipes. Our two major returnee exhibitors in particular, Barry Callebaut and Bühler, are addressing this approach at their exhibition stands. For example, Barry Callebaut is inviting the visitors to join them on a taste journey and will be presenting product concepts that reflect the current food trends," explained Guido Hentschke, Director of ISM Ingredients.

Greater resilience through a wider range of raw materials
Economic factors are additionally driving the search for alternative ingredients: Strongly fluctuating cocoa prices and supply risks are complicating the long-term planning for manufacturers. A wider range of raw materials can reduce the dependency on the cocoa market and make the supply chains more resilient. To this end, product developers are combining ingredients made from oats, sunflower seeds or legumes with carefully selected plant-based fats. The composition of these fats helps create the melting characteristics typical for chocolate.

In this connection, Döhler is relying among others on broad beans. After acquiring Nukoko in June 2026, the company is driving the industrial scale production of corresponding cocoa-free chocolate alternatives. The focus lies on applications in sweets and bakery products, ice cream as well as in coatings and fillings. "Leveraging Döhler's global expertise in ingredients, research and application, we can help customers develop resilient, future-oriented product concepts without compromising sensory quality," explained Kerstin Bergander-Kleinert, Director of the Grain, Nuts and Pulses Business Unit at Döhler. Furthermore, for plant-based alternatives for white chocolate, Döhler combines plant-based powders with nut and seed pastes. Rice syrup powder delivers sweetness, while almond and cashew pastes contribute to texture and colour. In this way, several carefully aligned ingredients replicate the functions of dairy components.

From the ingredients solution to the retail shelf
Peas and carob open up additional options for cocoa-free sweets. Fuji Oil's Anoza M is also based on these raw materials. Fuji Oil Europe, an exhibitor of ISM Ingredients, is also part of this corporate group. The Japanese group, Aeon, is using this ingredient solution for three new sweets products of its own brand, Topvalu, including coated caramelised almonds and Cranberry Crunch. The phased market launch is planned to begin in September 2026 in around 3,500 stores.

The Ingredients Special Show in Passage 4/5 curated by Haute Innovation will also offer ideas for the implementation of new raw materials. The spotlight is on alternative proteins, fermentation and sustainable raw materials. On the Talks & Tasting Stage in Hall 5.2, "Chocolate Futures" and "Plant-based Innovation Tasting" sessions are also dedicated to the future of chocolate and plant-based product innovations. "New ingredients have to convince in the finished product. That is why

we combine the expert exchange with concrete application and tastings at ISM Ingredients," stated Guido Hentschke.

Natural colours for new product concepts
The colouring is also being reevaluated during reformulation processes. Product developers are looking for colours derived from fruit, vegetables and plants to replace synthetic dyes. At the same time, natural colours can also serve as the starting point for new product ideas. GNT is applying the purple colour world of the Ube trend to cookies, muffins and donuts. The purple yam root familiar from the Philippine cuisine combines its distinctive colour with a mild, creamy and slightly nut-like flavour profile. This opens up opportunities for product developers to differentiate between trusted formats for bakery products using new colour and taste profiles.

In addition to the desired shade, further key issues include the processing and dosage. California Natural Color, an exhibitor of ISM Ingredients, offers natural colours in crystalline form for sweets and bakery products. Natural colour sources are transformed into water-soluble and free-flowing crystals using a patented drying technique. According to the manufacturer, these achieve a five to ten-times higher colour concentration compared to conventional liquid colours and enable correspondingly low usage volumes.

Discussing market trends, sampling product concepts
Knowledge partners like Innova Market Insights will enhance the event programme with insights into global trends and new market potential. The previously separate formats, the Talks & Tasting Stage and the Expert Stage, will be conducted on a joint stage for the first time in 2027. The range of topics spans from ingredients development and industrial implementation to consumer and market trends.

The co-staged ISM Manufacturing complements the range of ingredients with machinery, systems, automation and packaging solutions. Together with ISM Snacks & Sweets, the trade fair trio thus covers the entire value chain - from ingredients and recipe development, industrial implementation and packaging, right through to the finished product.

For further information see: www.ism-cologne.com/trade-fair/ism-ingredients

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