



# Getting Ahead of the Curve: Protein & Weight Loss

By Dr. A. Elizabeth Sloan

While low carb may have been one of the hottest diet fads of all time, it's high protein that's long been the winner in the war on weight.

Among adults trying to lose weight, 55% made a strong effort to increase their protein intake, up from 50% in 2007, according to the "2010 Gallup Study of Weight Management." Those making a strong effort to limit carbs declined among current dieters from 39% to 33%.

Moreover, with consumers associating protein with other important weight loss needs—including feeling full, building muscle/body toning, increased energy and lowering cholesterol for those on condition-directed weight loss plans—the future potential for high protein products is awesome indeed.

And, the timing is right. While the economy kept growth in the \$61 billion U.S. weight loss industry—which includes foods, supplements, Bariatric surgery, videos, etc.—to less than 1%, it caused "dieters" to further shift to low cost do-it-yourself diet plans, e.g., diet

websites, OTC diet pills, meal replacements, low calorie foods/drinks and videos, according to Marketdata Enterprises' "The U.S. Weight Loss & Diet Control Market, May 2011."

Marketdata Enterprises reports sales of the top eight commercial weight loss chains reached \$3.14 billion in 2010, online dieting sales \$238 million and diet home delivery sales \$924 million.

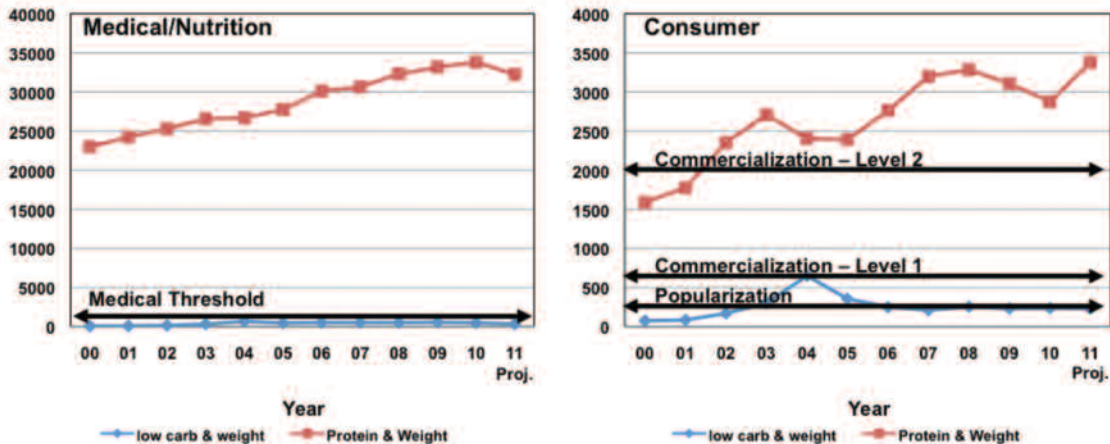
## Market Potential

According to Sloan Trends' TrendSense Model, protein and weight is a very large, strong and stable Level 2 mass-market opportunity on par with vitamin D and omega 3s. Medical Counts have continued to accelerate throughout most of the decade, indicating very strong scientific support and a wide variety of new newsworthy research findings. Although medical and research activity has flattened since 2006, this very high level of Medical Counts will easily sustain growth for the next three to five years. Mass marketers should be capitalizing on the widespread association of protein and weight, which is still a virtually untapped opportunity.

Perhaps, most compelling is the fact that protein and weight have been a highly marketable association throughout the decade and particularly before and after the low carb movement between 2003 and 2004, when low carb entered the mass-market phase temporarily at Level 1.

After several years of fad-like behavior earlier in the decade, low carb and weight has once again returned to its rightful position in the Popularization Phase, important to trendy specialty/health food channel shoppers and to very health and condition-specific shoppers. Low carb

## TrendSense™ Predictive Model: Protein, Low Carb & Weight



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\* Although there are many factors that go into determining consumer trends, measuring how medical/nutrition activity levels have risen over the past decade, as well as some of the key milestones that have occurred and how these issues have been understood and embraced by the public are essential in predicting the sustainability of the Consumer trend line.

has never crossed the Medical Threshold, indicating the beginning of a long-term sustainable trend and thus, continues to remain among the trendy diet fads. Specialty retailers should continue to capitalize on low carb and weight with creative new approaches recognizing its fad-like behavior.

### **Growth Opportunities**

- 54% of adults tried to lose weight in 2010 (Calorie Control Council Consumer Survey).
- The typical dieter now makes four weight loss attempts per year, the highest number in 15 years (Marketdata Enterprises).
- 80% of “dieters” and 69% of the general population believe it is important to consume more protein when trying to lose weight (Gallup).
- 68% of consumers believe protein helps build muscle, 40% helps you to feel full, and 37% helps with general weight loss (International Food Information Council, “2010 Food & Health Survey”).
- Among the 13% of food shoppers who were on a specific diet program, 11% were on the Atkins diet in 2010, 14% a low carb diet of their own (FMI, “US Grocery Shopper Trends,” 2010).
- 38% of consumers chose foods/beverages because they’re high in protein; 31% said they maintained a high protein/low carb diet in 2010 (HealthFocus).
- Only 2% of consumers believe calories from protein are most likely to cause weight gain.
- Weight control and cholesterol tie for the most desirable benefits of functional foods; one-third of consumers bought a functional food for weight loss in 2009 (Mintel “US-Functional Food Report, 2009”).

### **Functional Foods**

More than half of dieters—and 39% of the general population—are making a strong effort to increase their protein intake, according to Gallup. Of the 80% of weight watchers in 2010 on a do-it-yourself program, 60% want to use regular grocery store foods to help control their weight, reports Marketdata Enterprises.

With breakfast considered the most important meal by dieters, ready-to-eat cereals, smoothies and other traditional fare are strong candidates for higher protein options. Snacks and combination products for those concerned about heart health and weight are other important options.

With the American Heart Association and other organizations still negative on high protein diets, manufacturers must pay strict attention to a product’s fat content and should fortify these products to stem challenges that high protein products prevent the delivery of certain nutrients.

### **Dietary Supplements**

With nearly 28 million U.S. households having a member that is obese, SymphonyIRI’s November 2010 “OTC Medication Report” estimates their annual market potential alone for OTC and supplement weight related products at \$4 billion per year.

Weight loss meal replacements remain a strong direction, posting sales gains for the last six years in a row to \$2.4 billion in 2010 (NBJ, Feb. 2011).

Cross marketing these products with energy, satiety, fortification with nutrients lost when trying to lose weight or a toning/flab fighting program are other big ideas more specific to the supplement market.

Lastly, with pill form supplement sales unchanged since 2003 at \$1.57 billion, designer and unique blends of protein may well be a bright light as the pill form supplement market moves away from thermogenic weight loss.

### **References furnished upon request.**

**About the author:** *Dr. A. Elizabeth Sloan is president of Sloan Trends, Inc., Escondido, CA, which is a consulting firm that offers trend-tracking and predictions, strategic counsel and business-building ideas for food, supplement and pharmaceutical marketers. Each month she will provide analysis and discuss opportunities of a particular market being covered in a given issue.*

**SLOAN TRENDS’ TRENDSENSE** is a 15-year-old trend tracking system, which identifies and quantifies trends as well as predicts the optimal timing, sustainability and life-cycle stage of ingredients, terms, product opportunities and related market issues.

The model displays medical and consumer “activity levels” based on a comprehensive analysis of five critical sources of information—consumer, trade and competitive, legal and regulatory and media coverage. The resulting charts give insight into the market’s changing health issues and concerns, the ingredients that are up-and-coming and those that have just about run their course, as well as what health claims, marketing messages and products will bring your company the most success.

• **Emerging Phase** = Trends begin to appear on the radar screen. Companies should begin to collect literature and market details for those that exhibit continual growth and that might be of interest.

• **Popularization Phase** = Medical/Nutrition crossover to consumer media and marketplace; opportunity for niche or specialty markets. Marketers/manufacturers should begin a detailed evaluation of the supporting marketing and scientific data and determine if this term/trend offers a good strategic fit and is appropriate to pursue. Appropriate product development procedures should be undertaken.

• **Commercialization Phase** = Mass-market ready. Mainstream consumers have a significant degree of familiarity with the term/trend and there is opportunity for competitive advantage by getting out ahead of the competition or by providing a unique and highly innovative product positioning for success.