

## Protein: More Room to Grow

Sales of all kinds of protein-rich food and beverage products are surging as consumers continue to work at increasing protein consumption. *Premier Protein's* high-protein shakes enjoyed an average annual growth rate of 59% over the past five years, Euromonitor reports. Sales of ice cream carrying a "good source of protein" claim jumped 55% for the year ended Oct. 11, 2018, according to Nielsen. Sales of meat, cheese, egg, and nut combination fresh snack packs soared 45%; jerky/meat snacks grew 11%, according to IRI's 2018 *State of the Snack Food Industry* report.

One in five consumers (19%) now cite legumes, nuts, and seeds among their primary protein sources, along with meat/poultry, eggs, dairy, and seafood, per Nielsen. Sales of foods/drinks with a "good" or "excellent" source of protein claim reached \$22.6 billion for the year ended June 9, 2018, per Nielsen.

Six in 10 consumers tried to add more protein to their diet in 2017; 32% tried to add more plant protein, per the Hartman Group's *Health + Wellness 2017* report. Over half (55%) of U.S. households consider high protein an important attribute when shopping for food; 6% of households had a member on a high-protein diet for the year ended Sept. 18, 2018, per Nielsen.

More than one-third (36%) of Millennials take a protein supplement; 22% of adults overall take one, per the Council for

Responsible Nutrition. Sales of liquid nutritionals/meal replacements reached \$5.4 billion for the year ended Dec. 2, 2018, per IRI. *Premier Protein* led unit growth, up 39%, followed by *Boost*,

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*SlimFast*, and *Ensure*. Unit sales of *Kind* intrinsic health value bars grew by a whopping 693%, and unit sales of the *Rx Bar* were up 160%.

*Nutrition Business Journal* predicts nutrition bar sales will reach \$6.8 billion in 2021 and sports nutrition/protein powder sales will be \$6.5 billion. At the same time, the opportunity for manufacturers to tout their products' natural protein content to grow sales appears to be a very timely idea.

According to information from Nielsen, significant numbers of consumers are confused as to the protein content of even the most common protein sources; 45%–64% don't consider beef, chicken, or pork to be high in protein. Moreover, they didn't recognize shrimp or cottage cheese as high in protein, and they overestimated the protein content of peanut butter.

High protein is among the top claims driving growth in the dairy sector. *fairlife's* ultra-filtered high-protein, high-calcium fresh milks led unit sales growth in the whole milk and reduced-fat sectors, up 47% and 37%,

respectively, for the year ended Aug. 12, 2018.

According to Nielsen, nutritious snacks that carry a protein claim grew at nearly double the rate of those that qualify for a

protein claim but do not use it on the package. Labeling snack products that qualify for a protein claim could add as much as \$50 million to the bottom line.

After taste and no artificial ingredients, protein content is the most important attribute to consumers when they purchase plant-based foods/beverages, according to data from Mintel. Nearly one-third (30%) of non-dairy milk consumers say extra protein would encourage them to drink more nondairy milk, per Mintel. IRI's snack report projects that sales of high-protein snacks made with chickpeas will grow 35% in the next few years; those made with beans will be up by 25%.

Increased energy is the primary reason consumers try to get more protein, followed by weight management and/or muscle maintenance; brain health is a distant third, per the Natural Marketing Institute.

While marketers are differentiating the type/source of protein, more effort is needed to provide the optimal amount of protein per serving (30 g of high-quality protein, three times per day). In

addition, education is needed on the importance of leucine for muscle synthesis and the timing of protein consumption.

Additional protein health linkages such as lean body mass and

satiety are also worth exploring. One-quarter of consumers rank muscle health among the benefits they most want to get from food, per the International Food Information Council's 2018 *Food & Health Survey*.

With 72% of kids aged 6–12 involved in sports, according to the Aspen Institute, high-protein sports nutrition products are a missed opportunity. Three-quarters of adults aged 50 and older are aware of losing muscle with age; about one-third (34%) are extremely concerned about it. Nearly half of those aged 65-plus already have sarcopenia, per the National Center for Health Statistics.

Among the new demographic of fit consumers who exercise three or more days per week for more than 30 minutes and may represent as many as 40% of U.S. adults, nearly three-quarters (74%) always/usually choose foods because they are high in protein, per HealthFocus. **FT**



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