

Health and Functional Benefits in Modern Nutrition



In this interview, Albert Strube (left), Director Global Growth Product Lines Nutrition & Health, and Holger Riemensperger (right), Business Director Food Ingredients, talked with Benno Keller about how Cognis is helping to improve food products.

Benno Keller: Cognis is a major supplier of both emulsifiers and a wide range of “health ingredients”. How do these two things go together?

Albert Strube: Cognis has carved out a unique positioning for itself as a manufacturer of functional ingredients – none of

our competitors in the food ingredients sector can match this.

Holger Riemensperger: We’ve been in this market for a long time, and we have a broad range of products. We’re always working together with our customers and sharing our expertise.

BK: Is your approach based more on specific products or general concepts?

AS: Cognis is much more than a mere supplier of ingredients. We offer innovative solutions and concepts that fit with current market trends and customer needs, based on our technological know-how and formulation competence. At this year’s Vitafoods trade show, we launched a new concept entitled “Newtrition – Eat.Feel.Live.” This focuses on the consumer’s need for a holistic sense of well-being, and helps Cognis customers to develop products that serve this need. “Inner balance,” vitality, protection, joy and pleasure, and beauty are all factors that contribute to this sense of well-being. For example, N&H offers products and solutions that help to reduce cholesterol levels, strengthen the body’s immune system, make skin firmer and protect it against the sun’s radiation, and help people with weight management.

HR: Often, the impetus comes from our customers, who want to improve their products and make people healthier. Sterols

were first used as functional ingredients in products such as bread as long as ten years ago. In today's "intelligent foods", both technical and functional aspects have to be just right – examples include our solutions for cholesterol-free cakes, or desserts based on non-trans fats.

BK: Is it possible that both product ranges – health ingredients and emulsifiers – could be combined in the same product?



AS: Under certain circumstances, it makes sense to offer a blend. But what is much more important are the synergies between them. We share expertise, both internally and with customers, especially in the area of application technology – for example, in the use of functional ingredients in dairy products. That's why we enjoy such a strong position in the dairy and baked goods segments.

HR: We can give customers very specific advice, be it about the consistency of laban, a popular yoghurt drink in the Arab world, or about milk containing CLA in Spain. New applications are being found all the time, and you can't just assume that what you know from other products will be equally applicable to, say, margarine.

BK: You must have to deal with very different circumstances across the various markets ...

HR: The trend towards healthier eating is something that we find everywhere. For instance, the UK was one of the first countries where reducing the trans-fatty acid content of food became a big issue, while in Italy, using healthy fats is a priority, particularly in the country's famous ice cream industry.

AS: Spain is something of a special case, as consumers there are unusually receptive to functional foods and willing to experiment. This is partly due to government strategies to combat malnutrition, which have been running for several decades now.

HR: "Food intelligence" pays a lot of attention to regional eating habits. In northern nations, the general rule is the less fat, the better, while further south, it is more about using healthier types of fat.

BK: What products are you focusing your development efforts on for the future?

AS: We're focusing primarily on dairy-based and baked desserts. The beverage category is not as important just yet, but here too, we are working on formulations with added functional ingredients, in this case with our partners at WILD.

BK: What is your assessment of the situation in 2009 in the light of the economic crisis?

AS: We're noticing a certain caution on the part of customers. For example, expensive product launches are being postponed.

HR: Cost pressure is forcing manufacturers to cut back on expensive raw materials. To serve this need, alongside our premium lines, we are now also offering a new range of cheaper alternatives, such as "Eco Whip." The performance may not be quite as good as that of the premium products, but it is still more than adequate to make good-quality products. With our application know-how, we can help customers realize significant savings through intelligent use of emulsifiers. In this sense, the economic crisis is actually an opportunity for us.

BK: What else can we look forward to in the rest of this year?

HR: As part of our Newtrition concept, we will be launching a number of new and improved products in the coming months. For example, the sunflower oil-based Lamequick Sun is a completely new topping. The aim is to give our customers an additional competitive advantage, by meeting the demand from consumers for healthier fats. Lamequick Sun will be particularly appealing to customers who are concerned with making their products as healthy as possible, and are already offering things like toppings based on non-trans fats.

AS: Cognis offers a whole range of omega-3 solutions that are tailor-made for the specific health concerns of different age groups. We are also going to relaunch our Plantalin range. This contains selective plant extracts, such as lemon balm and rooibos, that can be used in various food and beverage products to improve consumers' alertness and inner balance.

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