

Low/No/Reduced Sodium NPD Claims Decline Despite Salt Concerns

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Despite increased awareness about the risks of too much sodium in consumers' diets and pledges from governments around the world to reduce salt levels in food, products with low/no/reduced sodium claims have seen some decline over the past years according to new findings from Mintel.

Globally, launches of foods with low/no/reduced sodium claims declined 5% over the 2010/2011 period, appearing on just 2% of total food launches in 2011.

Chris Brockman, Global Food and Drink Analyst at Mintel, said:

"A large percentage of the global food industry remains wary of the commercial impacts of reducing salt in their products. This anxiety is well-founded, with many products positioned as low sodium forced off the shelves prematurely in recent years due to poor sales. Manufacturers struggled to find workable salt substitutes, forcing many to rapidly pull them from the market. Efforts are being made to offer consumers alternatives to sodium. However, existing salt replacements have not caught the imagination of consumers. Consumers are concerned about salt intake, but are not willing to compromise on taste."

Indeed, according to Mintel's Global New Products Database (GNPD) Europe remains the most active region in terms of product innovation, covering the same percentage in 2011 (35%) as the year before of new product launches carrying low/no/reduced sodium claims - compared to 39% back in 2007. North America follows with 26% share of the global market in 2011 as opposed to 32% in 2010 and 28% in 2007. While APAC comes third covering 19% of new launches in 2011, vs 18% in 2010 and 19% in 2007.

In Europe, 3% of all new food products introduced in 2011 in the UK carried a low/no reduced sodium claim, a higher percentage than other key European markets with the exception of Netherlands, where 9% of all new products had the same claim. For France the figure stood at 2% in 2011; for Spain 1.4%. Italy and Germany were significantly lower, at just 1% each.

"The Netherlands was higher mainly because of the food industry's Ik Kies Bewust ("I choose consciously") campaign featuring on-pack logos to indicate new or reformulated products that are low in sugar, sodium and saturated fat." Chris explains.

Over in Asia Pacific, New Zealand took the lead, with 3% of all new food products in 2011 labelled as low/no reduced sodium followed by Australia with 2%. Other market activity in the region included Thailand with 1.2%, South Korea (0.8%) and Singapore (0.8%). In Japan, 0.7% of new product launches carried the claims, in Taiwan 0.7%, in China 0.5% and in Vietnam 0.4%.

And when it comes to consumer attitudes, according to Mintel's research some 54% of US consumers say they limit their use of packaged snacks and other packaged foods because they think they have too much salt or sodium, and 53% are concerned about the amount of salt or sodium in their diets. However, it seems consumers will not give up salt easily. In general, 49% of British consumers agree that "taste is more important to me than calories in food," while in the US, 60% of restaurant diners typically order what they want instead of what is healthy. Moreover, when it comes to products flavored with a non-sodium or salt alternative, almost half (46%) of consumers in the US think that they don't taste as good as their traditional counterparts. Similarly in the UK, only a relatively small proportion (22%) of consumers have purchased low salt products, and just 4% of consumers have cut back on table sauces because of health concerns.

"Brands will need to dispel widely held perception about low sodium or salt alternatives to be successful. Fortunately, this is possible. Many food brands are already introducing step-by-step salt reduction programs that gradually reduce the salt content of their products - a strategy often called "stealth health", as the incremental removal of sodium can be carried out over a period of time to help the consumer to become accustomed to the changed flavour profile, without the need to flag that up prominently on-pack and thus deter consumers who may perceive "less taste". Other brands are also steering clear of the health issue by experimenting with different flavour profiles, such as strong spices and vinegars, to enhance taste while eliminating sodium." Chris concludes.

Globally in 2011, Snacks (16%) and Sauces & Seasonings (14%) have emerged as the most active categories in low/no/reduced sodium claims. While, in response to concerns from parents towards their young children, the Baby Food category accounted for 12% of new products carrying the claim globally. While Breakfast Cereals and Bakery accounted for 10% and 11% respectively, with 8% in Dairy.

In the overall "minus" claim category - products positioned with low/no/reduced formulations such as reduced calories, fat, sugar or cholesterol - Mintel's GNPD shows a global decline of 10% over the year 2010-2011, with low/no/reduced

calorie (-19%) and low/no/reduced carb products (-41%) seeing the biggest drop, followed by low/no/reduced sugar (-9%), low/no/reduced cholesterol (-9%) and low/no/reduced fat (-8%).

The findings also tie in to the Mintel Inspire trend "Fauxthenticity", which explores how food alternatives can become preferable to real versions, because they are variously healthier, greener or more affordable.

Richard Cope, Principal Trend Analyst at Mintel, explains:

“Sometimes a fake alternative carries less risk than its authentic cousin, especially when it comes to something like alcohol. An option might be for manufacturers to explore tricking consumer taste buds and marketing foods that smell - as opposed to taste salty. This is something we've seen food researchers investigate in our trend "Fauxthenticity". This has been the success story behind everything from B&Q's sales of fake grass, to sunless tanners and meat substitutes.”

Source: Mintel GNPD

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