Label it Clean

Here’s a package of stories on natural and organic label claims and simpler lists of ingredients.
The term “clean label” is sometimes described as a food industry buzzword. But before food processors roll their eyes they might want to know that there is a consumer magazine named Clean Eating, with the tagline Improving Your Life, One Meal at a Time.

The magazine, which explores food issues and offers lots of recipes for healthy cooking, has more than 600,000 Facebook likes. Formulating processed foods for a clean label is an important topic for the industry, but the consumer is driving it.

“Natural has always been appealing to shoppers on labels,” says Julie Johnson, a senior project manager with HealthFocus International (www.healthfocus.com), St. Petersburg, Fla. “A majority of shoppers agree that a food or beverage is more likely to be natural if there are fewer ingredients on the label. Many also believe that recognizable ingredients make for a more natural product.”

Johnson says those attitudes were expressed in the results of the firm’s 2013 HealthFocus study “The Consumer Definition of Natural.”

Research from HealthFocus and from other sources indicates there are specific food ingredients consumers want to avoid. Meanwhile, a number of ingredient companies are busy developing new solutions (and repositioning others) that will help food formulators clean up the Nutrition Facts panel. Finally, FDA is currently at work on revising the rules for Nutrition Facts (which have now been with us for 20 years), and one study shows consumers already are confused about the information on those panels pertaining to sugar content.

Clean definition

In his 2008 book “In Defense of Food,” journalist/food maverick Michael Pollan first suggested several rules for eating, including this one: “Don’t eat anything with more than five ingredients, or ingredients you can’t pronounce.”

The former Wall Street Journal reporter’s suggestion that consumers look for products with five ingredients or less (and a related prohibition on stuff your grandmother wouldn’t recognize) has helped create the legacy known as the clean label. Food formulators now routinely talk about shortening the ingredient deck and achieving clean label.

But what does that mean?

To some extent it means avoiding some of the same compounds that have alarmed consumers for decades (or have more recently set off alarms), but it also requires limits on things like fats, salts and sugars, which are common components of nearly all foods.

Label it Clean

Calling a product natural is fine (so far) but a clean label speaks to the consumers who pay the most attention.

By David Phillips, Technical Editor
“For food manufacturers, clean label means simplifying the ingredient list, while removing ingredients that are not easily recognized or preferred by consumers,” says Agnes Jones, a technician with Ingredion Inc. (www.ingredion.com), Westchester, Ill. “It means taking out artificial colors, flavors, preservatives, et cetera.”

A 2013 study by the Hartman Group (www.hartman-group.com), Bellevue, Wash., demonstrates quite clearly what consumers are avoiding, and how those concerns looked in 2013 compared to 2007.

Sodium/salt and high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) are the two components that caused the strongest repulsion in 2013, with both of them being described by 50 percent of the study’s subjects as an ingredient to avoid. That is a significant shift from 2007 when 59 percent said they were staying away from sodium and just 41 percent were skipping HFCS.

Other top red flags were cholesterol (which registered with 58 percent in 2007, but dropped to 46 percent by last year); growth hormones (now avoided by 42 percent of respondents); and GMOs, which rose from 15 percent in 2007 to 33 percent in 2013.

“In general, when consumers seek high-quality foods, they are looking for short ingredient lists with recognizable, minimally processed ingredients that are locally grown,” says Blaine Becker, marketing director with Hartman Group.

Both cholesterol and saturated fats have become less of a concern, according to the study, while avoiding trans-fat has become increasingly important.

New ingredients
One approach to achieving a clean label involves an all-natural extension of a successful brand with a new, clean-label formula. Examples include Natural Jif Peanut Butter, which left behind the hydrogenated oils, and Haagen-Dasz Five, which involved a reformulation of some very basic ice cream flavors combined with a major marketing campaign. Lay’s Classic potato chips and at least two major brands of cookies have been described by marketing teams in recent years as being made with just a “few simple ingredients.”

Another solution to the clean label puzzle is to select ingredients that provide multiple functions and ingredients that can be described in simple terminology, says Jones.

“There are several categories of ingredients that allow cleaner labels,” she says. “Consumers recognize and want to see natural and non-GMO ingredients on the label deck.”

One example from Ingredion is the Novation brand
line of functional native starches. “These allow food manufacturers to remove modified food starch from the label and substitute it with functional native starches of various source including corn starch, rice starch, tapioca starch.”

Just this month, Tate & Lyle (www.tateandlyle.com), Hoffman Estates, Ill., rolled out a new line of products under the Claria brand. These are described as functional clean-label starches. Three varieties in the line span different levels of process tolerance for low temperature, high temperature and ultra-high-temperature (UHT) processing. The company says the products replace modified food starches and can be labeled simply as starch or corn starch.

“In addition to meeting consumer demand for simpler ingredient lists, the Claria line enables manufacturers to formulate with functionality similar to a modified food starch and to meet consumers’ expectations for taste and color in a variety of applications,” said Esther van Onselen, global marketing category director at Tate & Lyle. The products are said to have minimum impact on color and flavor in most formulations.

Tate & Lyle says its clients are eager to meet consumer expectations.

“Consumers are asking for products with simpler ingredient lists across a broad range of categories. In response, manufacturers are launching cleaner-label products,” van Onselen notes. “In fact, nearly 25 percent of new product launches globally were positioned as label-friendly in 2013, according to Innova Market Insights, including 35 percent in North America.”

Custom formulation of ingredients is typically available from ingredient suppliers along with collaborative assistance in overall reformulation.

“It’s important for food manufacturers to partner with suppliers that are ready to co-create the next generation of clean label products,” says Jim Carr, director of food applications at Tate & Lyle. “Manufacturers can gain access to a suite of exclusive resources to help deliver successful clean-label innovation including Tate & Lyle’s state-of-the-art Food Innovation Centers and a team of world-class applications experts in more than 15 locations.”

Jones says additional expertise can make reformulation more successful. “It is very important for food processors to work closely with their suppliers,” she notes. “When transitioning from traditional ingredients to clean label ingredients, it is important to understand if there are any differences in terms of performance.”

Whole Foods Markets bans 78 ingredients from products that can be sold in its store, and other retailers have an even longer list. Formulators need to familiarize themselves
with these lists or at least have access to them. They also must become familiar with natural alternatives like vinegar, beet juice and enzymes.

Marketers of coconut water, which can add flavor characteristics with virtually no additional calories, are now touting the stuff as a helpful ingredient for lowering calories in other foods and beverages. In many cases these new-found ingredients were used in food processing long ago but were replaced by cheaper ingredients that offered more ease of use or longer shelf life – but with proper practices, the natural ingredients can still provide efficacy.

**Clean and clear**

Having a nutrition panel that doesn’t alarm wary consumers is tough enough already, but the rules regarding those panels are about to change. In January, FDA announced it will revamp the requirements for the panels in an effort to give consumers more of the information that is thought to be most useful in curing obesity. Three changes are under consideration:

- Requirement of information regarding added sugars.
- Calories and serving sizes would be made more prominent in the label design.
- Serving sizes would be required to reflect how people eat and drink today.

Because of the requirement regarding added sugar, the International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation recently presented information from a 2009 study that indicated consumers are already confused about how calories are enumerated on nutrition panels.

The study, conducted by the Turner research network, focused on how consumers understood the relationship between the sugars line on a nutritional panel and the added sugars line. In many cases consumers mistakenly believed that the added sugars represented an additional amount of sugar that was not part of the total. When the total sugars line reads “total sugars” rather than simply “sugar,” the rate of that misunderstanding was lower – around 33 percent compared to more than 52 percent.

Consumers also believed to a large degree that the type of sugar in the added sugar line is a different type from that in the sugar (or total sugar) line. One survey participant stated: “I assume they must be different from regular sugars used in the manufacturing. Since it must be required on the label to differentiate between them, I assume they are artificial-type sugars.”

Additionally, nearly one in four consumers believed that added sugars carry a heavier caloric load than other sugars. IFIC has submitted comments to FDA, and is suggesting that “it would be productive to invest educational resources in a better understanding of total sugars rather than to combat any misleading understanding or confusion due to a declaration of added sugars.”

Food processors need to consider this and many other factors when developing new products or reformulating successful brands. Consumers have more information than ever, thanks largely to the required nutritional labels. More than ever, they are considering that information when they make purchases. They look for small number of recognizable ingredients, and compare figures for content of fat and sugar along with beneficial components like protein and fiber.

“You know what consumers are asking for these days: convenient, natural and organic foods of restaurant or homemade quality, plus beverages that please and delight,” says Jones. “And they want them prepared with recognized and trusted ingredients.”
SETTING THE STANDARD SINCE 1907
MO-free, natural, sustainable, organic and fair trade are all buzzwords that have been circulating in the foodservice and food manufacturing industries for some time now. Aside from growing health concerns leading consumers to choose more natural, organic products, they are also buying products that have a positive impact on the environment and global community.

In this digital age, consumers are more knowledgeable about their products, having easy access to information that addresses the healthfulness of food ingredients. Additionally, consumers are connected globally, allowing them to trace the impacts of their purchase decisions on eco- and socio-economic systems worldwide. Organizations promoting natural, green and fair trade ideals are also stronger than ever due to a reach that is not bound by geographical restrictions. With growing digital influence, the general public is demanding healthier, more responsible food production.

On the health side, requests for more natural products are on the rise. This means cleaner labels and wholesome ingredients. While there has been some controversy over the term “natural” on labels, as it can be quite pervasive even on processed items, one thing is clear: Consumers want foods that are actually clean. Nielsen-Massey Vanillas, a leading manufacturer of high-quality pure vanillas and fine flavor extracts located in Waukegan, Illinois, and Leeuwarden, the Netherlands, has set a high industry standard by offering all-natural, kosher, gluten-free and allergen-free products to their customers. Nielsen-Massey also offers an organic line, which is certified to the National Organic Program (NOP) provided by Quality Assurance International (QAI) which is a USDA-accredited certifying agency.

For many years consumers have been choosing organic products that have not been altered by synthetic substances.
In March of 2014, Consumer Reports National Research Center conducted a survey of 1,016 adults and found 84% of U.S. households buy organic food, with 45% of Americans buying organic once a month or more.

Genetically modified organisms (GMOs) have also been examined more closely. Non-GMO products have become a strong contender in regards to brand choice, according to the 2014 Market LOHAS (Lifestyle of Health and Sustainability) Mambo Sprouts Marketing Annual Natural and Organic Consumer Research. In fact, 80% of consumers participating in the MamboTrack survey said they seek out non-GMO products when shopping for food.

While U.S. government agencies, like the FDA and USDA, do not require GMO labeling, other organizations are encouraging non-GMO products to be verified and included on labeling. Organizations such as, Non-GMO Project, an independent non-profit verification organization, believe consumers should have access to clearly-labeled non-GMO free products to help them make informed purchase decisions.

A potential concern of those seeking GMO-free products is the increased use of herbicides and pesticides in GMO plants, which are engineered to stand up to harmful chemicals. Chemicals used against common pests and weeds may also be harmful for the environment by polluting water, harming wildlife and contaminating soil, as reported by responsibletechnology.org. As a result, food and ingredient manufacturers, such as Nielsen-Massey, are embracing the call for GMO-free products.

Recently, Nielsen-Massey has switched from corn alcohol to sugarcane alcohol to ensure products are GMO source free in the United States. Nielsen-Massey’s conventional products are tested and verified to contain no GMO material. These steps have helped Nielsen-Massey guarantee their products surpass customers’ and consumers’ standards worldwide.

Just as organic and GMO-free products appeal to environmental concerns, Fairtrade organizations, such as Fairtrade Canada, an internationally recognized non-profit Fairtrade certification organization and member of Fairtrade International, help regulate environmental components involved with agriculturally-based products. This certification process ensures small-scale farmers in developing countries receive fair price and use sustainable farming practices, which in return, stabilizes crop producing communities and protects the environment.

“We are excited to be able to offer Organic Fairtrade Madagascar Bourbon Pure Vanilla Extract that is both certified Organic and Fairtrade,” said Craig Nielsen, CEO of Nielsen-Massey. “Although Fairtrade products are commonly known to be coffees, teas and cocoa, it is just as important for our vanillas to be Fairtrade certified to promote sustainability and help producers in the countries where our vanilla beans are grown.”

With products like Organic Madagascar Bourbon Pure Vanilla Extract and Organic Fairtrade Madagascar Bourbon Pure Vanilla Extract, Nielsen-Massey is committed to customers, and strives to meet the changing demands of consumers, retailers, food manufacturers and foodservice professionals.
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Real Food
Chef Rob Corliss shares his philosophy of connecting people, and especially kids, to their food, environment and wellness.

Chef Rob Corliss, a children’s advocate for healthy eating, shows how broth, fat, and protein powder ingredients from International Dehydrated Foods Inc., (IDF) contribute to the flavor, nutrition, and functionality of a range of applications, such as salad dressings, soups, and other simple but nutritious foods. Connecting natural, poultry-based food ingredients with the growing demand for “real food,” Chef Corliss demonstrates how naturally wholesome ingredients like IDF chicken broth, fat, and protein powder can add dimensional flavor, highly digestible protein, and foundational nutrition to a range of delicious foods for all ages.

Click on the image below to watch the video.
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- New Products for Health and Wellness
- Food Safety Starts With Ingredients
- Food Grows on Trees; Money Doesn’t

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