



Mid-Year Trends Update:

From Tradeshow Floors to Research in the Field, Farms & Orchards Too!

This trend forecast brought to you by:

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In this article, you will find:

- The major beverage trends driving today's new product offerings.
- How functional ingredients have made new inroads to popular beverages.
- Why nostalgic, swicy and indulgent are heating (and sweetening) up.

From sales to commercialization to customer service and everything in between, all the folks at Leahy-IFP take great pride in their work.

Our passion for our jobs contributes to the growth of our business and the strengthening of our culture. We want to support our customers effectively and we want to be productive team members. It's a win-win for everyone.

On the innovation team, we are committed to staying on top of trends, those that are emerging and the ones that are already, well, trending. This year, in fact, as a team we decided to focus much of our outreach and messaging around trends. Maybe you've noticed our informative emails, blogs and social posts about the various trends on our radar or those already driving our products and our customers' products.

One way we love to stay on top of trends is going to tradeshows. This year we've been to and exhibited at several big national shows as well as regional shows. We've written about the Coffee Expo already, and most recently we attended the National Restaurant Association show and Expo West.

As we reach the middle of 2024, it's a good time to see how our innovation team did by comparing our predictions to what we saw at the NRA and Expo West and continue to see in our ongoing trend research.

What We Predicted:

Trend Forecast Blog, January 2024

"Innovative beverage brands are tapping into a wide variety of herbs, beans and vitamins to answer the consumer demand for lower, slower and no caffeine options."

What We Spotted:

NRA's Energizing Innovations: Power-Packed Elixirs

At this year's NRA, energy beverages continued to surge with the introduction of innovative ingredients such as lion's mane, B vitamins, coconut water, and amino acids. Various caffeine-infused drinks were showcased, each tailored to fuel energy and focus, providing a boost for every lifestyle.



Natural Product Expo Mushroom Magic: Harnessing Nature's Power for Holistic Wellness

Mushroom extracts took the spotlight at Natural Products Expo, where their adaptogenic, nootropic, and calming properties were on showcase. Mushrooms are said to have positive effects that span focus, gut health, energy, beauty, sleep, and immunity. Highlighting varieties such as lion's mane, turkey tail, cordyceps, shiitake, reishi, and chaga, these mushrooms offer a wealth of benefits, albeit with earthy flavor profiles that present challenges in beverage formulations. Despite this, their popularity continues to soar as consumers seek natural solutions for holistic wellness, embracing the diverse benefits these fungi provide for mind, body, and immune support.



What We Predicted:

"We've Been Thinking" Email, March 2024:

"...it comes as no surprise to us that hydration is the buzz word in the beverage industry these days."

What We Spotted:

Natural Products Expo/NRA: Hydration hydration hydration

The trend to offer hydration beverages continues to surge. We saw water packaged in cans and cartons, tapping into consumers' cravings for distinctive hydration encounters beyond the ordinary. With eye-catching designs and refreshing taste, these canned waters not only quench thirst but also elevate the drinking experience.

Other operators opted for hydration with low and sugar-free electrolyte beverages, featuring familiar childhood flavors (more on that later...). Additionally, there were newcomers crafted with fewer traditional ingredients such as seawater sourced from the Atlantic Ocean.



What We Predicted:

January 2023 Trends Forecast:

"But operators who want to capitalize on two trends at once will find success in launching "newstalgia" based products."

What We Spotted:

NRA's Nostalgic Hydration: Childhood Flavors, Adult Demands

The trend to offer hydration beverages continues to surge. We saw water packaged in cans and cartons, tapping into consumers' cravings for distinctive hydration encounters beyond the ordinary. With eye-catching designs and refreshing taste, these canned waters not only quench thirst but also elevate the drinking experience.

But it can't just be about the grown-up urge to hydrate. Savvy customers expect more, and the operators delivered at all the shows we went to this year, just as we predicted they would. The low and sugar-free electrolyte beverages brands resisted the urge to create classic flavors like lemon or lime. Instead, the most innovative brands are offering familiar childhood flavors like Sour Green Apple, Blue Razz, and Peach Rings. These drinks offered a refreshing hydration experience with a "newstalgic" twist.



What We Predicted:

January 2024 Trends Forecast:

"Amid the ever-present hum of a tumultuous news cycle, consumers began using food and beverage to carve out little escapes from their daily lives. A luxurious little treat is an easy and accessible way steal a moment of indulgence."

What We Spotted:

NRA: Dessert-Inspired Beverages: Indulgence in Every Sip

Dessert flavors seamlessly blended with beverages, crafting a delightful fusion of indulgence. Notable offerings included cherry pie hard cider, snickerdoodle iced coffee, key lime pie refreshers, and Creamsicle energy drinks, each sip providing asweet retreat into dessert bliss.

And for a beverage that taps into the newstalgia and little treat trends at the same time, we saw fruit Loops flavored iced lattes and frozen carbonated drinks. These guilt-free indulgences defies societal mandate to "grow up."



What We Predicted:

"We've Been Thinking" Email, Feb 2024:

"Operators in every segment, from QSR to fine dining, are getting in on the swicy game. They're drizzling hot honey on pizza, concocting sweet and spicy mocktails, and slathering spicy sweet sauces on their sammies."

What We Spotted:

NRA: The Rise of Sweet Heat

The bold and complex flavors of sweet heat, including mango chili, hot honey, habanero peach, and spicy pineapple, received full embrace at this year's NRA. From fiery kicks to sweet sensations, these flavor profiles ignited the palate and left a lasting impression. As predicted, consumers are craving multifaceted flavors that afford them a unique sensory experience.



What We Predicted:

January 2024 Trends Forecast:

"Consumers are demanding a multitude of functional benefits, ideally all in one big sip. From increased ad/hd diagnoses to anxiety, insomnia and everything in between, consumers are looking to the beverages they drink to ease their troubled minds."

What We Spotted:

Natl Products Expo:

The trend to offer hydration beverages continues to surge. We saw water packaged in The rise of beverages tailored to match consumers' current or desired moods reflects a growing trend towards prioritizing mental well-being. With a significant focus on promoting feel-good sensations and providing brain support to alleviate the stresses of daily life, these drinks offer a refreshing escape and a boost to mental health. Whether it's calming anxiety, boosting energy, or enhancing focus, these beverages cater to diverse needs, empowering consumers to find balance and positivity in their daily routines. As the demand for holistic wellness solutions continues to surge, these mood-boosting beverages emerge as a welcome ally in the quest for inner peace and vitality.



Other Trends We Observed:

Milk Tea Magic: A Tropical Twist

Milk tea took on a tropical twist with bursting boba in exotic flavors. Milk teas infused with tropical fruits like mango, lychee, and passion fruit were showcased, offering a refreshing escape to paradise with every sip.

Fizzy Delights: Exploring Milk Soda

Milk soda emerged as a refreshing alternative, blending the creaminess of milk teas with the effervescence of carbonation. In this less common offering, the playful flavors—reminiscent of cream soda—are combined with powdered skim milk and yogurt flavor, offering a fizzy delight reminiscent of childhood favorites. This emerging trend is worth watching, as it could quickly follow in the footsteps of its popular cousin, milk teas.



Floral Infusions: A Tapestry of Blossoms

Floral flavors bloomed across the show floor, with hibiscus leading the charge. Refreshing agua frescas, cocktails, and mocktails infused with lavender, rose, and other exotic florals created a harmonious blend of familiar and adventurous flavors—addressing consumers' unconscious bias and reluctance to try new tastes. Seen hitting not only the mark but also satisfying the palate perfectly was our All Friends Strawberry Hibiscus Hydration Beverage!

Cereal Revival: From Bowl to Glass

The nostalgia of childhood mornings came alive with cereal milk-inspired beverages. Fruit Loops flavored iced lattes and frozen carbonated drinks captured the essence of the beloved cereal in every sip, offering a guilt-free indulgence that defies societal pressure to "grow up."

Other Trends We Observed: (continued)

Honey's Sweet Evolution: A Hive of Innovation

Honey stole the sweetener spotlight at both NRA and Expo West with sustainable sourcing and artisanal craftsmanship. From pure honey, delicately flavored with real wild berries, to varieties infused with the fiery kick of chilies, the products offered a sweet symphony of flavors that elevated culinary creations to new heights.

Innovative Infusions: Blurring Boundaries (Bonus Trend)

Nestled in the corners of the NRA show, the fusion of recreational drugs and mixology blurred boundaries, enticing attendees to indulge in unexpected flavor combinations and elevate their drinking experience. A notable example was a refined tobacco syrup, imparting a clean, smoky sophistication to cocktails and mocktails.



Brain Boosting Brilliance: Creatine's Cognitive Comeback!

Creatine is experiencing a notable resurgence, not solely for its renowned muscle-building properties but also for its cognitive benefits, capturing the interest of consumers seeking holistic wellness solutions beyond conventional fitness supplements. This comeback underscores a broader shift towards embracing supplements that offer multifaceted advantages. Recognized for its ability to enhance cognitive function alongside its established role in physical performance, creatine emerges as a versatile ally in the pursuit of overall well-being. As consumers prioritize holistic approaches to health, creatine stands out as a compelling option, providing both physical and cognitive support for those striving for optimal vitality and performance.

Clear Whey, Clear Taste Quest: Can You Crack the Flavor Code?

Clear whey protein gains popularity for its clarity but struggles with taste, often described as reminiscent of cheese or rancid dairy. Despite flavor pairings like blue raspberry or mango, the challenge remains to enhance palatability while maintaining nutritional integrity. The recommendation of Leahy's food scientists is that the clear whey and collagen be paired with creamy flavor profiles such as strawberries and cream or orange creamsicle.

Japanese Inspirations: Yuzu and Beyond

Japanese flavors, with Yuzu and Lychee leading the way, made waves in sparkling water, refreshers, chili paste, mochi, and marmalade. NRA attendees experienced the allure of Japanese cuisine through innovative flavor combinations that captivated the senses. At Expo West, Miso beverages infused with Asian fruits like Yuzu gained traction, reflecting a growing acceptance of diverse flavor profiles and culinary influences.



We want to create a more fruitful life for everyone and one of the best ways we can do that is by being an expert resource for you—our customer and partner. That's why we keep our pulse on all beverage trends. Our R&D and Marketing teams are always eager to share their knowledge of the beverage industry so that our customers can thrive right along with us.

*None of the products depicted are affiliated with or the property of Leahy-IFP.

At Leahy-IFP, we are committed to making a more fruitful life for everyone. If you're interested in learning more about the latest beverage trends, just let us know, we'd be happy to discuss with you and your team.

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