

Nuts, Almonds, Chocolate: Functionality, Shelf Life and Liking

Almonds and chocolate are a compelling combination for consumers. Confectioners must consider the almond form, processing and the chocolate mass itself to ensure a high-quality consumer experience.

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It is clear that clean-label and natural products are the path forward for innovative product development, including within the confectionery category. The chocolate sector is well-primed to address ever-growing consumer demand for “natural” and “clean” products. More and more, manufacturers are expanding the definition of these terms to include the addition of relevant functional nutritional and health benefits. As manufacturers look to strike a balance between health and nutrition—and simple indulgence—texture is emerging as a promising way to craft unique experiences using novel techniques and ingredients to pique consumers’ interest.

Overall, chocolate consumption appears to be up since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, driven by changes in buying habits by channel and increased online purchasing. When a 2020 Global Chocolate Study by Sterling-Rice Group for the Almond Board of California was fielded in June 2020, 64 percent of global survey respondents reported being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

in some way. Additional pandemic-related data from the study indicated that 37 percent of respondents who were affected by the pandemic indicated that they were eating more chocolate than before the pandemic began. Additionally, one-third of respondents who reported being affected by the pandemic have begun purchasing chocolate online for the first time.

CONSUMER DEMAND FOR ALMONDS

According to data obtained in the chocolate study, which surveyed 5,000 consumers across 10 key markets, 42 percent of surveyed consumers reported enjoying new and exciting flavor and texture combinations in chocolate. Almonds with chocolate can increase product appeal to health- and wellness-focused consumers, building on almonds’ natural and nutritious qualities while also reducing guilt.¹ Additionally, Innova Market Insights research indicated that chocolate innovation is driven by consumers looking for products with clean label, gluten-free and no additives/preser- ➤



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