

Victoria Ward, (Speaker #10)

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Questions

1. Do you think there is a correlation between snacking and obesity?

The content of a snack, just like the content of a meal, is always a choice. Snacking can be a healthy component of a well-balanced diet and lifestyle, just like it can be a component of a poor diet and unhealthy lifestyle. It's not the snacking itself that would be linked to weight gain or obesity, but the type of snacking any given consumer chooses to partake in. When snacks are selected with nutrition in mind, snacking can be a great tool to satisfy hunger and manage weight.

2. Do you foresee that the current salted item trend will slow down and then fade out? What about salt and heart health concerns?

I don't think that the sweet and salty/savory trend is on its way out anytime soon! In fact, it's working its way into the mainstream, positioned to one day surpass trend status. The trend is active in so many categories beyond confections; from coffee shop beverages to ice cream and alcohol. Sweet and savory has a home in the American marketplace for many years to come. Regarding health concerns associated with sodium, confections - and similar categories - are areas of permissible indulgence. As with everything in life, balance is key and sodium has its place in a well-managed diet.

3. What is caramel? What makes it? Major ingredients? Process?

In the United States, there is no standard of identity for caramel. You may find it in a variety of forms, from liquid candy centers or sauces to soft, chewy pieces to a harder, stickier binder in the center of candy bars or turtles to hard candy. They may be grained (with a "short" texture) or ungrained (with a chewier, stretchier texture).

The components of a basic caramel include sugar, corn syrup, fat, milk proteins, an emulsifier, salt, and flavoring, usually vanilla. The caramel color and flavor development come not from the caramelizing of the sugars, which occurs at a much higher temperature than that to which caramel is cooked to, but from the Maillard reaction that occurs between the sugars and the milk proteins in the presence of heat. This is the same reaction that causes bread to toast and meat to brown, and it is important to the processing of caramels—but not essential. Lacking the sugars necessary to develop the color and flavor expected of a caramel product, sugar-free caramels usually must have caramel color and flavor added back in. Even in normal sugar caramels, additional caramel flavor can also help standardize the flavor delivery from processing, or to top-note, depending on the finished product application.

While the complexity of caramel is in the ratios of the ingredients, basic caramel processing is fairly simple. All ingredients are mixed, the sugars are dissolved, and the mass is kept at a boil until the temperature reaches the desired point. Because the hardness of the final product is

determined primarily by the amount of water left in the candy mass after cooking, the higher the temperature the product is cooked to, the more water will be boiled off, and the harder the final product will be. The standard final moisture content is 6-8%, correlating roughly to a final temperature of 240-250°F. Once the mass reaches the desired temperature, it may be cooled to a workable temperature at which it can be slabbed, extruded, deposited, etc., depending on the final product. Once in its final form, the caramel should be allowed to set at room temperature. (Tara Levin, DM Confections)

4. Insect candies – any trends in the foreseeable future?

Right now, it's more accurate to call insect candies a novelty rather than a trend. However, as the awareness and interest grows for incorporating insects into our diets, this could someday change. Insect flour has recently made a name for itself as a protein-rich "better for you" ingredient. Pair the health and wellness trend with an increasingly adventurous consumer demographic and there is certainly potential. But we are far from the days of insects being widely accepted as a mainstream food source.

5. Is the trend of sodium reduction in any way influencing the addition of salt (savory) into sweets?

Not really. While there is such a thing as a trend and a counter-trend, I don't think this would be an example of that.

6. What is the definition of salted caramel and how does it differ from regular caramel? Percentage of salt?

Just as there is no standard identity for caramel in the U.S., there is no set level of salt defined for "salted caramel" products. Usually, the difference between salted caramel and regular caramel is simply the addition of salt and/or flavor. The percentage will depend on the desired level of saltiness the manufacturer wishes to impart to the product. The salted vanilla caramels you tried at the show were only 0.224% salt, but with the addition of David Michael's natural salted vanilla caramel flavor, we were able to impart a stronger impact than salt alone. (Tara Levin, DM Confections)

7. Salt provenance – is the European drive for local or is it the safe mystique of faraway places (Himalaya, Galapagos etc.)?

The provenance trend is related to the local trend in that they both point to the origin of an ingredient or flavor, but they're actually quite opposite in meaning. The appeal of provenance is that the point of origin usually connotes a premium or exotic positioning, whereas the local trend is all about sourcing from nearby.

8. Confectioners have always used salt as a flavor enhancer in caramels and toffees as well as chocolate. What has caused this to be highlighted now?

Just as they are in fashion, trends in food are very cyclical. The consumer was ready to embrace something "different" in confections. Millennials particularly, with their "restless palates," are often on the hunt for new and exciting eating experiences. While it's true that salt has long

been used as a flavor enhancer in confections (and even baked goods) it hasn't always been called out and brought to the attention of the consumer. When salt began being highlighted as an ingredient or component in a typically sweet arena, consumers were intrigued. Once they tried – and enjoyed – the salty-sweet combinations, demand for more soared.

9. Do you think pumpkin spice is as popular of a trend as salted caramel? Will this “trend” last a while or do you think we will soon experience another craving?

Pumpkin spice hit the trend scene before salted caramel and is further along on its journey, as it's very much reached mainstream status. While pumpkin spice was once reserved only for pie, it eventually became a seasonal flavor favorite and now can even be found in some products and menus year-round. Pumpkin spice is a trailblazer example of how consumer demand can drive the success of a trend, even if it fits outside of expected parameters.

10. When it comes to combining savory/salty with chocolate, is milk or dark more popular and why?

It's really about consumer flavor preference, and when it comes to chocolate, most consumers prefer milk chocolate over dark chocolate and its bitter properties. On the other hand, dark chocolate has a smaller, but very loyal following. When it comes to salt in particular, its impact is more impressive when paired with dark chocolate, because one of the things salt does so well is mitigate and complement bitter flavors.

11. What do you see as the next salty/savory product combo in the US?

In terms of sweet and salty/savory flavor combinations, salted caramel is still very much America's darling right now. As the sweet and savory trend continues to grow, we can expect to see other pairings achieve popularity. Smoked notes pair very well with sweets like fruit, chocolate and caramel, bacon is a great complement to many sweets, and honey being served with cheese plates at restaurants is a growing occurrence. Salt + sweet, heat + sweet and meat + sweet are all areas of opportunity for continued flavor innovation within this trend.