

Sweets and Snacks Trends: Savory with Grains

Broader food industry trends – including ancient grains, power foods, herbs and spices – and a resurgence of classic flavors like peanut butter and coconut abound in the candy and snack industries this year. Thousands of new confectionery and snack foods will be revealed May 20 – 22 during the 2014 Sweets & Snacks Expo in Chicago. The Expo features the hottest new products from 650 companies and highlights innovation in every aisle.

“This year we see an interesting mix of new products that push flavor boundaries and introduce innovative ingredients, alongside new products that have returned to classic taste profiles and comforting ingredients,” said Alison Bodor, executive vice president of the National Confectioners Association, the host organization of the Sweets & Snacks Expo. “It’s an interesting balance – on the one hand you have Sriracha and on the other, peanut butter. There are products with kale or chia seeds, ingredients many Americans are just getting to know, and products with coconut or marshmallows, classic ingredients being taken to a whole new level.”

Top Candy and Snack Trends 2014:*

Seeds, Grains and Power Foods

From quinoa to kale and from chia to chai, the candy and snack categories are no exceptions when it comes to the influence of the ancient grains, seeds and super food movements. According to IRI Worldwide, 53 percent of consumers try to eat foods that help prevent or manage health challenges and 45 percent seek snacks that offer benefits beyond basic nutrition. The industry has happily complied with these demands. Attendees will also see an influx of products with pumpkin seeds, chick peas, pomegranate, seaweed, sesame, parsnips and even peabutter (a spread made from brown peas).

Comeback Kids

Peabutter might be a radical new concept for most Americans, but they are sure to be better acquainted with its distant cousin, peanut butter, which is popping up alongside other beloved ingredients like bacon, marshmallow fluff and banana. Coconut is also experiencing resurgence in popularity with entries into NCA’s Most Innovative New Product Awards in the sweet, salty, savory, chocolate and gourmet categories. Other comeback kids include almonds, cashews and chocolate with hazelnuts, the latter of which grew an impressive 16 percent in sales in 2013. Caramels are also making a comeback in big way – both on their own and as an inclusion in other products.

Herbs and Spice, Twice as Nice

As taste palates and demographics continue to shift, food manufacturers are increasingly adding more flavorful and exotic herbs and spices to a variety of products, including candy and snacks. Last year’s unexpected Sriracha shortage seems not to have had a lasting impact as snack makers continue to experiment

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with the red chili and garlic condiment. Similarly, Tabasco is popping up in a variety of products, often paired with chocolate. Other herbs and spices highlighted by NCA's Most Innovative New Product Awards nomination process include ginger, rosemary, wasabi, sage, sea salt and cracked pepper.

Deliciously Decadent

Truffle oil, imported salts and browned butter add taste and texture to a wide variety of decadent candy and snacks being introduced at the Expo this year. Indulgent categories like premium chocolates, chocolate-covered salty snacks, bakery snacks, and dried meats and fruits have been on the rise for a few years, fueled in large part by the innovation snack makers have applied to new product launches. Look for more all-natural products in store aisles as well.

Have Your Cake and Chocolate, Too!

If strawberry cheesecake, birthday cake, s'mores and decadent chocolate spreads sound like the offerings on a trendy dessert menu to you, just wait until you taste the dessert-inspired products launching at this year's Expo. From whoopie pie to banana crème pie, this year candy and snack makers found inspiration from dinner's sweet, final course. For those who prefer to drink their desserts, you'll find a variety ranging from beer-themed chocolate and chewy candies to cherry cola, macchiato and crème de menthe flavored treats.

(Trends derived from products submitted for NCA's Most Innovative New Product Awards.)

Sources:

+ NCA estimates, 2013

- IRI data, 2013

~ Euromonitor, 2013

About the National Confectioners Association (NCA) - The National Confectioners Association fosters industry growth by advancing the interests of the confectionery industry and its customers. Serving as the voice of the industry, the Association advocates for the needs of the industry before government bodies, helps the industry understand and implement food safety and other regulations, provides information to help members strengthen business in today's competitive environment and creates relationships between all sectors of the industry including manufacturers, brokers, trade customers, suppliers to the industry and our consumers.

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