BAKING & SNACK INTERNATIONAL

Trends and technology for the industrial baking market worldwide.

Fortified Pursuit

Following in dairy's footsteps, the baking industry continues to pursue fortified, functional food market.

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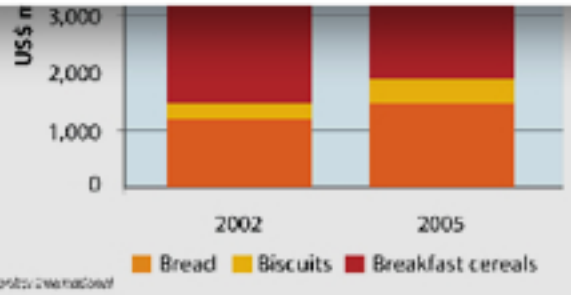
The baking industry is finally waking up — the magic wand of innovation is reviving two particularly sluggish sectors: bread and biscuits. With the timely death of the low-carb fad, manufacturers are starting to take a page out of the dairy industry's handbook by adding value to their own products, from extra fiber to plant sterols to exotic green tea. Global business intelligence provider Euromonitor International takes a look at this market and its huge potential, much of which still lies dormant.

Soluble fiber has been elevated to advanced functional heights, especially since one of its components, beta-glucan, was approved for heart health claims by the US Food and Drug Administration in 1998, reviving the 1980s oat craze. The next big thing on this front will be barley, which also contains beta-glucan. In May 2006, the FDA extended the heart health claim to barley. Cargill, Minneapolis, MN, USA, recently introduced Barliv barley beta-glucan, an ingredient marketed as cholesterol-reducing.

PLANT STEROLS AND OMEGA-3 OILS. The most remarkable innovation of recent years was the launch of cholesterol-reducing functional spreads with added phytosterols, introduced by Raisio and Unilever. Although these products are not doing well in the US, they are a hit in Europe, and the dairy industry, was the first sector to benefit — successfully integrating phytosterols and stanols into drinking yoghurts and other products.

Bakery is now following suit. Earlier this year, Finnish-owned Fazer Bakeries was given the go-ahead by the European Commission to market its sterol-enriched rye bread. In the US, Cargill announced in June 2006 that Bimbo's Oroweat brand was the first to contain Cargill's CoroWise plant sterols. Such products will do well on the European market and, with sufficient promotion, should also appeal to the ageing US population.



Dairy manufacturers were remarkably quick at capitalizing on their products' naturally healthy image as an excellent source of calcium and vitamins. In many countries, including the US, dairy producers started to routinely fortify milk back in the 1930s, in line with a governmental public health policy geared at eradicating malnutrition. The dairy industry has built on this, by further fortification, innovation and promotion.

In contrast, the bakery industry was slower to catch on. However, the bakery sector is in no way inherently disadvantaged here — many bakery products are also considered a naturally healthy staple food, and people have been benefiting from their fortification for decades. In the UK, the fortification of white flour with thiamine, iron, niacin and calcium is mandatory. In the US enrichment of white flour and bread has been mandatory in many states in the 1950s and nationwide since 1993. Folic acid was added to the mandatory mix in 1998 to help prevent neural tube defects in newborns.

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