

# Into the Mainstream: The Latest Tastes in Sports Nutrition

**Beverages are an ideal carrier for all kinds of nutritional benefits. For both professional and amateur sportsmen and women, the ease of consumption and speed of intake is particularly important. We asked Hugh Evans, Marketing Manager at Synergy Flavors, for his views on the latest trends.**

**?** **drink Technology + Marketing:**  
**What are the key current trends in the sports nutrition market?**

**!** **Hugh Evans:** Across the world, lifestyle and demographic changes are sparking increased consumer interest in products that can support healthier lifestyles and aspirational athletic endeavors. Subsequently, sports nutrition products and those enhanced with protein are fast reaching a more mainstream audience.

Indeed, Datamonitor estimates that over 80 per cent of European consumers are now interested in functional food and beverages that improve physical energy or stamina. And this growing interest is being encouraged by the increasing availability of high quality products from high street shops and supermarkets, as well as reputable online sites.

Growth rates are, unsurprisingly, impressive. The market is predicated to be growing at a CAGR of 9.0%, with an estimate that it will reach US\$37.6 billion by 2019.

**?** **What opportunities and challenges is this opening up for food and beverage manufacturers?**

**!** Mass-market expansion presents a major opportunity for manufacturers, but targeting a wider audience involves distinctly different challenges from succeeding in the traditional body building and serious athlete arenas. For mainstream audiences, great taste and interesting flavors are as important as product performance. In fact, research by Bord Bia has found taste and flavor to be the most common factor when selecting a sports nutrition product.

To tap into these new opportunities, manufacturers are aiming to innovate and differentiate their products with interesting and unusual new flavor concepts.

Simultaneously, scientific research is continuing to reveal new insights into the full benefits of nutritional ingredients. This is driving innovation in sports nutrition formulation and segmentation. As the functional properties and efficacy of complex ingredients become better understood, manufacturers are developing ever more advanced bases tailored to specific performance requirements and objectives.

For example, ingredients such as branched chain amino acids (BCAAs), fast-acting carbohydrates and creatine are increasingly being used as core components in nutritional product bases. Highly customized combinations of ingredients are being incorporated into products catering for pre, during and post exercise requirements.

The need to create ever more sophisticated bases to keep up with the latest science poses a variety of challenges for appealing flavor creation. As product bases become more advanced and challenging, flavorings need to be highly tailored to complement the underlying sensory matrices and ensure the desired taste masks any undesirable notes. The challenge is to deliver impactful and appealing profiles, without compromising performance.

**?** **What sensory qualities are main-stream consumers looking for in sports nutrition products?**

**!** In an increasingly segmented market, specific consumer preferences and requirements differ based on the exact product type in question.

Consumers of pre-workout products, for example, tend to look for refreshing and lighter fruity flavors. These products often contain very complex bases with a multitude of ingredients, meaning flavors also need to provide more intensity to complement and mask challenging underlying profiles.

More traditional products, such as protein shakes, meanwhile, are increasingly positioned for everyday consumption. Consumers are therefore looking for more exciting products which taste great and provide a nutritional boost.

Manufacturers are increasingly introducing innovative new flavor combinations to meet this demand. Examples we are seeing coming on the market tend to be based



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on popular flavors from segments such as dairy desserts and sweet bakery. This includes, for example, Neapolitan, blueberry cheesecake and raspberry doughnut.

Even when opting for more classic profiles, such as vanilla, chocolate and strawberry, we're noticing that consumers are beginning to look for more authentic and recognizable flavor variations, such as 'creamy' or 'beany' vanilla.

Additionally, consumers are starting to show interest in naturally flavored and sweetened products. According to Data-monitor, the presence of 'natural' ingredients is a highly influential factor for 68 per cent of consumers who buy products that improve energy and stamina. This adds additional challenges to flavor delivery.

With continual demand for sensory and functional requirements, manufacturers are turning to flavor specialists to support them in differentiating their products while delivering impactful and appealing taste.

**? How do flavor ingredients work in sports nutrition products? What makes them different from ingredients used in other types of products?**

**!** When working with a customer to create an appealing product, companies such as Synergy will typically start with an in-depth analysis of the key flavor descriptors of a specific base, pinpointing and mapping inherent sensory characteristics. Flavors can then be tailored for the exact task in-hand and with specific parameters in mind.

We have developed an extensive lexicon of profile descriptors. Our analytical approach is based on both sensory science and flavor chemistry, and allows for accurate quantitative taste profiling and flavor matching.

Flavorings are developed to complement the characteristics of a specific product base, masking less desirable notes and providing a high impact, lasting taste. We tailor flavors to work with the descriptor matrix of a base and, through sensory testing, adjust them until the desired profile is achieved.

What's undoubtedly true is that the best results are delivered through close partnership working between manufacturer and flavor specialist. As products become more specialized and complex, shared expertise and technical collaboration through the product development process is key to creating an end result that delivers on both taste and performance.

**Thanks you for your time and for sharing these insights. Best wishes for the future.**

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