

U.S. FOODLINK

The bi-monthly newsletter for importers of U.S. foods

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Adapting to Inflation THROUGH INNOVATION IN FOOD AND BEVERAGE MANUFACTURING

What happens when rising costs threaten every step of the production process? For many manufacturers in the U.S., the answer is often innovation. While some food and beverage producers have struggled to stay afloat amid the ongoing economic constraints, other U.S. manufacturers have leveraged these challenges as an opportunity to sharpen their competitive edge.

Sourcing

The rising costs of agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, water, and labor have also pushed many food and beverage manufacturers within the U.S. to pivot away from their traditional methods to practices that are more cost-effective and sustainable – and regenerative agriculture methods that emphasize both soil health and biodiversity are leading the charge.

For example, Bluebird Grain Farms, a family-owned company based in Washington State, has already fully integrated regenerative practices into its farming operations. With an emphasis on enhancing the health of their soil through crop rotation, cover cropping, and reducing tillage to grow organic grains like heirloom wheat and emmer, the company has managed to minimize its reliance on synthetic fertilizers while simultaneously producing more nutrient-dense crops.

In addition, the food-upcycling movement has also been gaining traction as of late, enabling U.S. food and beverage manufacturers to transform their food byproducts that would typically be discarded as waste into new types of consumable

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Adapting to Inflation *Continued*

goods. For example, ReGrained, a food-upcycling technology and ingredient platform based in San Francisco, transforms the spent grains of brewing companies into healthy and versatile snacks, reducing their waste footprint. Dan Kurzrock, the CEO of ReGrained, believes that “value-added ingredients and products from brewers’ spent grain alone could easily be a multi-billion-dollar market opportunity.”

Manufacturing and Processing

High inflation has also driven many U.S. food and beverage manufacturers to adopt emerging technologies such as automation and artificial intelligence (AI) into their operations to combat rising energy and labor costs. SugarCreek Packing Company uses Ignition, an industrial application platform for building solutions in human-machine interfaces (HMI), supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA), manufacturing execution systems (MES), and the industrial internet of things (IIoT). The platform is equipped to obtain useful and timely information about disruptive downtime incidents, as well as to reduce the company’s operating costs while simultaneously increasing its efficiency.

According to Ed Rodden, the company’s chief information officer, accessing real-time data was an ongoing struggle for SugarCreek – but many of these issues were resolved once it began leveraging the technology. “Typically, we were looking at information that was a day old. Now with Ignition, the data is immediately available and highly actionable. It makes a world of difference,” said Rodden.

Distribution and Logistics

Steadily increasing fuel and transportation costs have prompted many U.S. food and beverage manufacturers to

rethink their logistics approaches as well. Many companies have been turning to bulk shipping methods, which can help to reduce packaging waste while making the most of the allotted container space as a strategy for lowering overall costs. Innovations like AI-powered route optimization technologies can also help streamline supply chains while limiting delays and ensuring reliable delivery outcomes.

Sustainability-focused companies such as TerraCycle have developed innovative packaging solutions that purportedly generate zero waste, allowing many U.S. food and beverage manufacturers to streamline their packaging processes while decreasing their bottom lines. For international importers, these emerging practices can provide more affordable and eco-friendly options that align with global sustainability goals.

Retail and Consumer Pricing

At the retail level, inflation has also influenced how U.S. products are packaged and priced to meet evolving consumer expectations. Shrinkflation – decreasing the portion size of a product instead of increasing the price – remains a common strategy for managing rising food and beverage costs; however, many shoppers have begun to take notice.

In the most recent Consumer Food Insights Report conducted by Purdue University in October 2024, 47% of the U.S. consumers surveyed said they would prefer for companies to increase the prices of their snacks, meals, and beverages, while the remaining 53% preferred decreasing the sizes of these products.

Private-label products have also been gaining traction as a cost-effective method for retailers in the U.S. to expand their store-brand offerings by creating affordable yet high-quality alternatives.

Product Development

To mitigate the rising costs impacting product development, many U.S. food and beverage manufacturers have been reformulating their products with cost-effective, alternative ingredients. For example, Banza, a Detroit-based company, uses chickpeas to produce a more nutritious and budget-friendly pasta alternative to traditional wheat-based products.

Lightweight and recyclable packaging can help reduce costs while also appealing to environmentally conscious buyers and helping manufacturers achieve their sustainability goals. Milkadamia, an Illinois-based startup, recently debuted 2D-printed oat milk “Flat Packs” in sheet form that purportedly cut packaging waste by 94% and weight by 85%. The new “pre-cycled” product also decreases ecological costs.

The Road Ahead

Although inflation has impacted every facet of manufacturing within the U.S. food and beverage industry, it has also, in some respects, inspired a refreshing break from traditional strategies. From sustainable sourcing and advanced manufacturing to strategic pricing and product development, U.S. manufacturers are finding ways to deliver value without sacrificing quality.

The Better-for-You Boom

The “better-for-you” movement has gained traction within the U.S. food and beverage sector, reflecting a significant shift toward products that offer functional benefits and support consumers’ health and wellness goals. Small- and mid-sized manufacturers are capitalizing on these trends.

Functional Beverages

Gut health remains a top priority for health-conscious Americans, a trend largely driven by increased awareness of the gut microbiome’s impact on overall health and wellbeing – from improving digestion to enhancing cognitive function. U.S. manufacturers have catered to this growing demand with a wave of “functional” beverages like probiotic sodas and kombuchas packed with extra nutrients.

Health-Ade Kombucha, a mid-sized beverage manufacturer, leveled up its functional profile through its Glow Up line of kombuchas fortified with natural antioxidants and “gut-healthy acids” as well as probiotics.

Fortified, Superfood-Infused Foods

U.S. food manufacturers have increasingly incorporated essential nutrients like vitamins and minerals into their products to help consumers fill their nutritional gaps, which is especially important for individuals grappling with food allergies and/or dietary restrictions.

That strategy has created a promising opportunity that American food producers, such as Harken Sweets, have harnessed to their advantage. The better-for-you candy brand has enjoyed 50% growth since its launch in early 2024 – and much of its success can be attributed to its keen understanding of the wants and needs of health-conscious consumers.

After learning that 65% of Americans wanted to increase their intake of both superfoods and functional foods in its preliminary round of market research, Harken developed candy bars infused with superfoods and soluble fiber, another nutrient linked to gut health. By macerating



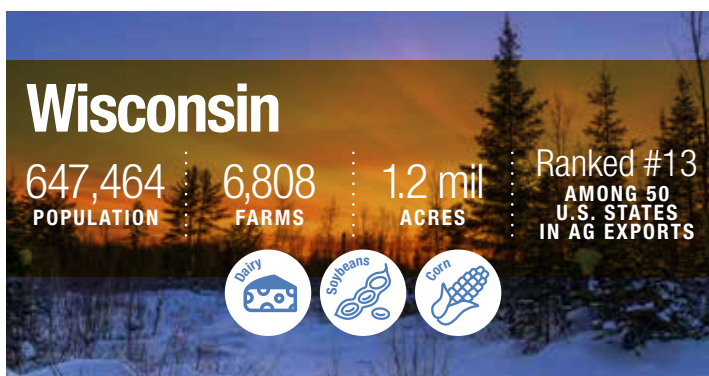
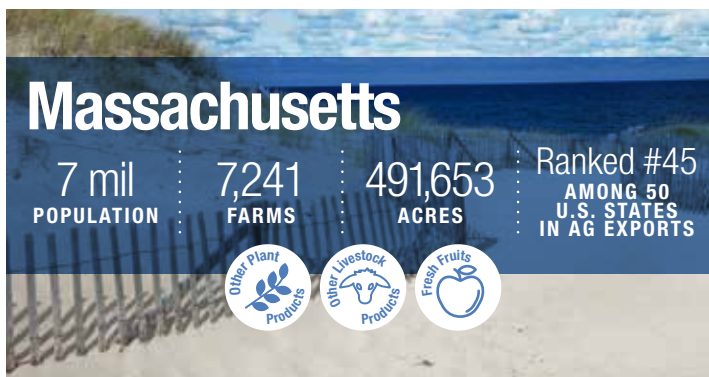
its dates, the company was also able to create the first-ever date caramel without using milk or butter, which has further increased its appeal with the growing number of U.S. consumers. And Harken’s candy bars are also low in sugar.

Low-Glycemic and Blood Sugar-Friendly Products

The rise of GLP-1 medications like Ozempic and Wegovy that are most commonly prescribed for weight loss and diabetes management, has also influenced consumer behavior – particularly around monitoring blood sugar levels. This shift presents significant opportunities for manufacturers to develop products catered to consumers taking the drugs. These individuals have become increasingly aware of their blood sugar levels, increasing demand for food and beverage products that have a low glycemic index and can help stabilize blood sugar levels.

For example, the small beverage company Swoon produces sugar-free lemonades and iced teas that are sweetened with monk fruit, making them an ideal option for health-conscious consumers who are seeking sweet, refreshing drinks that won’t spike their blood sugar levels.

Featured U.S. Midwest & Northeast State Profiles



news briefs

Beans are gaining popularity as a plant-based source of protein and fiber that supports gut health and reduces the risk of obesity, colon cancer, and heart disease. Some expect beans to become a top meat alternative for many Americans due to their low cost and long shelf life.

Industry experts have noted that yogurt remains popular due to growing consumer interest in gut health. However, they emphasize the need for brands to develop innovative, portable, and health-focused products to remain competitive within the sector.

Patients on GLP-1 drugs have reportedly lost interest in ultra-processed foods that contain colorings, bleaching agents, or artificial sweeteners, posing a potential threat to “junk food” manufacturers. “The whole field is still a little stunned,” said Ashley Gearhardt, a researcher and professor at the University of Michigan, reported *The New York Times*.

Increased screen time has inspired a shift toward quick, energy-boosting snacks as consumers juggle more activities and spend less time preparing meals. According to a recent report by Circana, the average American gets over seven hours of screen time daily, reported *Supermarket Perimeter*.

Nestlé U.S. predicts the top 2025 F&B trends will include “accessible experimentation,” wellness-focused functional foods, and extreme convenience. These trends reflect growing consumer desires for quick, healthy, and affordable food.



A recent Yelp Trends Tracker report found that searches for “coffee omakase” rose 5,173% between Sept. 2023 and Sept. 2024. Loosely translates to “I leave it up to you,” omakase is a curated and intimate experience with a barista.

Sweet brews and better-for-you beverages are among the top beer trends predicted for 2025, according to a recent report. Popular with younger generations, it's like combining dessert with alcohol consumption.

Hot honey, mushrooms, and Asian cuisine, particularly Korean and Vietnamese, are among the top restaurant trends identified in the National Restaurant Association's 2025 “What's Hot” report. Cold brew, hyper-local beer & wine, and creative spritzes also made the list.

U.S. small towns have seen a recent surge in coffee shops, which has largely been fueled by the rising popularity of iced, sugary drinks with Gen Z and Millennials. This shift has resulted in more drive-thru locations and social media-friendly drink options.

Brown butter is the top dairy flavor profile to watch next year, according to Edlong's “Top 10 Dairy Flavor Profiles for 2025” report. The flavor is especially popular with Millennial and Gen Z consumers due to its rich taste and versatility in both sweet and savory pairings.



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Agropur Inc.

Appleton, Wisconsin

Agropur is a top 20 global dairy producer founded in 1938. Our U.S. cheese operations produce more than 1 billion pounds of consistent, high-quality, award-winning cheese each year under the guidance of our Wisconsin Master Cheesemakers. Our cheeses regularly earn top awards from some of the world's most prestigious contests. Able to produce more than 20 varieties, Agropur specializes in mozzarella, provolone, cheddar and feta. Agropur has seven SQF Certified cheese plants across the U.S. along with international support. "Exceptional Cheese. Expert Solutions." agropur.com/us/cheese | agropur.com/us



Croix Valley Foods

Hudson, Wisconsin

Discover the distinctive BBQ flavors your clientele desires with Croix Valley. Our extensive range includes everything from fruit-infused BBQ sauces to iconic regional favorites like Memphis and St. Louis styles, catering to every BBQ preference. Established in 2009, we have swiftly grown to become one of the globe's fastest-growing BBQ sauce and rub providers. Our triumph has expanded our product reach to retailers across the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, The Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Czechia, Japan, and beyond. Retail partners consistently find that our diverse product offerings and bold flavor profiles cultivate a loyal customer base, ensuring repeat business year after year. Crafted in Hudson, Wisconsin, our products boast an all-natural, gluten-free formulation without any MSG. Embraced by professional food sport competitors worldwide, Croix Valley has become a favored choice. Connect with us, and we'll gladly send you a sample – we guarantee you'll be enamored with it!



Boyd's Cardinal Hollow Winery

North Wales, Pennsylvania

Whiskey Mead – 100% Fermented PA Wildflower Honey in old KY Whiskey Barrels for over a year. Multiple award winner. Smells like Whiskey, taste honey, swallow you get barrel. Finished at 3% residual sugar so only a semi sweet with 12-14% alcohol. Best Mead you will ever try!



Cheesewich Factory

La Grange, Illinois

Cheesewich products are high-protein, keto-friendly, grab-n-go snacks, available in open-air coolers. The perfect snack for kids and adults. Cheesewich Factory is a family-owned brand, offering a range of convenient and nutritious options for any occasion. The Cheesewich Factory prioritizes convenience, quality, and nutrition in its offerings, appealing to consumers seeking healthy, low-carb options without compromising taste. Their products are popular among busy professionals and fitness enthusiasts. In addition to the classic Cheesewich, the company offers a variety of product lines featuring different cheese and meat combinations, as well as other protein-focused snacks. The Cheesewich Factory is committed to delivering innovative, high-quality food options that cater to evolving consumer preferences.

For more information about these or other Featured Products please email: FoodLink@foodexport.org.



Bongards' Creameries

Chanhasen, Minnesota

Bongards Creameries is a farmer-owned co-op founded in 1908 in Minnesota, U.S. As a vertically-integrated, global cheese supplier with over a century of dairy expertise, Bongards produces hundreds of millions of pounds of natural cheese, process cheese, and whey each year. Our products are chosen by many of the world's largest foodservice operators, food manufacturers, and foodservice distributors. Bongards Process Cheese is crafted from rich, creamy natural cheese, and available in slices, loaves, or shreds. We offer flavors such as American, Swiss, Jalapeno, and Mozzarella, and a wide variety of slice configurations and pack sizes to meet your specific needs. For more information visit www.Bongards.com.



Dairyland Management LLC

Wausau, Wisconsin

Dairyland Ginseng is a trusted provider of premium Wisconsin-grown ginseng, sourced from local growers who uphold the highest standards of quality and sustainability. With over four decades of experience, we are proud to supply authentic American ginseng, renowned for its smooth, slightly sweet flavor and exceptional health benefits.

Our diverse range of products, including whole roots, slices, capsules, powder, and seeds for planting, caters to culinary, wellness, and export markets worldwide. By partnering with skilled Wisconsin farmers, we ensure that every product reflects the rich tradition and unmatched quality that makes Wisconsin ginseng the gold standard globally.

Dairyland Ginseng is dedicated to delivering premium, ethically sourced products that meet the needs of discerning customers. Whether for international cuisine or daily wellness, we are your reliable partner for exceptional American ginseng. Experience the trusted quality of Dairyland Ginseng in every product.



The Fremont Company

Fremont, Ohio

The Fremont Company is a leading American Ketchup and BBQ Sauce manufacturer. Our premium private label or branded condiments are made from California tomatoes with no artificial ingredients.

Fremont's newest offering is a BBQ Sauce matching the brand quality, taste and look of World's #1 BBQ Sauce – *Sweet Baby Ray's®. According to Nielsen, this brand also represents 46% of all BBQ Sauce units purchased in the U.S. Fremont's new BBQ Sauces are available in the three most popular BBQ Sauce flavors: Original, Hickory & Honey.

Fremont is an award-winning exporter with expertise to meet the unique needs of international business and our products are distributed in +85 countries. Whether it is your brand or ours, Fremont generates incremental sales with products preferred by your customers. *Sweet Baby Ray's® is a registered trademark of Ken's Foods, Inc. and is not produced by Fremont.*



Godshall's Quality Meats

Telford, Pennsylvania

Godshall's Quality Meats specializes in premium smoked meat products, with a focus on bacon varieties such as poultry, beef, and pork. Our offerings also include a wide range of sausages, hams, deli meats, and Halal-certified options. We operate two USDA-approved plants, both certified at SQF Level 3, allowing us to produce a diverse selection of processed meats tailored to our customers' needs. All our products are crafted from high-quality U.S.-sourced meats and are authentically smoked using real wood. Godshall's serves multiple market segments, including Retail, Foodservice, Snacks, Specialty/Gourmet, Private Label, and Natural/Organic.



Groceries USA

New York, New York

Marshmallow Fluff is a unique original American spread with no equal. Its unique light and fluffy texture is ideal as a sandwich spread, topping or baking ingredient. The Fluffernutter, the official sandwich of Massachusetts where Fluff is made, consists of marshmallow Fluff and peanut butter and has been a staple in American households for almost a century.

The Fluff brand has been featured in various daily newspapers and national magazines such as *Times* and *Newsweek* for its ability to stay so successful in the world of food marketing. American astronauts have even taken Marshmallow Fluff to the International Space Station – twice!

Packed in 7.5 oz. pet jars, Fluff is manufactured in its Lynn, Massachusetts facility since 1929 (although the origins of Marshmallow Fluff go back to 1917). The secret of Fluff's success is its large multi-generational customer base who grew up eating Fluff. An industry benchmark of success on how one company has stood the test of time.



Ice Cream Factory

Lebanon, Missouri

Ice Cream Factory is a Missouri-based, family-owned business that's been spreading happiness with high-quality, premium ice cream for over five years. Made with the finest ingredients and handcrafted with delicious baked goods from our own bakery. We offer 16 amazing flavors, all with no artificial colors, no artificial flavors, no artificial stabilizers, no high fructose corn syrup.

Our ice cream is available in over 4,000 locations across 34 states. We produce both for personal treats and business opportunities, including wholesaling, co-packing, private labeling, and retail sectors nationwide.

Check out our website at icecreamfactoryco.com to learn more and get started!

For more information about these or other Featured Products please email: FoodLink@foodexport.org.



Widmer's Cheese Cellars

Theresa, Wisconsin

When it comes to producing delicious, award-winning Wisconsin cheese and other farm-fresh dairy products, there's no place like Wisconsin. Widmer's Cheese Cellars was founded over 90 years ago in 1922 by Swiss immigrant and is settled in the heart of one of the richest cheesemaking areas in America. His motto was "take no shortcuts and accept nothing less than the best." This approach to cheesemaking has been carried on through four generations of the Widmer family.

Embracing the manufacturing techniques which have been handed down through generations of European and Wisconsin cheesemakers, Widmer's Cheese Cellars carefully produces some of the finest Brick, Cheddar, and Colby cheeses in the world. The dairy heritage, culture, and pride run deep, and the traditions of cheesemaking and dairy manufacturing are second to none. The cheeses are handcrafted today under the watchful eye of third-generation Certified Master Cheesemaker Joe Widmer.

<https://www.widmerscheese.com/>



Nutra Food Ingredients LLC

Kentwood, Michigan

The world's first COLLAGEN COFFEE is available in 6 decadent flavor varieties to choose from including Original, Mocha Hazelnut, Salted Caramel, Chai Latte, and seasonal favorites like Pumpkin Spice and Peppermint Mocha. Each COLLAGEN COFFEE blend is well-balanced with 11g (per serving) of the highest-quality hydrolyzed collagen peptides from grass-fed bovine, with a rich blend of real coffee and added MCTs to come out perfectly light and creamy. The formulations are all low to no sugar, non-dairy, hormone free, keto and paleo friendly. Give your morning routine that much needed pick-me up and glow by just adding hot water. These blends can also double to make creamy, lightly sweet, iced coffee drinks that are refreshing, and absolutely irresistible. Don't let your imagination stop there as Collagen Coffee can also be used to make ice cream, sauces, creamers, cookies, cakes, etc. There's no limit to what you can make!

Visit www.nutracollagen.com



Orange Cheese Company

Woodbridge, Connecticut

Oralife is a brand created by Orange Cheese Company, which offer various different retail-sized products for kids and adults at any time of the day! At Oralife, we believe life is great, and cheese makes it better! Oralife offers a variety of natural, fresh and delicious cheeses that are consciously selected and crafted for their quality and great taste. We invite you to join the journey of exploring what great cheese can bring to our life.



Reichel Foods, Inc.

Rochester, Minnesota

Reichel Foods, a leading innovator in the fresh produce snack industry, is the proud creator of Dippin' Stix and PRO2snax. Dippin' Stix delivers fresh, ready-to-eat snacks like crisp apple slices paired with caramel and peanut butter for a fun and flavorful snacking experience. These single-serve packs are perfect for busy lifestyles, providing a quick, nutritious boost on-the-go. PRO2snax takes convenience a step further by combining premium produce with protein-packed pairings, such as cheese, nuts, and hard-boiled eggs, for a balanced and satisfying snack alternative for day-to-day life or post-workout. With a commitment to quality, convenience, and innovation, Reichel Foods provides snacks that make healthy eating effortless and fit perfectly into today's fast-paced world.



Pine River Pre-Pack, Inc.

Newton, Wisconsin

Located in Wisconsin, Pine River is a manufacturer of gourmet cheese spreads offering three product lines: traditional cold pack cheese spreads, premier no-preservative cheese spreads, and shelf-stable gourmet snack spreads. Using only the finest ingredients from America's Dairyland, our cheese spreads are the world's most awarded. Pine River has over 20 flavors in sizes from the 2.5oz single serve and standard 8oz retail, to the 5lb tub foodservice up to the 30lb commercial offering. These are produced in a state-of-the-art SQF certified facility specializing in custom formulations and provide label branding. A great complement to any product line.



We Are Wonderfully Made

Metuchen, New Jersey

We Are Wonderfully Made, LLC (WAWM®) offers unique, high quality hot sauces that are delicious and healthy. We do this by bringing customers our Trinidadian recipes using only non gmo, vegan, gluten free, and low sodium ingredients. Created by husband and wife duo Iman and Ryan, Iman saw the need to provide a hot sauce that was health conscious and multi-use all while introducing the world to the great flavors of Trinidad and Tobago. WAWM® sauces are perfect for usage of all kinds like topping, dipping, cooking, marinating, and even in your favorite spicy drinks. WAWM® also features a built-in give back program where a portion of all sales are donated to The Andreas Foundation to raise awareness for pregnancy and infant loss. Learn more at wawmsauce.com



LorAnn Oils, Inc.

Lansing, Michigan

Discover the power of flavor with LorAnn's Bakery Emulsions, available in over 20 delicious varieties and a range of sizes. Designed for professional and artisan bakers, confectioners, and food manufacturers worldwide; our water-based emulsions deliver bold, consistent flavors that outperform traditional extracts, even when baked at high temperatures. From timeless favorites like Almond and Lemon to creative options like Red Velvet and Princess Cake, LorAnn offers something for every recipe and palate.

A trusted name since 1962, LorAnn is a family-owned company dedicated to quality and innovation. With Gluten-Free and Kosher-Certified options, our products are a trusted source for flavorings and culinary essentials, empowering chefs and home cooks to unleash their creativity in the kitchen.

Ready to transform your creations? Explore our full line of Bakery Emulsions and other premium ingredients at www.lorannoils.com. Bring extraordinary flavor to every bite!

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