by A. Elizabeth Sloan

# Consumers Have a **Taste for Texture**

*Walkers Deep Ridged Salt & Malt Vinegar Crisps*' ridges are "twice as deep" as other chips for maximum crunch. Clif Bar's new *Crunch* granola bar contains "rich, creamy chocolate chips." Yogurt is being sold whipped, moussed, twisted, and squished around, while gummy candies fast approach $2 billion in sales.

Marketplace developments like the preceding suggest that consumers—and product developers—are very focused on texture. In fact, over one-quarter (27%) of the best-selling new U.S. foods and beverages launched in 2012 carried a texture claim, according to IRI's 2013 *New Product Pacesetters Report*. The texture movement began around 2010 when the number of best-selling new products with a texture claim doubled over the previous 10-year period; growth has been strong and steady ever since.

The time to flaunt texture is now. Texture has enormous appeal to foodies, who are going well beyond flavor and terroir to find more adventure in foods. Texture is increasingly being used to confirm if a product is "real," "fresh," or "less processed." Pieces of real nuts or dried fruit signal quality in cookies and bars. Pulp delivers the same signal in fresh-squeezed juices; more than one-third (37%) of orange juice users buy juice with pulp, according to Mintel.

Moreover, texture claims are also helping to manage shoppers' taste expectations for new products. For example, will that cookie be soft and chewy or crisp and hard?

The percentage of consumers who said they would order or buy a food described as "savory" jumped from 31% in 2010 to 51% in 2012; for products described as "crispy," the total climbed from 27% to 38%; and for "rich" products, the share moved from 22% to 32%, according to data from Technomic.

Younger adults have the greatest interest in texture, which suggests that a focus on texture is a long-term trend worthy of investment by food manufacturers. Snacks, bars, cereals, and dairy (especially cheese) are the most active new product categories globally when it comes to texture claims, according to Innova Market Insights.

Texture and technology are allowing manufacturers to create entirely new product forms such as Kellogg's *Popcorn Chips*, PomePure's *Pressed Juices*, Peeled Snacks' *Apple Clusters,* or *Oatworks* breakfast beverages that combine oats and fruits.

Fromagerie Belle Chevre offers a goat cheese cheesecake. Taza supplies *Stone Ground Chocolate,* and Pepperidge Farms offers *Milan Melts*. Extra-thin items (e.g., cookies, crackers, and bread thins) are adding crispness and crunch while addressing a fast-emerging low-carb/less bread trend.

Salty snack marketers are making chips in all sizes, shapes, and thickness for added crunch. Boursin added nuts and figs to its smooth cheese spread in Belgium. String cheese was the third-fastest-growing healthy snack in the United States in 2012, according to IRI data.

Coatings play an important role in texture enhancement. Breaded baking/grilling cheeses for the center-of-the plate are growing in popularity. In Eastern Europe, soft cheese/curd cheese bars enrobed in chocolate are a popular snack; dough-enrobed whole nuts are offered in Western Europe.

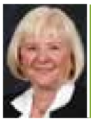
With the use of frying as home food preparation technique in the U.S. dropping 22% over the past five years, according to a Food Marketing Institute report, and sales of French fries falling in restaurants for eight consecutive years, finding alternative ways to add crispness and crunch to foods is a very big idea.

Moreover, with nine in 10 consumers preferring to get benefits naturally from foods, the opportunities for natural texturizing ingredients (e.g., whole/ancient grains and natural thickeners) will gain momentum. Whole grains and fiber are still the most sought after healthy ingredients, per the International Food Information Council.

The revolution in restaurant breads, burger buns, and sandwich carriers and the explosive growth of trail mixes are two high potential market segments for texture. Flatbreads and focaccia were among the fastest-growing breakfast breads on menus in 2012, according to Datassential; brioche and pretzel bread are big for sandwiches; and tortillas and Texas toast are now trendy for burgers. Mission's new *Fruited-Flatbreads* and Great San Saba River Co.'s *Peach, Pecan & Amaretto Preserves* are other naturally strong texture-driven ideas.

Look to restaurants as a barometer for the most popular texture claims. According to the Food Research Institute's *MenuMine* database, crisp, tender, creamy, stuffed, and melted were the top texture descriptors for savory menu items. Technomic reports that whipped, creamy, crisp/crispy, brulée, crunch/crunchy, moist, and smooth were the top texture dessert descriptors; for restaurant menu items overall, the leading descriptors were crisp, tender, creamy, whipped, and smooth. **FT**

> ***Texture has enormous appeal to foodies,*** *who are going well beyond flavor and terroir to find more adventure in foods.*



***A. Elizabeth Sloan,***
*Contributing Editor*
*• President, Sloan Trends Inc., Escondido, Calif.*
*• sloan@sloantrend.com*