Plant-based ingredients in sports nutrition have gained popularity among European consumers, the latest consumer survey for V-Label shows.

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Data from 18 European countries show that plant-based ingredients such as pea, rice, or potato proteins are appealing to consumers interested in sports nutrition products. Food producers that want to introduce new products or boost sales should continue educating consumers and focus on communicating the various benefits their ingredients and products may bring to their consumers.

Plant-powered variety: ingredients and flavors

Sports nutrition food and drink producers introducing new plant-based protein products may capture consumer interest based on their preferences. The following ingredients listed as proteins were selected as appealing: **plant protein (71%), rice protein (60%), potato protein (59%), wheat protein (59%), pea protein (58%), soy protein (56%)**, algae protein (41%), and hemp protein (41%). Interestingly, the most common protein on the market - whey - was second in terms of favorability, chosen by 69% of respondents. Egg protein was even lower with 57%.

The most appealing flavors for sports nutrition products were chocolate (77%), vanilla (73%), tropical fruit (57%), acai berry (56%), and lime (56%), whereas the least appealing flavors were blackcurrant (26%), blueberries (25%), cola (25%), lemon (25%), and lemonade (25%).

“The message for food producers is clear. European consumers want variety and plant-based ingredients in their functional foods,” says Renato Pichler, CEO of V-Label. “The plant-based foods megatrend, driven by increasing consumer demand, is well established within the alternative meat and dairy markets. We see a lot of untapped potential in different categories.”

Informed consumers: claims, factors, and barriers

When buying food and drink products, consumers seek out various types of information. With sports nutrition products, consumers found these claims appealing: low/no sugar (70%), energy-boosting (69%), high in fiber (68%), contains probiotics (67%), high in protein (66%), plant-based (65%), high in vitamins (60%), low/no lactose (41%), and satiety enhancing (40%).

Consumers selected several factors as important when choosing sports nutrition products: multiple functional benefits (71%), natural claims (69%), scientific claims (68%), type of protein source (63%), health claims (62%), and plant-based ingredients (57%). Data further suggest some barriers consumers face when buying sports nutrition products: cost (67%), types of protein used (55%), no products that suit nutritional needs (52%), lack of awareness about different types of protein (50%), and lack of understanding around ingredient and health claims (49%).

“With our partner organizations, we directly speak to more than 890,000 consumers that are very interested in plant-based products,” comments Renato Pichler, CEO of V-Label. “V-Label is in a unique and strong position that certified producers may benefit from. We may help them get their products seen by potential customers.”

V-Label has recently conducted its own consumer survey with more than 23,000 respondents across the globe. When buying vegan or vegetarian products, 91% of respondents prefer products with a certificate such as V-Label, half of whom say they definitely opt for such products. “79% of consumers globally agree that they consciously pay more attention to products with the V-Label symbol and 61% claim they are actively on the lookout for the V-Label sign on the packaging,” says Sarah Gajdosik, International Sales and Business Development Manager of V-Label. “Producers may benefit from existing trust consumers have towards V-Label, and, in this sense, V-Label goes beyond the simple recognition of whether a product is vegan or vegetarian and helps them stand out from increasingly full supermarket shelves.”

Product types, frequency, and desired outcome

In the last six months, 53% of respondents have purchased protein bars, 49% high protein cookies, 47% ready-to-drink high protein beverages, and 35% protein powder to use in shakes/beverages. When it

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comes to frequency and types of products, consumers have their favorites as well:

- High protein cookies: 20% daily, 37% weekly

- Ready-to-drink high protein beverages: 22% daily, 37% weekly
- Protein bar: 22% daily, 37% weekly
- Protein powder to use in shakes/beverages: 21% daily, 36% weekly

Consumers focused on sports nutrition products search for various information on packaging and actively look out for ingredients delivering desired benefits. When it comes to health claims, these are the most appealing: helps improve digestive health (69%), helps boost energy (67%), helps you gain muscle (66%), helps improve heart health (66%), helps improve immune health (66%), helps you lose weight (53%), helps satisfy hunger (50%).

Messaging for specific products may be adjusted based on the desired outcome consumers seek to have with specific products:

- High protein cookies: 60% to maintain a healthy weight, 29% to lose weight, 32% to build lean muscle/tone up/achieve a favorable body
- High protein drinks that are ready-to-drink straight from the packaging: 62% to maintain a healthy weight, 29% to lose weight, 33% to build lean muscle/tone up/achieve a favorable body
- Protein bar: 59% to maintain a healthy weight, 30% to lose weight, 30% to build lean muscle/tone up/achieve a favorable body
- Protein powder to use in shakes/beverages: 58% to maintain a healthy weight, 29% to lose weight, 29% to build lean muscle/tone up/achieve a favorable body

ENDS

For more information or to set up interviews with V-Label, please contact Martin Ranninger: martin.ranninger@proveg.com

www.v-label.eu

Graphics/photos: https://bit.ly/3vLCBHe

About V-Label

Across the globe, more than 40,000 products from more than 3,500 licensees now carry V-Label. V-Label is an internationally recognized, registered seal for labeling vegan and vegetarian products and services established in Switzerland in 1996. It is a reliable, go-to shopping guide for consumers. With more than 25 years of experience labeling products and engaging experts in quality management, food technology, chemistry, cosmetology and marketing, V-Label is the frontrunner of a global movement. As such, they cooperate with businesses, retailers, consumers, and campaigners.

About the survey

The data presented in this press release are based on consumer surveys conducted by FMCG Gurus. The survey was done in 18 European countries (Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, The Netherlands, Sweden, Turkey, & the UK) and presents opinions of 18,000 consumers.

Company Contact:

V-Label GmbH

T. +420720658032
E. martin.ranninger@proveg.com
W. https://v-label.eu/

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