

Nutrient-rich dairy beverages an emerging market

The global food market is estimated at around \$2.5 trillion per annum, which is growing currently at a rate of four percent per annum. A radical shift in food consumption pattern has been forecast the world over.

In markets, especially in the developed world, with a growing aged population, the consumption of healthier foods is rapidly increasing. Besides, the emerging health-conscious newer generation globally is paving the way for introduction of varieties of weight-reducing, low-cholesterol, high-fibre, nutrient-rich food products. In recent times, the demand for these products has increased by leaps and bounds!

A report, published recently in the Australian Dairy Food journal, on a study conducted by ACNielsen Global Services, identified some key trends relating to consumer purchases in food and beverages: A Continued Focus on Health and Freshness; The Need for Convenience: and The Continuing Need for Value.

The report further stated that overall global growth rate in food and beverage products would vary significantly within regions and categories. In the beverage category, yoghurt-based drinks topped the list, which showed double-digit growth.

Today's lifestyles are gradually demanding healthier beverages to quench thirst, which are primarily dominated by coloured, carbonated drinks. Besides, consumers also prefer beverages that are fun, portable and convenient and of course taste good. Milk and milk-based drinks are certainly the answer!

It caters to all kinds of needs over and above its nutritional benefits. Some of the dairy beverage products can be enriched with active ingredients such as omega-3 fatty acids, cholesterol-lowering ingredients and probiotics besides micronutrients. Such products are being targeted at the niche market globally.

There is a rapidly growing functional food market with products such as probiotic yoghurt drinks, cholesterol-lowering drinks, drinks with high fortification levels for children and sports drinks. However, not sufficient focus has been given to whey-based beverages, traditional fermented dairy drinks. Whey contains key proteins, carbohydrates, minerals, trace elements and vitamins and is virtually fat free. The utilisation of dairy by-products such as whey with the addition of fruits, cereals and active ingredients in carbonated beverage forms could revolutionise the existing beverage market.

The key to successfully marketing these products is excellent product delivery and customised packaging system (e.g. single serve shots) to maintain the freshness and naturalness. The key challenges therefore would be in creating an integrated supply chain with macro production and warehousing hubs with distribution systems.

According to a survey conducted by M/s Euromonitor International, though probiotic branded product manufacturing is, at present, at a nascent stage in India, a radical change is taking place. For instance, branded yoghurt/curd and cultured milk/lassi are growing at a rate of 14 percent and 33 percent respectively. Leading players in the Indian dairy industry like Amul, Nestle, Mother Dairy

and Britannia are already in the probiotic milk and milk product market. An internationally reputed probiotic beverage brand, Yakult, is also entering the Indian beverage market soon.

Some of the recently conducted surveys projected a mammoth Indian consumer market growth. Among food products, value added milk products and especially probiotic products are expected to top the list. Thus, India is becoming an attractive destination for investments in this sector.

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