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INNOVA MARKET INSIGHTS

Heart Health Products Push Ahead

Despite ongoing regulatory issues with regard to health claims, the positioning of new food and drink products on a specific heart health platform appears to be continuing unabated. Data from the **Innova Database** show that the number of product launches positioned on a heart health platform has nearly tripled over the past five years. They accounted for nearly 1.5% of total food and drinks launches recorded over the 12 month period to the end of April 2010, up from less than 0.7% in 2005.

The USA and Europe have dominated this activity, accounting for two-thirds of heart health launches recorded by **Innova**. In terms of types of product, the bakery and cereals sector clearly leads with over a quarter of the total, ahead of dairy products with 12%, ready meals and meal components with 10% and soft drinks with 9%. Other sectors featuring significant numbers of heart health launches included hot beverages; meat, fish & eggs; fruit & vegetable products and soups, sauces & seasonings.

While these products are taking a specific heart health positioning, there are many other products not included in these figures where the benefit may be implied but it is not specifically mentioned. These additional products use ingredients perceived by consumers to be heart healthy, sufficing in many instances to influence the consumer's choice. Ingredients falling into this category include omega-3 fatty acids, wholegrains, oats and soya. All of these have also been linked with other health benefits, such as joint health and cognitive health for omega-3 fatty acids, digestive health for wholegrains, controlled energy release for oats, and women's health and bone health for soya.

A review of relevant activity recorded by the **Innova Database** shows that products for cholesterol reduction continue to dominate the heart health market in terms of numbers of launches. Circulatory health foods, dominated by omega-3 products, have seen rather less activity, not as a result of fewer being launched, but more in terms of using different and broader target markets utilising other claimed health benefits, particularly for infants and children. There are some new circulatory health ingredients in the offing, however, that may boost the sector in the future. The anti-hypertensive market remains relatively limited, but has seen further development in Europe of the use of peptides sourced from milk proteins and in Japan, from sardines. The use of antioxidant ingredients for heart health is another area that is relatively undeveloped and may have the potential to go further, particularly using the intrinsic health benefits of products such as cocoa and fruit, if the regulatory situation can be resolved.

The health claims situation has been causing considerable difficulties in some parts of the functional foods market. The heart health sector has fared better than many, with heart healthy ingredients such as plant sterols/stanols for cholesterol reduction and the Fruitflow anti-thrombotic tomato extract both providing sufficient evidence to have their health claims approved by the European Food Safety Authority. Approval for claims about some other ingredients, such as omega-3 fatty acids, is proving more problematic.

The heart health food and drinks market is also very fragmented. It is made up of a whole range of products varying from existing repositioned and reformulated brands from large and mature markets, such as breakfast cereals, to small sectors made up of products containing relatively new ingredients. An example is dairy products with phytosterols and bioactive peptides. In general, growth in the new markets is much faster, being from such a small base. It also requires the investment of large sums of money in product development, subsequent promotional activity and consumer education.

"The heart health market seems set for further development over the next five years" concludes **Innova Market Insights' Head of Research Lu Ann Williams**. "Factors at work include pricing, regulatory, industry and supplier issues. The direction and outcome of many of these is still far from certain, but overall growth rates will depend on if and how some of these start to be resolved."

For further information on the **Innova Database**, the representative for Australia and New Zealand is Glen Wells (Glen.Wells@innova-food.com.au)