

U.S. FOODLINK

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Four Alt-Protein and Plant-Based Innovations ON THE RISE

Today, a sizable majority of U.S. consumers are actively working to increase their protein intake. This shift has paved the way for ample opportunity regarding innovations in high-protein products – both standard types and plant-based alternatives – for both manufacturers and exporters within the food and beverage industry.

Here are a few of the latest trends, innovations, and shifts in consumer patterns and preferences to watch.

1 **Advancements in the Taste and Texture of Alt-Meat**

The alt-protein sector has rapidly evolved in recent years, largely driven by increased consumer demand for sustainable and high-quality alternatives to traditional animal products. However, one of the most crucial barriers to overcome when developing plant-based meats is replicating the texture, structure, and bite that consumers expect from conventional meat.

While manufacturers have historically relied on functional additives like methylcellulose, hydrocolloids, and starches to accomplish this goal, these ingredients can often exhibit temperature-dependent behaviors that result in products that may not consistently meet textural expectations, according to Anatolii Utkin, a food-tech expert and principal scientist for Novonesis.

“Methylcellulose forms a gel upon heating that dissipates when cooled, while hydrocolloids gel in cold conditions but lose functionality when heated,” Utkin explained, elaborating that recent advancements within the plant-based meat category

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4 Alt-Protein and Plant-Based Innovations *Continued*

have focused on overcoming textural challenges inherent to non-animal protein formulations.

“A breakthrough innovation from Novonesis involves the application of a novel enzyme transglutaminase, which cross-links amino acids in plant proteins to create a stable, meat-like texture across varying temperatures,” Utkin added.

2 Combining Multiple Technologies in Alt-Protein Production

Another key trend to watch within the alt-protein space is the integration of many different technologies, such as extrusion, 3D printing, precision fermentation, and biomass fermentation, in the production of protein alternatives, according to Jack Ellis, the leader of Cleantech Group’s agriculture and food research operations.

“Plant-based, fermentation-derived, and cell-cultured [methods] have conventionally been seen as three competing technological pathways to the same end goal: animal-free protein,” said Ellis, “but we’re already seeing them become complementary to one another, with some or all of these technologies likely to feature together in a single end product.”

Impossible Foods’ plant-based beef alternative is one example of this phenomenon, which is primarily made from soy protein but also contains leghemoglobin, an ingredient that imitates the bloodiness of slaughter-derived beef that is produced via precision fermentation.

GOOD Meat, a cultivated chicken product developed by Eat Just, is a second example. Although early iterations of the product comprised about 70% cultivated chicken cells, Ellis says the cost to manufacture them at commercial scale would have been astronomical due to the expenses associated with growth media, bioreactors, regulatory clearances, and other related factors.

“To massively bring those costs down toward price parity with conventional meat, the most recent version contains around 3% cultivated chicken cells, with the remaining 97% consisting of plant-based proteins and oils,” Ellis explained. “So, is that technically a cultivated meat product, or a plant-based meat product? It’s both.”

According to Ellis, this approach is a standard practice in the production of conventional processed meats, where plant-derived ingredients such as binders and fillers are relatively commonplace.

3 New Types of Animal-Free Complete Proteins

Recently, the U.S. has seen an uptick in plant-based complete protein sources. This means they contain all nine essential amino acids required for optimal human health, which is significant for individuals following plant-based diets, as the majority of plant proteins do not fall into the “complete” category and must be combined with additional plant proteins to achieve a combination that contains all nine essential amino acids.

Duckweed, an aquatic plant also known as lemna that doubles in mass every 48 hours, is one example of a plant-based complete protein source that has emerged as of late. Plantible Foods, a startup that leverages a vertically integrated aquaculture system to cultivate duckweed, recently raised \$30 million in Series B funding round to scale up the production of its 140-acre farm in Texas. The company was the first to discover the natural enzyme RuBisCO, which it extracts from duckweed to develop products like Rubi Whisk, a plant-based egg substitute. In addition to protein powders and egg substitutes for functional foods, duckweed is also being incorporated into plant-based seafood alternatives to replicate the taste and texture of fish, and companies have also been fermenting it to improve its digestibility and flavor.

Solein, a novel type of protein discovered in Nordic nature, is another example of an innovative complete protein that is not derived from animal products. In fact, it is composed of a single-cell organism that is grown with carbon dioxide and hydrogen and can be produced with renewable energy, airborne materials, and small amounts of the same minerals plants obtain from soil via their roots.

Last September, the Finnish food-tech company Solar Foods obtained FDA approval to introduce Solein to the U.S. market, and the ingredient has already made its way into the CPG category via a partnership between Solar Foods and KelpEat, an algae startup that incorporated the ingredient into crackers that boast more than 35 percent protein.

4 Novel Forms of Plant-Based Dairy Alternatives

In the past, most alt-dairy manufacturers leveraged ingredients like soybeans, almonds, and coconut in their plant-based dairy alternatives – and while these ingredients remain commonplace within the sector, other alternatives have rounded out the category in recent years.

Tater Cheezz Nuggets made by ARK34 Ltd. that feature Aviko Rixona’s potato-based cheese, which is allegedly the first-ever cheese alternative derived from potatoes on the market, were named Best Frozen Product at Gulfood 2025, and the boxer-turned-investor Mike Tyson recently debuted a dessert topped with potato-based ice cream at Mr. Charlie’s, a fast-food chain known as the “Vegan McDonald’s.”

In addition to potatoes, lentils have also emerged as a base for dairy substitutes such as Violife’s new Supreme Coffee Creamers and Country Crock’s heavy whipping cream alternative – as have watermelon seeds in Força Foods’ MILKish, which is the first milk made from watermelon seeds in the world.



Case Study: Violife Solves Plant-Based Dairy Pain Points with Lentils

Dairy-free cheese manufacturer Violife recently launched a line of lentil-based coffee creamers, Violife Supreme Coffee Creamers. According to Meryem Leyoussi, commercial and brand lead at Flora Food Group, the inspiration for the lentil-based formula was born from an extensive round of research and development aimed at solving one of the biggest consumer pain points with plant-based creamers: separation in coffee.

“The breakthrough came when we perfected a proprietary processing method that harnesses lentil protein’s natural properties to create that rich, smooth texture consumers crave,” Leyoussi explained.

Taste, Texture, and Performance

Violife opted to use lentils in the coffee creamers due to their neutral taste, which allows the three flavor varieties – Tempting Vanilla, Seductive Caramel, and Boldly Original – to truly shine. The brand also chose lentils because of their exceptional emulsifying properties, which enable the coffee creamers to remain rich, creamy, and perfectly smooth without separating or curdling mid-pour.

Leyoussi says the lentil-derived formula is remarkably heat-stable and consistent in both hot and iced coffee applications as well, solving another common challenge associated with dairy-free creamers.

Another advantage of the lentil formula is that it’s free from major food allergens like nuts and soy in addition to dairy, making it accessible to consumers with specific dietary needs.

According to Leyoussi, the initial consumer response to the coffee creamers has been overwhelmingly positive. The products have especially garnered praise for their taste, blending ability, and rich texture – and the brand has seen strong repeat purchase rates, which she considers to be the “ultimate vote of confidence.”

Strategic Partnerships and Promotion

To spread the word, the brand launched a U.S. marketing campaign entitled Creamy Confessions featuring a series of reality TV stars, social media influencers, and online content creators.

“We wanted to create a playful, relatable campaign that highlights the hesitation people often feel about making the switch while showing that Violife is here to commit. With our new Supreme Coffee Creamers, there’s no sacrifice – just smooth, indulgent, creamy mornings,” Leyoussi said.

Once Violife had identified its storytelling angle, the brand sought out personalities who could bring it to life in an authentic manner.

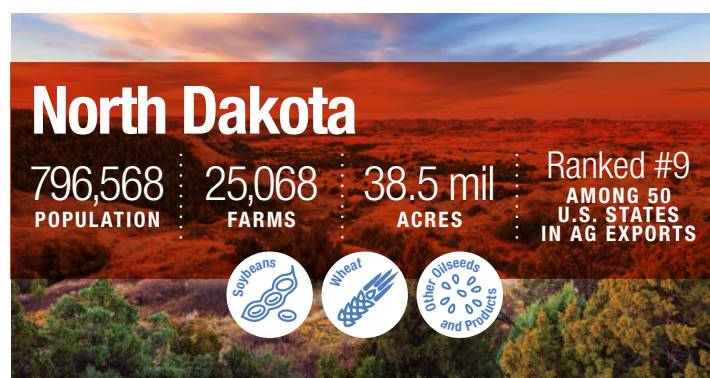
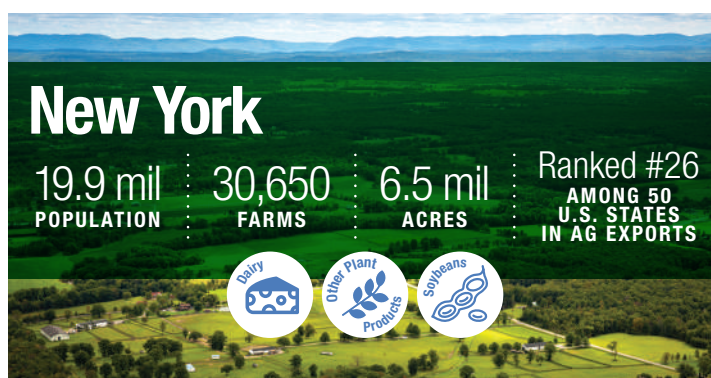
“Chrishell Stause, who is dairy-free, resonates with fans who appreciate candor and authenticity, while Bozoma Saint John represents confident decision-making and living boldly. Sasha Farber brings a playful energy, and his recent relationship headlines create a natural tie-in to our ‘commitment’ theme,” Leyoussi explained.

Violife also partnered with coffee-focused content creators like Noah Stern, as well as broader lifestyle creators like Amanda Cerny and Alyssa Lauren that appeal to audiences interested in veganism.

The campaign also includes in-person activations featuring product samples and interactive activities like “confession booths” where attendees are invited to write down their own “creamy confessions” for a chance to be featured in the digital ad campaign.

“We’ve noticed an interesting shift in consumer conversations – more people are specifically mentioning the non-separation benefit in their feedback, showing that our campaign messaging is resonating and helping consumers articulate what they love about the product,” Leyoussi said.

Featured U.S. Midwest & Northeast State Profiles



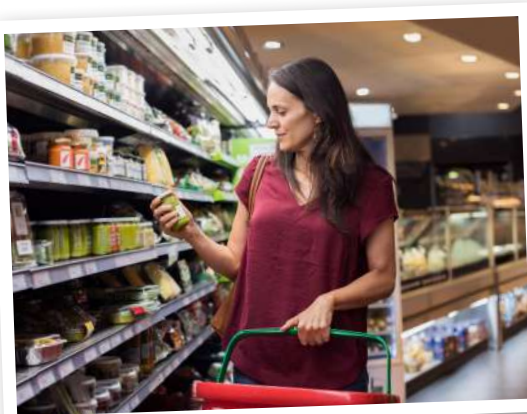
news briefs

73% of U.S. consumers report modifying their buying habits in the last year due to price increases, according to an EY report. “Retailers have always dealt with varying degrees of geopolitical uncertainty, inflation, and supply chain disruptions, but what’s different now is the ability to measure their connection with consumers and how external influences impact day-to-day buying habits,” said Mark Chambers, retail sector leader.

The “3:45 Dinner” trend is gaining momentum as parents embrace earlier mealtimes to curb after-school hunger, prevent evening tantrums, and simplify family routines. With growing consumer demand for early dining, restaurants have a prime opportunity on their hands, reported *The Food Institute*.

Americans are snacking less – but is Ozempic the only reason? The snack category has taken a hard hit due to economic pressures coupled with increased GLP-1 usage and consumer demand for healthier options, reported *The Wall Street Journal*.

The Conference Board’s monthly survey revealed consumer confidence about income, business, and labor conditions fell to its lowest level in 12 years in March. Expectations plummeted to an index level of 65.2, which was significantly below the threshold of 80 that often signals a recession, reported *The Wall Street Journal*.



Over 53% of global consumers are purchasing more private-label products, driving 4.3% year-over-year growth, according to NIQ. Additionally, 68% of respondents view private labels as good alternatives to name brands, signaling continued shifts in perceived value.

Nearly 33% of U.S. coffee and tea drinkers are interested in getting functional perks from their beverages, including probiotics and adaptogens. A recent report found that, while cold brew coffee drinkers aim to boost cognitive function, tea drinkers prioritize beverages with relaxing and immunity-boosting properties.



Nearly 50% of Americans are trying to reduce their alcohol intake in 2025, with Gen Z leading the charge, according to a report by NCS Solutions. At the recent UBS Global Consumer and Retail Conference, Athletic Brewing CEO Bill Shufelt highlighted the rapid growth of the non-alcoholic sector, reported *The Food Institute*.

Non-alcoholic wines like Cupcake Vineyards’ Alcohol-Removed Sauvignon Blanc are resonating with the growing number of consumers moderating or eliminating alcohol. Despite challenges in replicating the complexity of traditional wines, innovations in production methods are creating opportunities within the category, reported *The Food Institute*.

The plant-based industry may have found a way through its stagnation – a recent report found that consumers increased their plant-based purchases in 2024. As the sector recovers, Nutpods CMO Patrick Coyle recommends that brands strike the right balance between value and their values, reported *The Food Institute*.

Sour and tangy flavor profiles are continuing to dominate the gummy category, according to Katjes brand executives. Clean, lower-sugar, and vegan options are also gaining momentum, reported *Snack and Bakery*.

Consumers’ growing appetite for protein is fueling wellness industry expansion. The trend reflects recent shifts toward a more holistic approach to nutrition, with protein now seen as vital for immunity, satiety, and healthy aging, reported *Glossy*.

Immunity-boosting products are gaining traction as consumers seek long-term wellness solutions. The market is expected to grow at a CAGR of 9% through 2028, offering ample opportunities for F&B brands to develop nutrient-dense products, reported *The Food Institute*.



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Bollygood

Indianapolis, Indiana

Bollygood is the first Indian-inspired sparkling lemonade and limeade, delivering a refreshing, modern twist on the beloved Indian classic, Nimbu Pani (Indian lemonade). The recipe, handed down from founder Maxine's grandmother, originally contained 40g of sugar. Although Maxine was raised in Canada, her parents emigrated from India in the 1960s; she spent many of her childhood summers in India. Drawing from her East and West upbringing, she crafted a healthier, sparkling version with only 50 calories per can, 7g of added sugar, and proudly Non-GMO Project Verified.

Bollygood resonates with both culture-curious and health-conscious consumers, offering four distinctive flavors: Lemon Ginger Mint, Lime Basil Cumin, Lemon Pomegranate Cardamom, and Lemon Mango Turmeric. As a certified woman-owned and minority-owned business, Bollygood is committed to spreading joy and celebrating culture through its beverages. Now available in major grocery chains, Bollygood delivers a sweet, bubbly experience that captures the vibrant spirit of India.



ZeroCarb Inc.

Fishers, Indiana

ZeroCarb LYFE – A New Standard in Low-Carb Eating - ZeroCarb LYFE is redefining what it means to eat healthy. Based in Fishers, Indiana, we specialize in high-protein, zero-carb foods crafted to meet the needs of today's health-conscious consumers. Using innovative food technology, we've developed chicken-based pizza crusts and LYFE Chips, offering a satisfying alternative without compromising on taste or texture.

Designed for individuals following low-carb, keto, and high-protein diets, our products provide an easy, enjoyable way to make better food choices. Whether in retail, food service, or direct-to-consumer, ZeroCarb LYFE continues to grow as a trusted option for those seeking indulgence and nutrition in every bite.

By focusing on quality, simplicity, and innovation, we are helping consumers embrace a lifestyle where healthier choices are both accessible and delicious.

For more information, visit zerocarblyfe.com.



Chicken Soup for the Pet Lover's Soul, LLC

Cos Cob, Connecticut

Great inspiration comes from many places. For this well-loved brand, it was reading the thousands of stories submitted to their Chicken Soup for the Pet Lover's Soul books. True stories about unconditional love inspired them to create premium, natural cat food, dog food and treats for over 20 years.

Chicken Soup for the Soul Grain Free recipes start with real meat as number one ingredient. Never any by-product meals or artificial colors or preservatives. No corn, wheat or soy. Their recipes are designed for pets with sensitive stomachs. Probiotic Fiber to help support Healthy Gut. Taurine to support Heart Health and Vision. Omegas 3&6 to help maintain Healthy Skin & Coat. Antioxidants to support Immune Health. Not to mention Great Taste! For all stages of your pet's life.



Del's Lemonade & Refreshments Inc.

Cranston, Rhode Island

Del's Lemonade is a second-generation family-owned business with Italian roots dating back to the 1840's in Naples. Officially starting in 1948, in Cranston, Rhode Island, Del's has become a household Rhode Island name over the past 75 years. Majoring in soft-frozen beverage franchises throughout Rhode Island and several other states in the U.S., we are a fantastic summer destination. Despite this seemingly seasonal demand, we also have lines of products that the consumer can purchase to be able to have anytime, anywhere. Selling bottled juices, canned carbonated beverages, and take-home packets that customers can make the classic Del's soft-frozen lemonade with just ice and a blender, we have made it possible for a Del's lover to enjoy any time of the year.

The products we are currently promoting for export are the above-mentioned take-home mixes. We currently offer 2-oz single serving packets, as well as 1 lb. Packs with 8 of these 2-oz packets. The flavors we have are lemonade, watermelon, blueberry, peach-mango, tangerine-orange, and frozen dark hot chocolate. All six of these flavors are offered in 2-oz. Varieties, while the multi-packs are offered in lemon, watermelon, blueberry, peach-mango, and a variety pack of those four flavors.



Fat Boy Natural BBQ

Lincoln, Nebraska

Fat Boy Hickman's BBQ is a line of products created to enhance every meal and barbecuing experience. Born from competitive grilling and incorporated in 2002, Fat Boy BBQ was created to market rubs used in competition. The skills mastered in these competitions and the knowledge obtained from other barbeque experts lead to the development of our all-natural barbeque products.

After traveling much of the U.S., we became educated on the benefits of using rubs in grilling and smoking meats to keep them juicy and tender. After using various meat rubs already available on the market, we developed one more suited to our operation. As more and more people became acquainted with our grilled and smoked meats, the request to purchase the rub became more frequent, and the company was formed to market it.

Over time this one rub evolved into our current line of seven rubs, several of which have won national awards. Each is distinctive in taste, heat level, and texture. Our rubs seal the meat surface to offer a juicy and flavorful meat product.

Fueled by the popularity of our rubs the company expanded to include a new concept in barbecue sauces. Unlike some sauces on the market, our variety of six Kansas City, Southern, and Southwest-style sauces are thick with seasonings and a fullness of flavor that delights the taste buds.



Hudson Exports Inc.

Edison, New Jersey

Hudson Exports is a New Jersey-based consolidator and international distributor of American Grocery. We work with retailers in 18+ countries across the globe to help our partners satisfy their US-made FMCG requirements.

Products: Kellogg's, Starbucks, Ocean Spray, Lays Stax, Arizona, Karmalize, Munk Pack, Lundberg, Walden Farms, Herr's, Brad's.

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Little Rhody Foods, Inc.

Foster, Rhode Island

Discover the local taste of Rhode Island with Little Rhody Foods! Located in rural Foster, Rhode Island, Little Rhody Foods (LRF) is a prominent food distributor of premium and delicious local foods. These foods include a variety of eggs, including their premium line, Little Rhody Natural Eggs.

As a purveyor of premium, local foods, LRF maintains a high standard of quality when selecting the best foods and drinks to provide to local stores. One popular Rhode Island brand within the Little Rhody Foods family is Del's® Lemonade. One of Del's® newest beverages is Sparkling Del's®, available in Lemonade and Tangerine Orange. Find and enjoy this refreshing drink available in various local Southern New England stores.

For more information on Little Rhody Foods and their other fine products, visit www.ShopRhody.com or call 1.800.746.3934 today! Eli Berkowitz, Owner and CEO, Little Rhody Foods



Fry Krisp Food Products Inc.

Jackson, Michigan

With 75 years of experience delivering high-quality, American-made food products, Fry Krisp is proud to introduce its new line of bottled seasonings. Designed for both food service and retail, these expertly crafted seasonings bring bold flavors to kitchens everywhere. The lineup includes Lemon Pepper Seasoning, Seasoned Salt, Smoked BBQ Rub, Lime Pepper Seasoning, Wing Seasoning, and Vinegar Salt – perfect for enhancing meats, fries, snacks, and more.

Made with natural ingredients, these seasonings are available under the trusted Fry Krisp brand or for private labeling, offering flexibility for restaurants, supermarkets, and home cooks alike. Whether you're looking to add a signature touch to your menu or bring high-quality flavors to store shelves, Fry Krisp's seasonings deliver taste and versatility. For more information, contact us today at FryKrisp.la.



Herbsmith Inc.

Hartland, Wisconsin

Simple Food Project: Years of veterinary practice made one thing clear – every animal who ate well, healed well. Knowing real food lays the foundation for health, Dr. Bessent started The Simple Food Project to make whole food nutrition accessible for every pet. She crafted balanced raw diets with limited ingredients and freeze-dried them to lock in all the benefits those fresh, raw foods offer – without the hassle. At \$2.56 per meal for a 50 lb. dog, it's real nutrition without compromise – or the hefty price tag. Feeding your pet well shouldn't be complicated. Now, it isn't. Learn more:

<https://simplefoodproject.com/>

Herbsmith: After more than a decade of using Chinese herbal combinations in her practice, Dr. Bessent founded Herbsmith Inc. Herbsmith manufactures veterinarian-developed, premium-quality supplements for dogs and cats to address issues from joint health, to allergies, to gastrointestinal support. Made at state-of-the-art manufacturing facilities in Wisconsin, Herbsmith supplements contain only the finest ingredients from around the globe at therapeutic levels to bring dogs and cats into a new state of health and wellness. Learn more:

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

Medicus Veterinary Diets: Developed by Dr. Chris Bessent and reviewed by Independent Veterinary Specialists and Nutrition Consultants, Medicus Veterinary Diets combines modern science with a deep understanding of whole food nutrition to support sick pets when they need it most. Each formulation is designed with two guiding principles: the fundamental architecture of food and the impact of disease on the body. With a carefully balanced omega 6:3 ratio, antioxidant-rich ingredients, and USDA-inspected meats, we prioritize quality and safety. Our therapeutic diets harness science-backed whole foods to address the most pressing health challenges in pets today. It's nutrition, precisely when they need it. Learn more: <https://medicusveterinarydiets.com/>

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



Show-Me BBQ Sauce, LLC

Rochepoint, Missouri

Celebrating 50 years, Show-Me® Bar-B-Q Sauce proves that a few simple ingredients can deliver anything but a simple taste. Rooted in the heart of Missouri, our timeless and traditional flavors are a Midwest staple, reaching kitchens in 50 states, 11 countries, and military bases worldwide. With a shelf-stable, no-refrigeration formula, our sauces and seasonings offer a consistent, reliable, and authentic Bar-B-Q experience – perfect for backyard grillers and pitmasters alike. As a family-owned business, we know that great food goes beyond borders; it brings people together. Tradition raised us, culinary exploration inspires us, but it's the food lovers who create the unforgettable moments.

No Refrigeration | Gluten-Free | No Preservatives | No Fillers | No High Fructose Corn Syrup



OMG! Pretzels

Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania

OMG! Pretzels is changing the way people think about pretzels. OMG! Pretzels is a woman-owned, family-run company that crafts the only authentically-aged and seasoned sourdough pretzel nuggets on the market. With 5 unique varieties available in 3-ounce grab-and-go bags that come to retailers in tear-away caddies, these mini bags are ideal for convenience and hospitality channels. Proudly made in the USA, our culinary-inspired recipes are kosher, artificial ingredient free, and nonGMO. We are driven by our mission to bring people together and inspire joy over shared moments of scrumptious, better-for-you snacking. Boasting a light and airy crunch, our carefully-crafted products are more than just a perfect standalone snack; they are an elegant enhancement for entertaining and a delicious addition to favorite recipes. OMG! Pretzels are a better-for-you snack with an elevated taste and gorgeous appearance. Once you pop one in your mouth, OMG! comes popping out!



SAI Probiotics LLC

Maple Grove, Minnesota

SAI Probiotics LLC is dedicated to harmonizing the advantages of probiotics with nature's special ingredients, creating an integrated and scientifically supported approach to enhancing gut and immune health. Akshaya Panda, the founder, boasts 20 years as a pivotal figure in this industry. He played a crucial role in the growth of well-established probiotic companies before embarking on his own journey to address a noticeable gap in the market.

Amidst the proliferation of probiotic products boasting higher bacterial counts and substantial price tags in an attempt to enhance potency, SAI Probiotics takes a more intelligent approach. We carefully select natural, extensively researched, and time-tested ingredients that enhance the effectiveness and synergy of probiotics. This enables us to offer products that are not only safe, affordable, and efficient but also adopt a holistic approach to elevate overall health, going beyond just the gut.

We are proud to introduce this unique women's probiotic supplement, SAIPro Femme. Fortified with 8 potent probiotic strains clinically proven to enhance vaginal health, prevent recurrent UTIs, manage fat accumulation, and fortify gut health, our product harnesses the combined power of these strains alongside turmeric, an influential natural anti-inflammatory, and cranberry extract, a remarkable antioxidant. This extraordinary product offers 20 Billion CFU/serving in two delayed-release veggie capsules, and elegantly packaged in desiccant-lined CSP bottles for extended potency and efficacy.

For further inquiries or to embark on your journey to enhanced health, please contact us at: Call +1-763-494-9721 or Visit <https://saiprobiotics.com/>



Sweet Street Desserts

Reading, Pennsylvania

Founded in 1979 in Reading, Pennsylvania, Sweet Street Desserts began with a passion for creating the perfect cookie. Sandy Solmon, the company's founder, started baking cookies in a two-bay garage, perfecting recipes that balanced flavor & texture. Her dedication turned a small local following into Sweet Street Desserts, now a global leader in the dessert industry.

Still-owned by Sandy and headquartered in Reading, PA, Sweet Street serves restaurants in over 60 countries. Sandy leads a team of passionate recipe developers, crafting desserts with the finest ingredients, from South American chocolates to locally harvested apples, ensuring every product meets the highest standards.

At Sweet Street, the ingredient to success is luscious desserts worthy of your craves, baked with ingredients you feel good about sharing. Your passion for artful food and dedication to wholesome ingredients will always be the motivation behind every ready-to-indulge, luscious dessert.



Buckaroo & Company, LLC

Evanston, Illinois

Welcome to the exciting world of Rollicking Buckaroo Pepper Jam and Seasoning Blends, where flavor knows no bounds, and culinary creativity runs wild!

At Rollicking Buckaroo, we're not just selling products; we're crafting experiences that ignite taste buds and elevate your culinary journey. Whether you're a dedicated food enthusiast, a passionate chef, or a discerning business owner in the buyers, wholesale, or foodservice industry, we invite you to embark on a flavor-filled adventure with us. <https://www.buckaroopepperjam.com/>

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