

## INSTITUTE OF FOOD TECHNOLOGISTS (IFT) *Chicago July 2022*

Professionals from a wide range of disciplines in the food industry gathered for the first time in three years for their annual conference in Chicago.

Programs were designed to encourage a robust discussion of differing opinions related to processed food, sustainability and nutrition.

### PERSPECTIVES ON PROCESSED FOOD

A spirited debate over the question of “should we eat more processed food?” opened Monday morning’s program with renowned experts on both sides of the debate and clips of consumers clearly conflicted about the question. What emerged from the discussion was a better understanding of a question that requires more than a simple yes or no.

- Consumer education is key to understanding more about the processing that brings sought-after benefits to foods, versus processed foods with minimal nutritional value.
- Processing can play a key role in alleviating food insecurity around the globe. Yet consumers who have the luxury of many choices often look at processed foods with disdain.
- Lifestyle diets can be the subject of endless discussion. However, it was noted that many foods that appeal to vegans, looking for great tasting options, often require far more processing than more mainstream options.
- Classification systems that try to simplify an understanding of the level of processing involved in various foods often confuse the issue because they are so simplistic and do not allow for true understanding. One expert went so far as to describe the popular and widely used NOVA food classification system as “rubbish”.

### FOOD AND FLAVOR HIGHLIGHTS

- **Powerful Foods** – ingredients that add a nutrient punch to favorite foods are mainstreaming the appeal of exotic sounding ingredients like turmeric and moringa.
- **Alternative Everything** – for every widely used food like eggs, sugar and dairy, a spectrum of alternatives are emerging.
- **Classic Comfort with a Healthful Twist** – plant based and whole plant proteins are finding favor in popular comfort foods.  
  
Plant based protein has brought the issue of sustainability front and center for many consumers as they balance issues of sustainability, cost and level of processing.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR FOOD MARKETERS

**Words Matter** – Labels do not allow for nuanced communication that is so important to educating consumers on the real benefits that processed foods can bring to them. Misunderstood language can be the basis of unnecessary negative perceptions.

**Marketing Mistrust** – Consumers are more and more skeptical of marketing language that gives the appearance of obfuscating real product benefits. Being transparent and providing credible information can build trust.

**Amped Up Food** – Foods that multi-task continue to appeal to modern consumers who want more functional benefits from everything they consume including snacks, beverages and meals.

### SUSTAINABILITY FEEDS TODAY’S CONSUMERS

There is a widespread understanding and appreciation for the importance of living a lifestyle that sustains and renews the planet.