

# Botanical boosters: Pandemic-induced immunity demands support functional ingredient innovation

20 Aug 2021 --- Botanicals have experienced a resurgence in recent years thanks to their abilities to elevate F&B applications with a healthful spin. Consumers today are more educated about and interested in consuming functional ingredients, with botanicals often appearing under that umbrella.

**NutritionInsight** speaks to experts in the botanicals arena who share their thoughts on the blossoming space.

"More than 50 percent of global consumers are looking for products with botanicals they believe improve health. Health, in particular digestive health, mood management and immunity, is an important driver. Still, emotions, clean labeling and taste are as important," explains Francis De Campos Ferreira, global portfolio director for cocoa and botanicals at Kerry.

More consumers than ever are looking for natural solutions that can deliver on taste and bring additional benefits such as sensory experiences, sensations, emotions and healthy perceptions. "Botanicals provide those," he highlights.



Botanicals are a vital part of ADM's developments in future-forward nutrition solutions.

While many botanical extracts are associated with perceived health benefits, Kerry offers its customers several branded botanical extracts through the [acquisition of Biosearch Life](#), which deliver many health benefits, including joint health, women's health, and heart health.

Dominique Delfaud, marketing, sensory and consumer research lead at Mane, adds that while botanicals have been trendy for many years, the pandemic has boosted some pre-existing trends like immunity, and health and wellness trends in general, which has "further accelerated the demand for botanicals."

## Emerging ingredients

Functional botanical extracts, also known as hero ingredients, can deliver the growing consumer demand for antioxidant-rich foods, beverages and supplements.

According to June Lin, global vice president for marketing, health and wellness at ADM, acerola is trending due to its vitamin C content.

"Additionally, ingredients providing inherent sources of caffeine, such as guarana, green tea and yerba mate connected with boosting mood and sustaining energy, are also growing in popularity."

"Plus, our high-quality plant extracts can be added to enhance health and wellness benefits further. Moreover, our high-fruit and vegetable content powders are concentrated sources of the nutrients and functional ingredients that are naturally present in the parent botanicals," continues Lin.

## Self-care bolsters overall health

According to Collette Kakuk, vice president of global marketing at Layn Natural Ingredients, consumers, now having experienced a pandemic, are looking for efficacious, natural, functional botanicals for proactive self-care more than ever.

"The post-COVID consumer buys for prevention and increasingly specific functions. They understand the value of natural, botanical metabolic antioxidants like never before – particularly for concerns that the pandemic, including immune health, have emphasized, stress, sleep, inflammation and energy," she explains.

Consumers are also seeking unique active ingredients, such as quercetin, and investigating other terminology, including polyphenols and flavonoids.

"They understand healthy inflammation support and are looking for more functional benefits from what they consume," Kakuk notes. "It's a good time to be in an industry driving botanical innovation for health and wellness ingredients."

**Back to nature approach** Kakuk believes a back to nature movement that embraces the goodness of nature can boost the power of self-healing through natural means.

"A back to nature approach eschews synthetically derived compounds that are void of any complementary molecules that can enhance and heal. Witness full and broad-spectrum CBD as an example," she adds.

One major area in which botanicals are demonstrating their value is the gut health arena.

"Many botanicals provide compounds that can serve as precursors to unique metabolites in the microbiome that can contribute to overall health," continues Kakuk.

"For instance, pomegranate standardized to ellagitannins are transformed by gut bacteria to urolithin A, which belongs to a class of benzo-coumarins that have been shown to act as antioxidants, improve muscle function and support a healthy inflammation response."

Together this highlights the need for longer-term, natural approaches in addition to innovating botanicals for immune support, gut health and other physical functions.

Layn has also been heavily innovating natural ingredient solutions to provide emotional, mood and stress relief benefits in this "new era where mental health is becoming an increasing crisis."

"We have seen increasing interest in our botanical extracts with high antioxidant activity and potent polyphenol content," highlights Kakuk.

"These include Sophora Japonica (quercetin) extract, citrus extracts, lychee extract, mango leaf extract, grape seed extract, apple extract, bilberry extract, resveratrol, Galla Chinensis extract, rosemary extracts, and all of our tea

extracts – green tea, black tea, oolong tea and pu-erh tea."

#### **Botanicals for immunity**

There has been significant growth in botanical extracts targeted to support a healthy immune system, including extracts of Andrographis, garlic, broccoli seed, citrus, dandelion, echinacea, fenugreek, ginger, grape seed, honeysuckle and lychee.

"Many individuals are seeking herbal, plant-based solutions to help support healthy stress responses and those that are naturally calming and support proper sleep. Some of these include extracts of broccoli seed, rice bran, apple, Ziziphus and magnolia bark," Kakuk affirms.



Layn has innovated in emotional, mood and stress relief solutions in this "new era where mental health is becoming an increasing crisis."

Finally, she says the number of health conditions that were "once the realm of older populations" is filtering down to younger generations due to "increased stress, improper sleep and other factors such as diet and the environment."

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