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COMMENTARY

Macro Trends In Snacking: A Seismic Shift Is Underway

by Simon Thorneycroft (/publications/author/6394/simon-thorneycroft/), Columnist, April 19, 2017

America is a nation of snackaholics. Snacking is now *more* important than sitting down to three squares each day. How do we know that? **Food Navigator** (<http://www.foodnavigator.com/Trends/Marketing/Get-ready-for-bespoke-snacking-experiences-on-a-mass-scale-says-Mondelez-chocolate-innovator>) told us earlier this year that “growing numbers of young people see no problem in swapping three daily meals for six substantial snacks a day.” And the Hartman Group’s “The Future of Snacking 2016” report found that 91% of consumers snack multiple times throughout the day and that, “snacking now accounts for half of all eating occasions as America’s consumers say that snacking is essential to daily nutrition.” We spend over \$1 billion a year on snacks and that number is expected to increase by \$35 billion in the next five years. As a nation, the snack trend is pointing nearly straight up.

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Tucked into this grand picture of Americans eating are clues about what sort of experience they are searching for in their snacks. Here are a few that stand out:

Larger Snacks: the Meal Snack

One of the biggest shifts across categories is a movement towards portion-sized packaging. Sometimes called meal replacements or meal-snacks, snacks are getting bigger.

Launched in 2015, **Farmer's Pantry** (<http://www.farmerspantry.farm/>) dove into the meal-snack space as a hearty alternative to trail mix or jerky. Inspired by traditional sit-down meals, Farmer's Pantry innovated a soft seal bag that keeps the turkey or chicken moist and the vegetables, corn nuggets and croutons crisp. Slide the bag open and pull the sections apart to mix your meal-snack.

Plant-Based Protein

CPG companies of all sizes have embraced quinoa and its super-food nutritional profile. Cucina and Amore recently launched a line of **Ready-to-Eat Quinoa Meals** (<http://www.cucinaandamore.com/quinoa.html>). Portion sized at just less than 8 ounces (1 cup), flavors like Mango Jalapeño and Basil Pesto make a convenient, healthy, ready-to-eat, gluten-free meal. The packaging, which separates the quinoa from the sauce in a reusable or recyclable container, also offers flavor customization to the consumer and even a spoon to eat it with.

Portion Controlled, Shareable Snacks

One of the beautiful benefits of meal-snacks is their built-in portion control. Many of the big CPG brands like Nabisco, Kellogg, Hostess, and Emerald have lines of 100-calorie snacks. They are sometimes called "fun sizes." Mars Company subsidiary **Goodness Knows** (<https://goodnessknows.com/>) recently launched a pre-portioned, pre-cut bar of four squares, perfect for sharing.

Nutrient-Dense Snacks

Chips and salty snacks are not going away anytime soon. But to service the new functional snacker and grab additional market share, chip companies are adding superfoods, like ancient grains, and nutrition ingredients, a.k.a. nutraceuticals — protein, probiotics, vitamins and minerals — to their formerly nutritionally void snacks. Launched at the Winter Fancy Food Show, **Plocky's** (<http://plockys.com/>) new line of ProTATO Crisps includes Original, Spicy Honey BBQ and Peppercorn Ranch flavors. Spritzed with dehydrated rice protein, each flavor claims seven grams of protein in a one-ounce serving. Does this make the chip experience guilt-free? Certainly not. But it does offer more nutritional value and increased satiety in a product not known for it, no matter the portion size.

Graze Your Way to Good Nutrition

Food and the whole experience of food consumption are evolving. Some of these changes can be attributed to cultural shifts (we, as a nation, do not sit down to dinner, together or apart, nearly as often as we used to) and some to the increased pressure on our time (with everyone working longer hours, who has time to cook anymore?). Add in our obsession with mobile tech as a distraction from a sit-down meal and it becomes clearer why Americans are demanding more nutritious, healthy food that is conveniently packaged for consumption on the go. As the time spent cooking and fully engaged in the previous traditional

As the time spent cooking and fully engaged in the previous traditional meal-eating shrinks, the consumer is shifting their thinking about diet to consider a range of snack-meals as daily staples. Food companies are producing convenient, healthful options that can help the consumer easily eat right. Snack-meals are evolving to meet the nutritional and lifestyle needs of the modern consumer. Embrace the snack shift because it's a trend that's here to stay.

Comment

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