Sweetening with Stevia
Mastering the Challenges in the Formulation

The stevia plant has a great deal to offer: it contains natural sweeteners and has no calories, which makes it a promising sugar substitute. WILD Flavors GmbH (WILD) has used stevia in successfully positioning many of its customers' products – everything from beverages to confectionery – and offers stevia as table top version, too. As the great taste expert, WILD began investing in stevia R&D years ago, and it has developed technologies to master the challenges in handling stevia.

by SILKE ORTMANN

There is great interest in carbonated soft drinks with stevia. Consumers especially appreciate simple and natural products. According to data by the market research company Mintel, these products are in especially high demand in Germany, where 55% of consumers would reach for beverages with alternative sweeteners. In the UK this figure is 47%, while in France it is 45%, and Italy comes in fourth with 26% of consumers wanting stevia beverages.

In the meantime, stevia sweeteners are available in numerous products – everything from soft drinks and fruit juice beverages to dairy products all the way to chocolate and other kinds of confectionery and licorice. Manufacturers of global brands are also turning to the new sweetener: in March 2012, Coca-Cola launched the first stevia sweetened version of Sprite in France and Switzerland. The idea was to rediscover refreshment but with 30% less sugar and fewer calories. A year later, the company applied the concept to the UK market. Recently Coca-Cola also expanded its product range in Argentina to include “Coca-Cola Life”, which is sweetened by a combination of sugar and stevia.

A successful launch
This new sweetener has been used in the US since 2008. In the European Union, steviol glycosides, the sweetening substance naturally found in the stevia plant, received approval from the EU Commission in 2011 – two years after France approved its use in foods and beverages. France was the only country in the EU which had previously applied for approval. The JEFCA – the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives – set the purity standard at 95%: a stevia sweetener must contain at least 95% steviol glycosides. WILD offers products with different levels of Rebaudioside A so that each manufacturer can select the sweetening system which best complements its products and price point.

Natural and zero calories
Stevia has two major advantages: unlike standard synthetic sweeteners, stevia products are natural in origin, and they make it possible to create low or no calorie sweetening. Both of these factors are appealing, and they give stevia huge sales potential. Around the globe, there are growing numbers of consumers who want a healthy diet that is as natural as possible and who make a point of seeking out natural low or no calorie foods and beverages. Steviol glycosides have another point in their favor: they enable manufacturers to stay within their budget without having to make compromises in the product’s taste. One factor must be kept in mind, however: taste is what influences people’s choices and, by extension, it determines the long term success of foods and beverages. Great
be considered to create the ideal taste when composing the formulation.

**Customized solutions**

WILD began investing in R&D for stevia sweeteners early on. Today, the company offers manufacturers taste modifiers which allow them the option of using steviol glycosides with a sugar like flavor profile. In recent years, WILD has worked in close conjunction with a trained panel of sensory experts to produce a wide selection of Taste Optimizing solutions. These products not only influence the sweetening profile of products, they can also mask a possible bitter off note. Adding bitter blockers inhibits the appropriate taste receptors in the mouth and reduces bitterness. Natural ingredients which improve the mouthfeel and finish the sweetening profile complement this concept. The experts at WILD combine the different natural taste components to create great tasting products with high consumer acceptance. WILD’s Taste Optimizers do not contain any sugar substitutes or sugar alcohols such as erythritane. They can be labeled as “natural flavors” in the finished product. WILD's service offers even more: “We not only provide Sunwin Stevia™ to our customers, we offer customized turnkey solutions fitting perfectly with the product concept,” adds Silke Ortmann, Product Management Ingredients WILD.

**A wide ranging product portfolio**

Depending on the customers’ preference and market demands, WILD’s different kinds of Reb A can create low or no calorie products with an authentic sensory profile. If the goal is to use natural ingredients and create an excellent taste while only lowering, not removing, calories, a combination of sweeteners from the WILD portfolio - Sunwin Stevia™ plus Fruit Up® - can be used in products such as premium beverages. Fruit Up® is a natural fruit extract which WILD developed as an alternative to standard sugar sweeteners. 100% of the sweetening properties of Fruit Up® are derived from fruit. Neither chemical additives nor enzymatic treatments are used in the manufacturing process.

**The trend toward stevia**

With its natural origin and zero calorie sweetening properties, stevia will remain in demand, according to WILD estimates, and it will continue to be a sought after sweetener for product innovations. A convincing overall concept contributes to win over more and more consumers with regard to stevia.

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