

Political change - continuity or disruption?

THIS year will see the end of the legislative period of both the European Parliament and the European Commission. The current Commission will need to hurry if it hopes to present all its proposals in Q1, otherwise they are likely to fall off the table. That's because the campaigning at Parliament level is set to begin in earnest in May, sending Members of the European Parliament racing back to their local constituencies to do the rounds in an effort to get re-elected. This basically means that all unfinished political files or proposals are unlikely to be completed before the end of the term. Inevitably, some of the pending ones will not be taken up again in the new cycle.

So what can we expect from the new regime that will be in place at the end of this year for the Parliament and the beginning of 2024 for the Commission? If the war in Ukraine still rages, this will be one of the key priorities for the incoming political class, along with associated issues around energy and inflation.

One question for our sector is, to what extent will the new administration continue with the Green Deal and, notably, the Farm to Fork Strategy? Some of the legislative initiatives are already late and it now looks like some might never see the light of day.

Industry has already invested a lot of resources into making sustainable food systems the future focus for Europe. After all, we recognise that working sustainably makes business sense. It would certainly be regrettable to see any future Commission not continuing down this path.

I hope that the new Commission will understand that the only way to boost the global competitiveness of Europe's food and drink sectors is by incentivising and



2023 will bring big changes in Brussels.

Sebastian Emig considers the implications

rewarding producers, without undue discrimination, to improve the sustainability of their operations and supply chains in the way they deem best. Furthermore, within the Farm to Fork Strategy, I hope that all political stakeholders can find an appropriate and non-discriminatory compromise and agree a harmonised front-of-pack nutrition labelling scheme across the EU. The same goes for a broader approach to consumer information, including digital.

TRENDS TO WATCH OUT FOR

The lingering impacts of inflation, the growth of retail media and the full return of the store shopping experience will all have a significant impact this year.

In 2020 and 2021, safety concerns driven by the global pandemic upended grocery shopping. In 2022, the health crisis took a back seat to roaring inflation and a prolonged period of supply chain disruptions. While prices are slowly starting to come down, many consumers remain financially stressed after so many months of paying more for groceries and other goods. Shoppers will look for value and search for promotions and other tools to hold down costs. In the case of snacks, both smaller pack sizes and large family packs are already helping consumers to meet the price point they are able and willing to afford.

Despite an increase in prices, most

snack products remain relatively affordable, certainly when comparing items bought at retail with those bought at restaurants or other food service outlets. While some consumer surveys have shown that consumers may start to contract into core, primary food items during times of inflation, that may not actually show up in their snack buying habits.

So far, despite the pressure on consumers' incomes, snack sales have stayed strong even as prices have increased. I am sure that we will see continued strength in sustainable and health-related innovations, with claims such as plant-based, gluten-free or high-protein driving growth for the category.

Comfort foods reigned supreme in the early stages of the COVID pandemic and we saw a recalibration back towards functional, beneficial type foods in 2022. Consumers are seeking foods that will support their lifestyles and maintain their health, promising to aid recovery, provide an energy boost and satiate hunger, among other benefits.

The whole concept of wellness has also been extended since the pandemic to factor in mental and emotional wellness. It now includes moments of indulgence, mental health and relaxation.

With that in mind, the desire to be healthy and to indulge can exist simultaneously. Better-for-you snacks ►

capitalise on this dichotomy within today's consumers. Consider crisps that are made from vegetables like kale or sweet potato, whole grain options featuring ancient grains like quinoa or millet instead of refined flour varieties, or meat snacks that are playing into diet trends by having no sugar and come packed with protein. In addition to seeking out plant-based foods and using plants as base ingredients, such as chickpea flour or cassava, snack makers are considering sustainability and vegetarian-friendly options in their ingredient choices.

There is also a tremendous opportunity for snacks makers to fortify their products with functional ingredients that align with consumers' needs. Functional food products – those designed to deliver health benefits beyond basic nourishment – will play an even bigger role in snacking choices when it comes time to reach into our pantry shelves looking for something quick and healthy. Think vegetable chips infused with probiotics or protein bars made from nut butters and dried fruits fortified with vitamins and antioxidants.

Consumers are increasingly willing to try new things, which is good news for some of the more 'progressive' ingredients. The trick will be to satisfy those seeking new

experiences while maintaining a comforting link to nostalgic favourites. It's similar to the longstanding balancing act of trying to meet the needs of consumers who demand health and wellness benefits as well as deliciously indulgent treats.

Finally, many consumers have resumed the daily activities they enjoyed before the pandemic, leading to an uptick in demand for on-the-go snacks. Children are back at school, sports and other activities are back in full swing and more and more people are returning to the office – at least part time. Consumers are increasingly purchasing pre-prepared grab-and-go snacks, which echoes pre-pandemic sales patterns. Even so, convenience nowadays means not only on-the-go but also at-home convenience, because many consumers are glued to their computer screens throughout the day. They are looking for something to grab and eat at home as well.

Overall, 2023 looks promising when it comes to finding healthier snacking alternatives that don't sacrifice taste, so consumers won't have to choose between enjoying their favourite 'guilty' pleasure and making a responsible nutritional choice. They want it all and it's our job as an industry to deliver!

SNACKEX 2024 - BOOK YOUR SPOT

Stand sales for our SNACKEX 2024 started at the end of last year. Our trade show will take place on 19-20 June in 2024 in Stockholm, Sweden and we've made a great start!

We are selling stands on a daily basis and it already looks like we will need to extend the show floor in order to accommodate all the exhibitor requests. This is a clear sign that our industry is thriving and that business is going very well.

If you haven't booked your stand yet, I would strongly advise you to do it at the earliest opportunity to get a good location on the show floor.

We are very much looking forward to welcoming you there! ●



Director General Sebastian Emig*

*in his capacity as permanent representative of Prime Consulting BXLBCN SL

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