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World Food Day: What Should Food Deliver, Beyond Calories?

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What does it really mean to nourish people?

On World Food Day, that question feels particularly relevant. This year's theme, "Innovate today. Nourish tomorrow," turns attention towards the role innovation can play in creating future-proof food systems.

Meeting the world's food needs involves more than producing enough food. It also means ensuring people can access foods that are nutritious, diverse and safe, while considering how food systems can continue to support people and the planet in the years ahead.[1]

What Does It Mean to Nourish?

Calories remain fundamental to food security. But nourishment asks a broader question: what else does food contribute to our health and wellbeing?

A nourishing diet depends on more than energy alone. It is shaped by the balance, diversity, and nutritional quality of the foods available to people, as well as whether those foods are accessible and appropriate to their needs and circumstances. The exact composition of a healthy diet will vary across cultures and individuals, but principles such as adequacy, balance, moderation and diversity remain important.[2]

Improve Foods People Already Eat

Innovation cannot solve every part of that challenge. But it can help the food industry make progress where it has a direct influence: the foods people already buy and eat.

For food and beverage manufacturers, one opportunity lies in reformulation: finding practical ways to improve familiar foods without requiring people to fundamentally change how they eat.

The priority should be to make meaningful nutritional improvements, not simply to add nutrients for the sake of it. Depending on the product, this could mean increasing fibre or protein, or reducing excess sugar or fat. The right approach will depend on the food, the people it is intended for, and the wider dietary context.

Fibre and protein illustrate this opportunity. Many people do not consume enough dietary fibre, while protein quality depends on factors such as amino acid composition and digestibility.[3] For manufacturers, the challenge is to translate these nutritional considerations into practical improvements without losing sight of the product's purpose or how people consume it.

This is where ingredient innovation can make a practical difference. Chicory root fibres, for example, can be used for fibre enrichment across applications including bakery, cereals, snacks and dairy. They can also support sugar and fat reduction, giving food manufacturers greater flexibility when developing products with an improved nutritional profile.

Plant-based proteins present a similar consideration: the nutritional value of a product depends on more than its total protein content. Different plant sources vary in their essential amino acid profiles and digestibility, meaning that simply increasing protein content does not necessarily tell the whole story. Combining complementary protein sources can help improve the overall amino acid profile, while functional properties such as solubility and emulsification also influence how well an ingredient performs in a finished product. [4]

The opportunity is not to make every food a “health food”. It is to consider how the foods people already choose can deliver more nutritional value, where it makes sense to do so.

Nourishment Needs a Wider Lens

But, improving nutrition is only part of the challenge. How food is produced, how much of it goes unused, and the resources required along the way also matter.

As populations grow, demand for food will increase, while climate change and pressure on natural resources can affect the availability of raw materials. Meeting these needs will require the food industry to consider not only the nutritional value of its products, but also how efficiently food and resources are used.

Reducing avoidable food waste is another part of this picture. Food that spoils before it can be consumed represents a loss not only of food itself, but also of the resources used to produce it. Depending on the application, improvements in storage, packaging, and processing can help maintain food quality and extend shelf life, potentially reducing such losses.

Understanding the wider impact of food production also requires looking at the entire value chain and beyond any single environmental category. BENEO’s work with BrightWolves to develop third-party-verified Life Cycle Assessments (LCAs) across its ingredient portfolio is one example. By considering a broader range of environmental impacts, including water and land use next to greenhouse gas emissions and more, LCAs can provide a more comprehensive basis for decision-making.

For product developers, this kind of information can be valuable earlier in the formulation process — helping teams consider nutrition, functionality, cost and environmental impact together, rather than treating sustainability as a question to address only after a product has been developed.

Nourishing Tomorrow Is a Collective Effort

Perhaps this is what makes the future of food so complex. A food can be nutritionally valuable, but accessibility still matters. An ingredient can improve a product, while its wider environmental impact still needs to be understood. What works in one market may not work in another.

There will always be different priorities, trade-offs and approaches. But as our understanding of nutrition, ingredients and their wider impacts continues to grow, so too do the opportunities for the food industry to work together to create products that deliver greater value for people and the planet.

The question, then, is not simply how much food we can produce. It is what we want that food to deliver.

[1] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), World Food Day 2026: Innovate today. Nourish tomorrow.

[2] World Health Organization (2026), Healthy diet. WHO identifies adequacy, balance, moderation and diversity as core principles of a healthy diet and notes that dietary needs and healthy dietary patterns vary according to individual and cultural contexts.

[3] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (2013), Dietary protein quality evaluation in human nutrition: Report of an FAO Expert Consultation. FAO Food and Nutrition Paper 92.

[4] BENEO, Sustainable protein enrichment with faba bean.