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BENEO Explores the Future of Fibre Enrichment and Sugar Reduction in Asia-Pacific

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As consumers across Asia-Pacific increasingly seek foods that deliver more nutritional value without compromising on taste and texture, fibre enrichment and sugar reduction are becoming key priorities for food manufacturers. BENEO is advocating a shift from ‘fibremaxxing ’, simply increasing fibre intake, to ‘fibremixxing’, an approach that combines different fibre types to achieve complementary nutritional and functional benefits. In this interview with NUFFOODS Spectrum, Christian Philippsen, Managing Director, BENEO Asia Pacific, discusses the formulation challenges involved in developing fibre-rich foods, the potential of chicory root fibres such as inulin and oligofructose, and the role of clinical evidence in substantiating digestive and metabolic health benefits. He also explores how manufacturers in Indonesia and across the region can integrate fibre and plant protein into everyday foods, respond to demand for nutrient-dense and sugar-reduced products, and translate nutrition science into consumer-friendly innovations.

BENEO is shifting the conversation from 'fibremaxxing' to 'fibremixxing.' What are the primary formulation and sensory challenges in combining different types of fibre to achieve both nutritional balance and consumer-appealing textures?

Fibres are not interchangeable. Different fibres have different structural and physicochemical characteristics — including differences in solubility, viscosity, hydration and fermentability, which can affect how they function in a food product. This means the starting point for “fibremixxing” is understanding the specific functionality of each fibre and selecting the right type and grade for the intended application.

Some fibres can contribute sweetness and support sugar reduction, while others can contribute different textures or help with stability. For formulators, the challenge is to balance these nutritional and technical objectives with the sensory

experience of the final product.

Depending on the fibre and application, this can involve considerations such mouthfeel, viscosity, moisture retention, processing conditions and stability. Fibre selection and dosage can also influence the final taste and texture, so the right formulation approach will vary from one product to another.

This is why application expertise is important. “Fibremixxing” is not simply about combining different fibres for the sake of it; it is about understanding what each fibre brings to the formulation and selecting combinations that deliver the desired nutritional and technical outcomes while maintaining the taste and texture consumers expect. Local legislation also needs to be considered as part of product development.

Given the high prevalence of fibre deficiency in Indonesia, how can food and beverage manufacturers best leverage the 'fibremixxing' approach to make fibre-rich products more accessible and desirable to the local consumer?

96.7 per cent of Indonesians aged five and above consume fewer than the recommended five daily servings of fruit and vegetables — highlighting an opportunity to improve the nutritional quality of everyday diets.[1] While this statistic does not directly measure fibre intake, it points to the importance of finding practical ways to incorporate more fibre-rich foods into everyday eating.

For food manufacturers, one approach is to make fibre part of foods that consumers already know and enjoy, rather than treating it as a separate “health” category. Different fibre types can support different formulation objectives, giving manufacturers flexibility to develop products that provide fibre enrichment while also addressing considerations such as sweetness, texture, or mouthfeel.

Inulin and oligofructose, for example, are chicory root fibres that can offer different functionalities in various food and drink applications. Depending on their chain length and the formulation, they can influence texture, mouthfeel, and sweetness across familiar formats, from bakery and cereals to dairy, snacks and other everyday foods.

Ultimately, the opportunity is to make fibre nutrition part of foods people genuinely want to eat. If manufacturers can improve the nutritional profile of a product while maintaining the taste, texture and overall eating experience, fibre can become a more natural part of everyday diets rather than something consumers associate only with specialist health products.

You mentioned that fibre and plant proteins can play complementary roles in satiety and weight management. What specific R&D considerations are critical when pairing functional fibres like chicory root with plant proteins in a single food matrix?

When combining fibre and plant protein, it is important to look at the formulation as a whole. Both ingredients can influence the texture and taste of the finished product, and the extent of this impact will depend on the application as well as the amount of protein and fibre required.

From an R&D perspective, this can require adjustments at several stages of the formulation. Water management is one consideration: plant proteins may require an additional hydration step, while the overall water content of the recipe may need to be adjusted when fibre and protein are combined. The formulation may also need to be adapted for flavour and sweetness, including the use or adjustment of sweeteners, depending on the sensory profile of the ingredients and the final product.

Processing is another important consideration, as the way ingredients interact within a food matrix can influence their functionality, texture, and sensory properties. This is why the right approach will differ between applications rather than following a single formula for combining protein and fibre.

Ultimately, the effect will depend on the specific ingredients, amounts, and food matrix. The R&D challenge is ultimately to bring these elements together in a product that delivers on nutrition while still tasting and performing as consumers expect.

As the functional nutrition market in Indonesia evolves, how do you expect the demand for 'nutrient-dense' and 'sugar-reduced' products to influence the next generation of functional food product development?

We see an opportunity for functional foods to move beyond the idea of simply making a product “healthier”, and towards delivering more nutritional value within foods that consumers already eat.

This becomes particularly relevant when eating occasions or portion sizes are smaller, because the nutritional quality of what is consumed can become more important. The growing use of GLP-1 receptor agonists has also brought greater attention to nutrient-dense, protein-rich food choices in the context of reduced energy intake.

For manufacturers, this points towards more multifunctional approaches to formulation. Rather than addressing fibre, protein, sugar reduction or texture as separate objectives, there is an opportunity to consider how different ingredients can work together within the same product. Chicory root fibres, for example, can provide dietary fibre while also contributing to sweetness and texture, making them relevant to some sugar-reduction applications.

The technical challenge is ensuring that nutritional improvements do not come at the expense of taste and texture. Sugar plays important roles in sweetness, structure and sensory perception, so reducing it requires careful formulation to maintain the characteristics consumers expect.

We therefore expect next-generation functional foods to place greater emphasis on getting more from each ingredient: improving nutritional value while also contributing to the functionality, texture, and sensory experience of the final product. The opportunity is to create everyday foods that are nutritionally more purposeful, without making consumers feel that they have to compromise on enjoyment.

With consumers becoming more ingredient-conscious, what role does clinical evidence play in ensuring the success of fibre-fortified products in the Indonesian market, particularly regarding digestive and metabolic health?

As interest in functional nutrition grows, clinical evidence becomes increasingly important in distinguishing a substantiated nutritional claim from a broader wellness positioning. This is particularly relevant for fibre, because different fibres have different structures and properties, so not every dietary fibre is automatically a prebiotic.

For manufacturers, the important question is therefore not simply whether an ingredient is a source of fibre, but what evidence exists for the specific ingredient and the benefit being considered. Human clinical studies can help establish whether an effect is observed in people, at what intake level and under what conditions. Looking across a body of evidence can also help determine how consistently a finding has been demonstrated.

Chicory root fibres such as inulin and oligofructose are a good example. They have been the subject of decades of research, including human intervention studies investigating their effects on the gut microbiota and digestive health.[2] More broadly, research on inulin-type fructans has also examined outcomes relevant to metabolic health, including body weight and body composition, although findings vary across studies and should be interpreted in the context of the population, dose and study design.[3]

This evidence has practical value for manufacturers, beyond consumer communication. It can steer ingredient selection and formulation, support responsible substantiation of product benefits, and help companies understand what can and cannot be communicated in different markets. In Indonesia, as in other markets, the regulatory framework also needs to be considered when translating scientific evidence into consumer-facing claims.

Ultimately, clinical evidence provides an important foundation for credibility. It does not guarantee that a product will succeed, but it helps ensure that the nutritional proposition is grounded in evidence rather than driven solely by consumer interest.

Looking beyond Fi Asia Indonesia 2026, what are BENEO’s key strategic priorities for supporting manufacturers in the Asia-Pacific region as they integrate functional ingredients into everyday diets?

For us, the opportunity is to help manufacturers translate nutrition science into products that work in the real world. That starts with continuing to build the scientific understanding behind functional ingredients, but it also means helping manufacturers address the practical formulation challenges that come with incorporating them into familiar foods.

Application expertise is therefore an important part of the equation. Different food formats, ingredient combinations and processing conditions can require different approaches, and manufacturers need to be able to balance nutritional objectives with taste, texture, stability and overall product performance.

There is also a need to look at functional ingredients more holistically. Rather than treating fibre and protein enrichment, sugar reduction or texture improvements as separate add-ons (and each with their own formulation challenges), manufacturers can consider how ingredients with complementary properties can contribute to several objectives within the

same product. This is where approaches such as fibremixxing reflect this more integrated way of thinking about formulation. However, identifying the right ingredients, grades and combinations for a particular application requires careful consideration and this is where application expertise becomes important. At the BENEO-Technology Centre, manufacturers receive support in translating these considerations into formulations that meet the nutritional, technical and sensory requirements of the final product.

Across Asia Pacific, the opportunity is ultimately to make these solutions relevant to the foods people already eat, while taking into account local formulation requirements, consumer expectations and regulatory considerations. Our role is to help bridge the gap between nutrition science and practical food development, supporting manufacturers in creating products that combine nutritional value with technical feasibility and consumer appeal. Ultimately, the goal is to make better nutrition a natural part of everyday eating.

[1] Ministry of Health, 2023 Indonesian Health Survey

[2] Nagy, D. U. et al. (2023). “Effect of chicory-derived inulin-type fructans on abundance of Bifidobacterium and on bowel function: a systematic review with meta-analyses.” Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition, 63(33), 12018–12035. DOI: 10.1080/10408398.2022.2098246.

[3] Reimer RA, Theis S, Zanzer YC. The effects of chicory inulin-type fructans supplementation on weight management outcomes: systematic review, meta-analysis, and meta-regression of randomized controlled trials. Am J Clin Nutr. 2024 Nov;120(5):1245-1258. doi: 10.1016/j.ajcnut.2024.09.019. Epub 2024 Sep 21. Erratum in: Am J Clin Nutr. 2025 Jul;122(1):368-370. doi: 10.1016/j.ajcnut.2025.05.013. PMID: 39313030; PMCID: PMC11600113.