

## “Hero ingredient”: Almonds crowned most popular nut in Europe

20 Sep 2019 --- Almonds are the most popular nut in new product introductions across Europe for the fourth consecutive year. According to [Innova Market Insights](#), there were over 4,500 new product introductions with almonds in Europe in 2018, representing 45 percent of all new product introductions with almonds globally. The [Almond Board of California](#) (ABC) says that this popularity is due to almonds' versatility and ability to tap into trends including clean label and plant-based foods.

“One of the challenges we have been working to overcome in Europe is shifting perceptions of almonds as ‘just’ an ingredient to almonds as a snack in their own right. Our marketing campaigns have supported this snacking positioning and manufacturers continue to play a role in innovating with almonds to create interesting, tasty, healthy snacks with almonds that appeal to consumers,” Dariela Roffe-Rackind, Director of Europe and Global Public Relations at ABC tells **FoodIngredientsFirst**.



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As well as being the top nut for European snacks, almonds are also popular in confectionery, which is the top category for almond introductions (27 percent). Bakery is the second most popular category for new almond product introductions (17 percent). Meanwhile, the cereal category has seen the strongest growth for almonds (8 percent).

Globally, almonds are experiencing double-digit year-over-year growth in specialty categories such as desserts and ice cream (+10 percent), dairy (+13 percent), spreads (+29 percent) and sports nutrition (+95 percent), according to Innova Market Insights.

Almonds are often recognized as being a great flavor character as they pair with numerous different sweet and salty ingredients, says Roffe-Rackind. “This offers variety and indulgence alongside the enviable nutrient profile,” she adds.

“Almonds are what I like to call a hero ingredient. Honey and avocado are two other examples of hero ingredients. These ingredients bring a healthy halo to any product they are in, are

nearly universally liked and offer additional benefits to great taste,” notes Lu Ann Williams, Director of Innovation, Innova Market Insights.

### New frontiers

One notable opportunity for expansion is in flavored almonds, which have been successful in North America. Specifically, Williams notes that almond butter is being used as fillings, almond milk is used with cow's milk to create an interesting new hybrid milk and whole almonds are being used in confectionery bringing a different kind of crunch.

“Because almonds are available in more forms than any other tree nut – flour, meal, paste, butter, oil, milk, and even almond co-products – we’re constantly seeing new innovation around the almond form, and new formats being developed, which makes almonds perfect for product developers. We also see interesting NPD with almond flour, which is starting to expand into new territories, such as smoothies, through a defatting process, which provides a higher protein product by removing the fat,” highlights Roffe-Rackind.

“The rise in demand for healthy yet indulgent snacks that deliver a natural and wholesome appeal is the single biggest trend driving manufacturers to innovate to maintain relevance. This trend is being driven by consumers continuing to want natural, trusted and easily-recognizable ingredients. This is reflected in the increasing use of ‘clean labels,’ plant-based products, as well as in other sustainable ingredients, including ancient grains and nuts,” Roffe-Rackind continues.

Indeed, almond products often feature natural health-related claims, with “gluten-free” being the top claim used (23 percent) worldwide. Notably, 36 percent of almond products introduced in the “bars” category were labeled “gluten-free.” Claims of “no additives/preservatives” were the second most used on almond product introductions globally, communicated on 17 percent of almond products, up two percent from 2017.

### The holy grail of sustainability

Another major factor influencing consumer purchasing in the snacking category is sustainability. “It’s not enough for snacks to be convenient, nutritious and taste good. The holy grail is that snacks are both ‘good for me and good for the planet,’” says Roffe-Rackind. She notes that ABC has launched the Almond Orchard 2025 goals – a sustainability initiative that, among other things, focuses on further reducing water usage and reaching zero waste in our orchards.

“The industry has long been committed to sustainability, but until recently, we haven’t communicated that much to consumers. That’s changing as we know how interested consumers are in how their food is produced and in the responsible use of resources,” she continues. “For California farmers, the step is continuing on the journey to achieve the Almond Orchard 2025 Goals for waste, water usage, air quality and pest management.”

Additionally, the almond industry is exploring higher-value uses for almond by-products such as hulls and shells. Traditionally, they were used for cattle feed and livestock bedding, but now the industry is using them to produce fermented products such as beer and kombucha. In addition, powder taken from the shells can be used to strengthen recycled plastics.

**By Katherine Durrell**



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