



Is innovative NPD at Sial set to define the future of food?

An increase in entrants for Sial's innovations section shows a worldwide focus on NPD, from microwaveable toast to "ultra" foods, says **Anna-Marie Julian**

Truffle caviar, vegetable wafers, chocolate pearls and lavender cooking crystals – it's not the kind of fare you'd expect to see down your local supermarket, but according to global food industry trade show Sial, such ideas offer a glimpse of our food future.

The products were among 400 examples of global NPD on display this week – at least for those who managed to fight their way past the French strikes to get to the show on the outskirts of Paris.

The biennial event brings together the latest innovation from

around the world and this year it highlighted 15 worldwide trends, which will define the future of our food, it claimed.

In a sign there is a new worldwide focus on NPD, the number of entrants competing for space in the innovations section at Sial this year was up 25% on 2008 to nearly 1,000. Of these, 400 were exhibited and the top 15 "major innovations" received a Trends & Innovations Award at the show.

So, which are most relevant to the UK market and how do winning products link with the trends?

One of the most eye-catching was Croc' Légumes, a range of vegetable wafers to be eaten as a snack or with dips, and containing at least 50% vegetables.

The inspiration was the French government's new-found focus on health. "We have always special-

TOP TRENDS

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- 2 Mixing genres
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Source: Sial/XTC World Innovation

ised in the production of waffles and wafers, but more and more there is a slogan in France for people to eat their five a day," says MD Benoît Rousseau. "I thought we're not in that trend with cakes and waffles – wouldn't it be fantastic to make a cracker but from a nutritional point of view?"

The wafers come in two flavours, beetroot & shallot and carrot & cumin, and took more than two years to develop, because of difficulties retaining the crunchiness of a cracker with a high vegetable content. The packaging is also made from renewable sources and is fully compostable.

Since the French company that makes Croc Légumes – Pâtisserie des Flandres – burnt to the ground during this period, the award is particularly exciting, says Rousseau, and he now plans to

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market them in the UK as he believes the market is ahead of France in its attitude to both health and the environment – another major food trend identified by Sial.

Of course, health and the environment are trends familiar to the UK consumer, but some of the trends identified for the show by consultants XTC World Innovation, are less familiar, including ‘ultra’.

This is a catch-all for extremely sophisticated foods such as caviar-like pearls made from truffles or flavoured liquid centres like salted caramel. And, ironically, the trend has been driven by the recession, according to Olivier Hausheer, CEO of XTC World Innovation, Europe.

“In a period of crisis we’ve seen the choice of entry-price products increase, but also the opposite with more premium products. It is products in the middle, which lack personality, that are suffering.”

Molecular cuisine, made famous by Spanish restaurant El Bulli, was the inspiration for *Perlage di Tartufo* or pearls of truffle, made by Italian truffle specialist *TartuLanghe*. The small, black pearls have the same colour and consistency as caviar, but are made from black winter truffle juice using a process called sferification, explains export manager Veronica Giraud.

The best raw materials

With budgets stretched, it’s not surprising that one of the trends identified in the study is the ability to “be like a chef at home”. But while being undeniably sophisticated, *Perlage di Tartufo* is, Giraud suggests, reflective of another trend identified in Sial’s study: more natural and simple foods. “Until last year, my customers – restaurants around the world – were trying to do fancy things, but then it changed and now they’re more concerned about selecting the best raw materials and presenting them in a very pure way.”

So how does simplicity tally with the molecular complexity of some of the developments? The two can co-exist, insists Hausheer. “With *Perlage di Tartufo*, for example, it uses molecular technology, but it is not a very popular word so the product is presented in a much softer way.”

A similar sophistication lies below the surface for another of the award winners – the microwaveable *Croque Monsieur*. The real benefit of *Maxi Croque* is convenience – it takes 2.5 minutes in a microwave – but the skill is in creating, or retaining, a crust. The feat has clearly excited the French, as manufacturer *Sapresti* has been inundated with requests from the French media since launching it this week, according to Edoard Despous, export director at the company.

“It’s about fast consumption, while keeping the pleasure of the traditional product. The technology is focused a lot on the packaging to give a nice crusty and golden finish, without the bread getting wet,” he says. It has secured distribution throughout 70% of French retail, and *Sapresti* is keen to speak to UK buyers, he adds.

Like a chef at home

Maxi Croque is a prime example of another global trend, which XTC call “handling and new needs”. Hausheer references the increasing autonomy of children in choosing and preparing their own foods, particularly using a microwave, as one example, but also believes an ageing population requires new products that are easy to handle.

With one in five people expected to develop a food allergy by 2020 according to a recent study, another trend is “the hunt for suspect ingredients”. While natural and simple foods are the obvious answer to such concerns, the fact that consumers are able to find out about foods and companies through the click of a button in our digital age explains why NPD such as *Cristaux D’Huiles Essentielles*, or essential crystal oils, made by French company *Florisens*, has a future. Making a virtue of the fact they’re organic, a fussy eater can nevertheless pursue sophisticated food developments.

So a future of cooking with caviar of truffles, after nibbling some vegetable wafers in front of the television, then finishing off with a lavender oil-flavoured pud may not be far off. ■