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# CO NT EN TS



## 3 VIEWPOINT

### Viewpoint: Protein as a cornerstone, and a peek around that corner

“Hero ingredient” whey may lead the protein pack, but plant-based options are on the rise. Managing Editor **Duffy Hayes** wonders, though, if there’s a more sustainable path forward.

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Protein is teaming up with powerful sidekicks like GABA, HMB, dileucine, beta-lactoglobulin and probiotics to redefine performance nutrition. **Nick Collias** shares the details.

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Firing a surge in the performance nutrition segment, consumers are embracing protein, creatine and hydration products like never before. **Scott Dicker** has the data.

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## Protein as a cornerstone, and a peek around that corner

**T**his issue has a fine focus on active nutrition – how dietary supplements can enhance athletic performance, boost recovery and generally enhance overall health. And often, that means providing targeted nutrients depleted during exercise, or even those episodes in life that simply require a certain level of physical demand.

In that vein, this category is for anyone with a vigorous lifestyle – not just hardcore athletes.

There's a lot to glean about the market for protein, specifically. One of our expert sources called it the "hero nutrient of our time" ... wow!

While plant-based protein options have surged for consumers who might prefer them over moo-cow whey protein, formulation limitations of proteins like pea, soy and rice mean dairy-based proteins are still a growing part of the category's expansion and market demand.

But I wonder if that's a sustainable path, and whether there's a better "whey" forward – one that is kinder toward animals as well as the environment.

Microalgae show tremendous promise, and the technology from one company in particular could be a game-changer when it comes to protein. Arborea was started by a visionary engineer, Julian Melchiorri. The British-Italian inventor and bio-innovator discovered a way to grow microalgae using just sunlight and minimal water – producing a clean, neutral-tasting protein that works in everything from alt-milks and powders to functional ingredients.

And, importantly, no fertile land is required, so many of the animal welfare and environmental



questions about protein production are essentially solved.

Kaly Chatakondur, Ph.D., Arborea's global commercial director, explained it to me.

"Essentially, we are turning carbon dioxide into any photosynthetic microalgae, but these microalgae are superfoods," he said. "They are packed with protein. They are packed with bioactive micronutrients and as a result, we have an unlimited source of proteins, bioactive nutrients and natural colors."

It's a tantalizing prospect – a potentially unlimited protein supply using just a sliver of our current footprint. That's definitely something to consider as you digest the details of the current market for proteins of all stripes, inside this month's magazine.

**Duffy Hayes**  
MANAGING EDITOR



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## What's next for protein?

It's protein's world, and we're all just living in it. But in a time when consumers can't get enough of this fundamental macronutrient, the biggest opportunities may lie in strategic pairings that help protein work smarter.

by Nick Collias

**N**atural product discussions often include the term “hero ingredients” – electrolytes for hydration, melatonin for sleep, curcumin for inflammation, for example. But some heroes go beyond specific goals to become universal stars. That's where protein stands today.

If this sounds mythological, that's the point. This macronutrient currently holds godlike status in the modern American diet.

“Protein is the hero nutrient of our time. People simply can't get enough of it,” Scott Dicker, of market research firm SPINS, reported. Despite years of growth, protein continues to expand across formats and aisles. “People can get high-protein cereal, pasta sauce – even ketchup,” Dicker noted. “So are they still buying protein powders? The answer is a resounding ‘Yes.’”

Protein may have won the game – but it can still do more. Every hero is better with the right sidekick. Forward-looking formulators are pairing protein with complementary nutrients that improve absorption, amplify effects, and help consumers get more muscle growth and recovery from every scoop. From neurotransmitters to biotics, these strategic

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combinations are opening new doors in a mature, crowded category.

### Protein plus GABA

**Superpower:** Enhanced recovery and muscle growth

**When:** Post-workout or pre-bedtime

GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid) is best known as a calming neurotransmitter that [supports](#) sleep and reduces stress. But research suggests its benefits extend beyond relaxation, especially when paired with protein.

A [clinical study](#) showed that combining 10 g of whey protein with just 100 mg of GABA (as PharmaGABA, from Pharma Foods



International) led to significantly greater gains in whole-body fat-free mass over 12 weeks of resistance training, compared to protein alone. Growth hormone levels rose faster and more consistently in the protein-plus-GABA group, pointing to an additive effect on muscle protein synthesis (MPS) and recovery.

Aditya Kulkarni, Ph.D., associate director at ingredient supplier Pharma Foods International, stated, “For the first time, our studies have demonstrated that GABA, when combined with a protein source, can significantly enhance lean muscle mass. While we used whey protein as the benchmark, any quality protein source paired with GABA may deliver similar benefits.” He also noted that Japan’s Food with Functional Claims (FFC) system has approved health claims based on this research, fueling the launch of new products from brands like Meiji and Rizap Wellness.

This combo isn’t just for athletes. The protein-GABA duo may offer targeted support for aging populations looking to combat sarcopenia, particularly those limited to light physical activity. And with added benefits for sleep quality and recovery, it’s a smart, multifunctional pairing for both performance- and wellness-oriented consumers.

### Protein + HMB

**Superpower:** Muscle retention during calorie restriction

**Best For:** GLP-1 users and at-risk populations

HMB (beta-hydroxy beta-methylbutyrate) may not have the flash of creatine or the buzz of collagen, but when it comes to protecting muscle, it’s quietly one of the most proven tools in the kit. A metabolite of leucine, HMB helps [reduce](#) muscle breakdown and support recovery – especially when paired with protein.

HMB’s best results have long come in high-risk groups: aging adults, hospitalized patients or individuals experiencing rapid weight loss. It’s no surprise then that Abbott Nutrition’s Ensure Enlive, a drink designed for elderly muscle preservation, includes 2 g of HMB per serving, alongside 20 g of protein. According to Ralf Jaeger, Ph.D., supplement researcher and co-founder of consultancy Incredovo, “That’s currently by far the majority of the HMB market. But it’s a very good example of a protein-HMB combination to prevent muscle loss – which basically is the same concept that works for people taking Ozempic.”

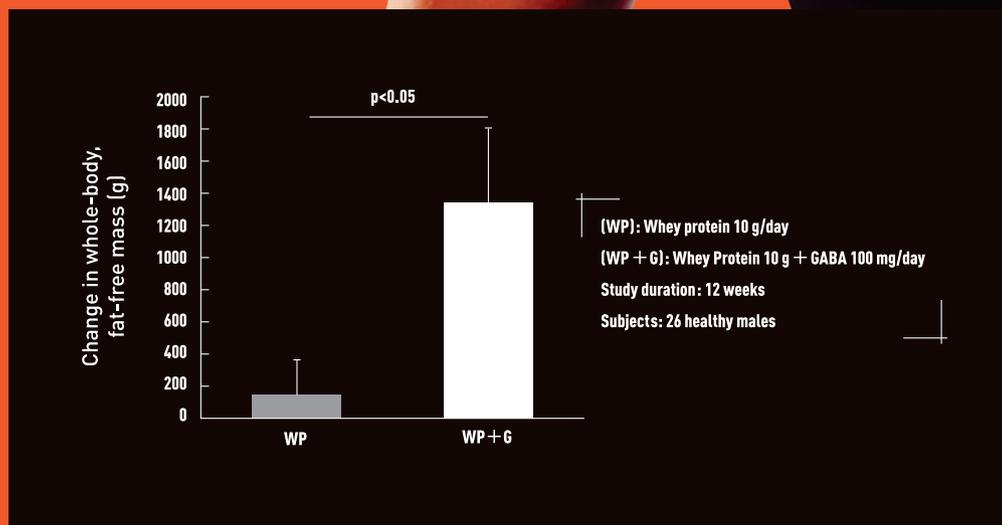
GLP-1 (glucagon-like peptide) users face a perfect storm: lower appetite, slower digestion





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**Protein** is the **hero nutrient** of our time. People simply can't get enough of it.



and often, significantly reduced protein intake. Adding HMB to plant-based proteins like soy has been [shown](#) in studies to significantly improve net protein balance and help preserve lean mass, helping the plant-based protein to be more whey-like for people at risk of catabolism (which can lead to muscle loss).

### Protein plus dileucine

**Superpower:** Even more gains

**Pairs well with:** Collagen protein

Not all proteins are created equal – especially when it comes to their leucine content, the amino acid most responsible for triggering MPS. While animal-based proteins typically provide more leucine than plant-based or collagen proteins, formulators looking to close the gap are turning to a powerful new ally: dileucine.

“Leucine on its own doesn't work – it needs the other essential amino acids [EAAs],” Jaeger

explained. “However, dileucine on its own does work.” That makes this dipeptide a promising standalone ingredient – or even more strategically, an additive that can supercharge the effectiveness of plant-based or low-leucine proteins like collagen.

Jaeger recommends 2 g of dileucine stand-alone, or a 1 g dose of dileucine alongside 15 g of a moderate-leucine protein. Collagen, which contains only about 2% leucine, may require even more to match the anabolic potential of more complete proteins. When muscle growth is the goal, adding dileucine could help functional proteins punch well above their weight.

### Beta-lactoglobulin protein

**Superpower:** Invisibility and hyper-efficiency

**Best for:** Shots and “hidden” protein drinks

Beta-lactoglobulin (BLG) may not yet be a household name, but it's on the verge of



read

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## Tangeretin plus whey protein helps athletes breathe better

A little-known citrus flavonoid was shown, when used with whey protein, to help athletes suffering from exercise-induced asthma.

## Formulation

becoming one of the most versatile tools in the protein formulator's arsenal –

especially for applications where taste, clarity and

compact delivery matter. Derived from whey, BLG protein isolates like Arla Foods Ingredients' Lacprodan BLG-100 deliver a unique nutritional punch with ultra-clean functionality.

In the standard protein comparison checklist – amino acid profile, macronutrient composition, taste and texture – BLG scores high across the board. It boasts more leucine than other commercially available whey proteins, a key driver for MPS. It's also low in minerals and virtually fat- and lactose-free, which makes it appealing for individuals managing dietary sensitivities or conditions like kidney issues. The texture brings minimal astringency, even at high concentrations.

But what may really set BLG apart is its stealth. Birgitte Kynde Ravn, manager of performance nutrition at supplier Arla Foods Ingredients, claimed, "Lacprodan BLG-100 enables very high protein concentrations (up to 23%) in small serving sizes while maintaining a clean taste and water-like viscosity."

This makes it especially valuable for "hidden" formats like protein shots, clear drinks and even intra-workout formulas – an application where protein has rarely ventured until now.

The utility of BLG spans both ends of the consumer spectrum. "For experienced athletes, it's a very efficient and high-quality protein source," Ravn explained. "For beginners, or consumers who aren't keen on traditional protein shakes, it provides an easy way to incorporate protein through convenient formats like shots and sodas." BLG has even found

## Protein for ... electrolytes or orange juice?!

**New acid-stable pea proteins are redefining where and how protein can be delivered.**

**P**lant-based protein in your RTM (ready-to-mix) hydration powder? In your orange juice? Even your kid's applesauce pouch? That's the promise of a new generation of acid-stable protein ingredients.

"Traditional pea proteins tend to crash out at low pH levels – around 5 and below – because that's their isoelectric point," Kushal Chandak, VP of R&D at ingredient supplier PURIS, explained. "We engineered HiLo and ClearP by changing the structure through processing, making them stable in acidic conditions and highly soluble."

This opens the door to an entirely new set of supplements and functional foods and beverages, particularly where consumers wouldn't expect to find protein – like clear electrolytes, juice shots or even fruit-based kids' snacks.

ClearP delivers 90% protein with less than 1% fat, and dissolves cleanly enough to provide up to 10 g protein in a single juice shot, according to the company. It's a clear, fast-absorbing, high-protein option that sidesteps the viscosity and chalkiness that have long limited plant proteins in acidic formats. With these innovations, protein isn't just for shakes anymore. It's for everything.

For consumers aiming to build or maintain muscle on a plant-based diet – **probiotic or postbiotic pairing** offers a validated, science-backed strategy.

early traction in GLP-1-focused products, appealing to users who want the benefits of protein without the heavy volume or creamy textures of conventional shakes. As the protein market continues to diversify, BLG is poised to power the next generation of high-impact, low-effort nutrition.

### Protein plus probiotics and/or postbiotics

**Superpower:** Increased absorption and protein quality enhancement

**Ideal for:** Plant-based proteins

Plant proteins like pea or rice are typically less bioavailable than their animal-based counterparts, which plays a big part in their “lower quality” reputation. But combining them with probiotics or postbiotics could shift that narrative.

A 2020 double-blind placebo-controlled clinical [study](#) published in *Probiotics and Antimicrobial Proteins* found that pairing 20 g of pea protein with a multi-strain probiotic (AminoAlta, containing *L. paracasei* LP-DG and LPC-S01) significantly enhanced the absorption

and concentration of numerous key amino acids – leucine, isoleucine, valine, methionine, and other EAAs and BCAAs (branched-chain amino acids) – all without affecting absorption speed. This suggests a meaningful uptick in the quality and utility of plant protein via microbial support.

These findings were echoed and expanded in a 2025 [study](#) comparing the effects of probiotics and postbiotics on protein absorption. Researchers found that postbiotics led to even greater improvements in total amino acid absorption, with enhanced consistency across participants. The authors concluded that postbiotics may offer a more stable, formulation-friendly option than live probiotics, particularly for shelf-stable protein products.

For consumers aiming to build or maintain muscle on a plant-based diet – or brands looking to improve protein quality claims – probiotic or postbiotic pairing offers a validated, science-backed strategy. It’s a modern approach to helping plant proteins perform more like their animal-based peers. ■



Nick Collias is a writer and editor with over a decade of experience working in the health and fitness industry. From 2016 to 2021, he was the host of the Bodybuilding.com Podcast, interviewing elite athletes and training thought-leaders on a wide range of exercise, nutrition and lifestyle topics. Additionally, he has worked for the last 20 years as a longform print and online journalist, as well as a book author, ghostwriter and editor.

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## Fueling the future: Sports nutrition trends in 2025

by Scott Dicker



**S**ports nutrition as a market continues to evolve, with 2025 shaping up to be a pivotal year. As consumers increasingly prioritize performance, recovery and holistic wellness, the demand for targeted supplements like protein, creatine and hydration products is surging.

### Market momentum: Sports nutrition on the rise

According to the most recent [SPINS](#) data, the U.S. performance nutrition segment grew by 12% year over year, outpacing all other supplement categories. In fact, performance

nutrition has been the fastest-growing supplement category each of the past four years. The segment includes protein powders, pre-workouts, creatine and hydration products – each playing a unique role in supporting active lifestyles while also finding success as crossover products into other health focuses. This growth is expected to continue.



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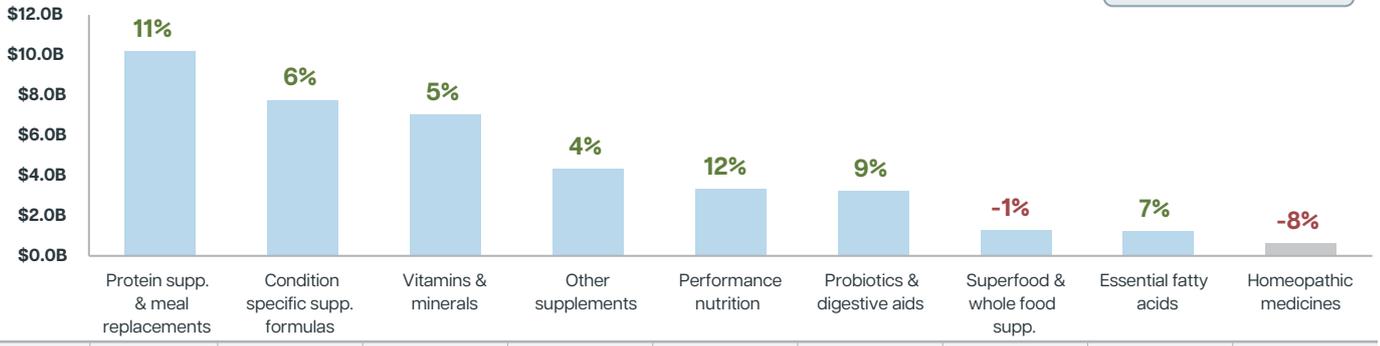
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**Shoppers are prioritizing holistic and fitness-oriented supplements** that enhance physical performance, provide natural and nutrient-dense options, and support muscle development.

**Vitamins and supplements by category**

Dollar sales, dol % change

**+7.3%**  
**VMS Total Department**  
 52 Week \$ Sales Change YoY



Units % chg, year ago:	+11%	-1%	+2%	+1%	+15%	+6%	-1%	+0%	-10%
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**My take: What's hot in 2025**

Several key areas are showing growth and innovation:

**1. Protein: Beyond muscle building**

Protein remains a cornerstone of sports and active nutrition, but its role is expanding. Protein continues to be the macronutrient

with a health halo surrounding it. With almost half of all households purchasing products in this category, the mainstream awareness of protein cannot be denied. The growth is extra impressive considering protein-enhanced products are now available in practically every category across the store.

**High protein**

Consumers, with increasingly more women, are looking for high protein label claims

**+7%**  
**Protein powder**  
 52 week \$ sales change YoY

**Whey protein powder is driving the most sales & growth**

SOURCE	MARKET SHARE	YOY GROWTH
Whey	38%	+9% #1
Collagen	22%	+8%
Plant	16%	+0%
Animal	4%	-10%
Blend (animal and plant)	3%	+1%

**Social media trending: 30-30-3**

30 grams of protein, 30 grams of fiber, 3 probiotic foods



<p><b>SS cookies and snack bars</b></p> <p>20 g protein</p>	<p><b>SS chips, pretzels and snacks</b></p> <p>18 g protein</p>	<p><b>SS cold cereals</b></p> <p>13 g protein</p>
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## 2. Creatine: A resurgence in popularity

Once considered a niche product for bodybuilders, creatine is experiencing a renaissance. Highlighted by its scientifically backed benefits for [strength](#) and [energy](#) – along with emerging research for [cognitive function](#) and [healthy aging](#) – creatine is on its way to following protein into the mainstream.

It's hard to overstate the opportunity for creatine. When I look for ingredients that have

the potential to surge, I often look for new health focuses, new demographics and new delivery methods. Creatine has all of those. Additionally, with initial [reports](#) about the potential to experience cognitive benefits after taking a higher dose than the “maintenance dose” for traditional active nutrition use, people who already take creatine may be inclined to start taking more of it, adding yet another massive tailwind for creatine.

### Room to grow for creatine: Gummies and beverages

#### Creatine gummies:

**+33%**

Total creatine subcategory \$ growth YoY

**+439%**

YoY \$ Growth



#### Creatine RTD:



#### Room to keep growing:

- New forms
- New demographics
- New health focuses
- And take more

Single dose creatine improves cognitive performance and induces changes in cerebral high energy phosphates during sleep deprivation

Alli Gorodji-Nejad<sup>1</sup>, Andreas Matuach, Sophie Kleedorfer, Harshal Jayeshkumar Patel, Alexander Dirzoga, David Elmenhoist, Ferdinand Rinkofski & Andreas Bauer

Scientific Reports 14, Article number: 4937 (2024) | [Cite this article](#)



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## Protein: The all-powerful and still trending macronutrient – video

Weight loss means losing fat as well as muscle, and protein is the answer for maintaining muscle mass. Explore that and more in this recorded webinar.

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without risk of contamination vs.  
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obtained by micro-organism  
fermentation



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of MyCondro™ in comparison  
with animal Chondroitin  
Sulfate



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clinical studies (at only 600mg/day  
of MyCondro™ vs. placebo)  
on joint health.



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## Market data

### 3. Hydration: Functional and flavorful

Hydration products are no longer just about fueling grueling endurance workouts. This has led to massive growth over the past three years, both in ready-to-mix (RTM) hydration supplements as well as RTD sports drinks. This category has fueled the most dollar growth

in the performance nutrition supplement space in recent years. Growth continues to be impressive for RTM products – but for the first time in years, we see no growth in RTDs, which could be a leading indicator that the entire hydration space is maturing past the recent growth surge. ■



*Editor's note: Scott Dicker and other industry analysts from SPINS will be sharing additional proprietary data this October at [SupplySide Global](#) in Las Vegas. Registration is now open to attend live or gain virtual access to the conference sessions post-event on demand. [Click the link for more information.](#)*



Scott Dicker is senior director of market insights at [SPINS](#). He applies his education and experience in nutrition, dietetics and sports nutrition to the ongoing development of the SPINS Product Library. Dicker's work leads to the identification of new trends and opportunities supporting retailer and manufacturer business plans.



watch

**The hottest supplement trends in 2024 – video**

The supplement sectors best positioned for future success are included in this must-watch.

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## Active nutrition for all life stages, lifestyles

by Vaughn DuBow

Once limited to athletes in their prime, sports nutrition has evolved into “active nutrition,” appealing more broadly to the mainstream. The category is booming with Baby Boomers as they look to address healthy aging concerns – and it’s zen-worthy among Gen Zers, whose increasing awareness of the mind-body connection inspires them to use functional nutrition to proactively support wellness.

Additionally, a 2025 ADM Outside Voice [global survey](#) found that more Gen Z and Millennial consumers looked to improve their consistent everyday vitality and performance over the last year than Gen Xers or Baby Boomers.

### Thinking fast, aging slow

Dealing with stress and supporting energy are key wellness drivers. Mental well-being is among the top five factors global consumers use to measure what they consider to be “good health,” according to FMCG Gurus’ top 10 trends for 2025 [webinar](#). This comes just behind “how fit and active I am.” Consumers increasingly seek products with proven efficacy and proactive, holistic health support to help them stay fit and active as far into life as possible. Nearly 60% of global consumers are interested in products customized to meet their nutritional needs. This is where convenient, personalized solutions like drinkable yogurts, ready-to-drink (RTD) shakes

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Nearly 60% of global consumers are interested in products **customized to meet their nutritional needs.**

and teas, gummies, snack packs and protein bars come into play.

### **A joint effort for better bones and movement**

The bone and joint health category is broadening as consumers across age groups prioritize mobility. Awareness around inactivity; menopause-related bone density loss; and the connection between joint health, body composition and metabolic balance is fueling demand for multifunctional, preventative solutions.

In response, formulators are incorporating botanical extracts and plant-based ingredients – such as [soy isoflavones](#) – to deliver effective support for skeletal strength and joint flexibility in active nutrition.

### **Thirsting for performance and recovery**

Globally, 64% of consumers associated a link between maintaining good levels of hydration and good overall health, FMCG Gurus found. Electrolytes [support](#) fluid balance and muscle maintenance (or healthy/normal muscle function), while hydration itself is now the top functional benefit sought in beverages – valued by 86% of consumers for physical health and 83% for mental well-being, ADM research found. This demand spans lifestyles, from athletes to casual exercisers and gamers, and is accelerating innovation across energy drinks, pre-workout and recovery beverages. With desire for rapid rehydration and evolving needs from segments such as



consumers taking anti-obesity medications like glucagon-like peptide (GLP)-1 receptor agonists (RAs), brands can look to leverage functional ingredients like natural caffeine, postbiotics and B vitamins. These formulations offer a comprehensive approach to support endurance and long-term wellness, reinforcing hydration as a cornerstone of the active nutrition space.

### **Raising the bar on protein**

Protein remains a top priority for consumers, with many targeting a whopping 30-40 g per meal to support muscle recovery, satiety and overall wellness. This has spurred demand for convenient, high-protein products, such as drinkable yogurts and performance bars. Blended or hybrid proteins combining plant and animal sources (in both meat and dairy) are gaining appeal. Notably, 83% of global plant-forward consumers (defined as flexitarians, vegetarians or vegans) believe that soy protein is a good source of plant-based protein to support building/maintaining muscle, according to ADM research. Another 81% consider soy a great option for reducing fat intake, and 79% associate it with a healthy



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- **86%** improvement in walking speed versus exercise alone \*
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## Category focus

or active lifestyle. Top-performing products may offer more than 20 grams of protein and include functional ingredients like fiber, biotics and botanicals, delivering both nutrition and sensory satisfaction in a portable, versatile format.

### Gut-driven gains

Consumer interest in the gut-muscle axis is growing alongside research examining this connection.

With demand for post-exercise solutions that optimize recovery, gut microbiome-supporting solutions are emerging as valuable additions. For example, a probiotic formulation combining *Bifidobacterium longum* CECT7347, *Lactobacillus casei* CECT9104 and *Lactobacillus rhamnosus* CECT8361 [demonstrated](#) certain benefits related to post-exercise oxidative stress. Additionally, *Lactobacillus gasseri* CP2305 postbiotic [may support](#) reduced levels of stress and occasional fatigue associated with exercise, may improve stress levels in male athletes, may improve recovery from exercise in male athletes and may help support positive mitochondrial health. Postbiotics are particularly ideal for incorporating biotics into active nutrition applications like shakes, stick packs, bars and gummies since they can retain efficacy in tough formulation environments.

### Comeback carbs and reformulating flavor

Carbohydrates, once vilified in the health and wellness space, are gradually reclaiming their role as a vital energy source for sports and active nutrition. While not a central focus of current innovation, their renewed relevance as performance fuel signals a broader shift in consumer understanding of balanced nutrition.

Overall, taste is no longer a trade-off for functionality. Active nutrition consumers expect their purchases to deliver on both



## Plant-based **joint health** solutions gain traction

by Simon Pitman

The joint health market is turning over a new leaf, with innovative plant-based formulations replacing some slow-acting standards.

TamaFlex, developed by ingredient supplier NXT USA, is a natural-based solution that leverages a unique dual-action mechanism.

“We evaluated 300 herbs and zeroed in on tamarind and turmeric for their ability to target both the COX [cyclooxygenase]-2 and 5-LOX [lipoxygenase] inflammatory pathways,” Eric Anderson, managing director of NXT USA, said. “TamaFlex [provides relief](#) within five days – that’s a game-changer compared to the six to eight weeks often needed for glucosamine and chondroitin.”

With consumer interest on the rise around cannabinoids and health, Levagen+ offers a clinically validated alternative to CBD for joint discomfort. Developed by ingredient supplier Gencor, this enhanced form of palmitoylethanolamide (PEA) [supports](#) the body’s endocannabinoid system and modulates inflammation and pain.

Animal-derived chondroitin sulfate has traditionally been a go-to for joint support, but ethical, dietary and safety concerns are prompting a shift. Ingredient supplier Gnosis by Lesaffre’s MyCondro offers a fermentation-based alternative that solves many of these issues while [delivering](#) enhanced bioavailability and clinical efficacy.

## Category focus



Postbiotics are particularly ideal for incorporating biotics into active nutrition applications like **shakes, stick packs, bars and gummies.**

nutrition and flavor. Clean-tasting plant-based proteins like soy and pea – along with flavor-modulation tools – can help developers meet this expectation by overcoming bitterness and restoring indulgence in high-protein, high-fiber and low-sugar or low-sodium offerings.

As personalization continues to influence consumer preferences, brands are also exploring formats for different occasions, like powders for breakfast and functional snacks throughout the day. Partnering with a global supplier with a library of high-quality solutions can help manufacturers check the boxes on nutrition and taste, while fast-tracking new innovation opportunities. ■



Vaughn DuBow is the senior director of product portfolio marketing for health and wellness at [ADM](#), where he drives demand and innovation for ADM's wide variety of cutting-edge health and wellness solutions. DuBow came to ADM with over 15 years of experience, with his most recent role as the global manager of sports nutrition ingredients at Lonza. He also has an MBA from Western Governors University.

  
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SupplySide Supplement Journal leads CPG brands from ideation through manufacturing, supporting the development of innovative, healthy and compliant products in the dietary supplement, functional food and beverage, and sports nutrition industries. As an official content provider for SupplySide, SupplySide Supplement Journal connects ingredient buyers and suppliers with executives across the health and nutrition marketplace.

