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Raising the **bar**:

Nutritious,
delicious
*snacking
innovation*





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Protein bars have long dominated convenient nutrition, but texture and flavor challenges are pushing consumers toward exciting alternatives.

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Culinary excellence meets **functional nutrition**

When three-Michelin-starred chef Thomas Keller enters the nutrition bar space, product developers take notice. The culinary mastermind behind The French Laundry has partnered with IQBar to create a Salted Caramel Chip snack bar that delivers both exceptional taste and impressive nutritional credentials – a combination that continues to elude many in the competitive better-for-you CPG category.

This isn't Keller's first foray into premium CPG development. With successful launches spanning gluten-free ancient grain flours, artisanal chocolate and signature seasonings, he brings unparalleled flavor expertise to the functional food arena. The result? A nutrition bar featuring toasted macadamia nuts that achieves the holy grail of product development: indulgent flavor profiles with nutritional density.

For formulators seeking to overcome taste challenges in protein-forward applications, Keller's creation offers a master class in balance – delivering 12 g of plant protein and just 1 g total sugars, while incorporating trending functional ingredients like lion's mane mushroom (*Hericium erinaceus*) and a specialized prebiotic fiber blend. This strategic combination of premium ingredients, culinary-driven flavor development and on-trend nutritionals demonstrates how chef partnerships can elevate nutrition bars beyond mere functionality to true culinary experiences.

Julie Johnson, president of market research company HealthFocus International, noted a significant shift: "We're seeing a move toward umami flavors in nutrition bars as consumers grow tired of overly sweet options."

Clean labels are equally important, Johnson added. Consumers want complex flavor profiles and natural ingredients. Botanicals may offer a solution, providing natural functional benefits while helping keep labels clean. According to a 2024 HealthFocus U.S. trend study, 35% of consumers are interested in botanicals – with even higher interest (46-47%) among those in their 30s and 40s.

This digital magazine is all about building the perfect nutrition bar. Veteran writer Cindy Hazen, for example, details how to develop bars with enough moisture to last throughout shelf life. Melissa Kvidahl Reilly considers alternative protein snack formats. And The Game Changers column spotlights 10 trailblazing brands.

In essence, the bar is set higher than ever.

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The moisture manifesto: Safeguarding snack bar quality and shelf life

by Cindy Hazen

Promises of nutrition and flavor may influence a consumer's snacking purchase, but if a bar is too hard or too soft, it won't meet expectations. In this category, palatability and food safety rely on moisture management. The developer is not only challenged to create a bar with the right texture, but the product also must maintain those attributes during its shelf life.

It starts with absorption

To understand the key differences in moisture management between various plant-based bars, Sam Smith, bar team lead at ingredient supplier Glanbia Nutritionals, said the scientist must understand the speeds at which ingredients absorb moisture. "The insoluble nature of plant-based proteins causes them to hydrate very slowly, while carbohydrates found at high levels in snack bars and energy bars absorb moisture very quickly."

It's tricky because all proteins don't behave the same way. According to IFF's principal scientist of bars and confectionery, Tracy Mosteller, Ph.D., plant-based proteins differ significantly in their molecular structure. She explained that the varying amino acid sequences create different hydrophilic areas that attract and retain moisture. "The water-



holding capacity will vary depending on the type of protein – soy versus pea, for example," Mosteller noted.

She further pointed out that even within specific protein categories, structural variations affect water interaction. Mosteller highlighted that proteins broken down through hydrolysis typically bind less water than their intact counterparts. This occurs because the hydrolysis process breaks proteins into smaller peptide units with fewer water-attracting regions, ultimately reducing their moisture absorption capabilities.

Among plant protein sources, she recommended soy protein products for their flavor, taste, functionality and protein quality. While pea proteins can be used successfully,

If protein brings along an unwanted flavor, **masking flavors can minimize** or eliminate some of the earthy, grassy or bitter notes.

she's found the formulation may be challenging with more flavor and dryness issues. If the protein brings along an unwanted flavor, masking flavors can minimize or eliminate some of the earthy, grassy or bitter notes.

Rob Skorge is project leader of customer innovation for the U.S. and Canada division of the Texture & Healthful Solutions segment at Ingredion Inc. He noted that independent of the protein source, "The ingredients' physical properties play a crucial role in determining the texture of protein bars. Protein solubility, particle size and interactions with other ingredients – including fibers and binding syrups – significantly influence the extent of water migration. For example, not all pea protein isolates perform the same."

As water is absorbed by proteins, dryness develops. Water is incorporated in nutrition bars via the binding syrups. Mosteller explained, "After manufacture, the water will migrate to the protein powders and become absorbed which results in a firm, dry mouthfeel." The formulation, processing conditions, packaging materials and storage conditions will also have an impact.

Measuring success

The water activity meter is an important analytical method for evaluating moisture in bars. Smith said water activity is a measure of free water in a product that is available for yeast, mold and bacteria to utilize for growth. "Microbial growth typically does not occur below a water activity level of .65. Unbaked bars do not go through a kill step and they rarely include chemical preservatives, so keeping water activity below this level is the primary safety mechanism for bars," he stated. Consumer testing and descriptive analysis sensory testing are other methods to determine acceptance levels and key differences between bars.

Skorge said Ingredion used a texture analyzer when evaluating its new pea protein in cold-pressed bars. "We tested full formulations in accelerated shelf-life studies against competitor ingredients, evaluating both physical and sensory attributes," he shared. "We measured hardness and toughness attributes. Hardness is described as the perception of how hard or firm a product is when you bite into it, and resistance to deformation. Toughness is described as the mouthfeel sensation of





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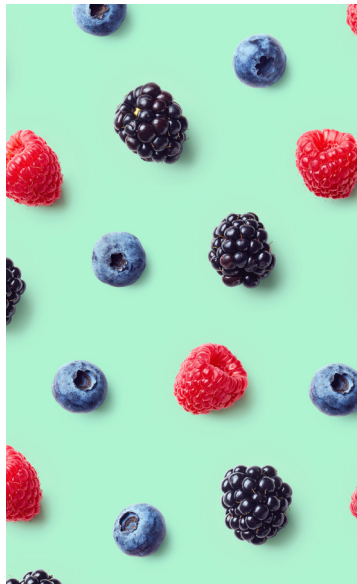
Few consumer trends are as far-reaching as the drive to reduce sugar consumption – considering that 76% of those surveyed say they're limiting or avoiding sugars.*

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Manufacturers should thoroughly examine **sweetener specifications** to ensure the final product maintains appropriate water activity levels for **optimal shelf stability and longevity**.

labored chewing due to sustained, elastic resistance from the food.” Ingredient maintained its pea protein consistently exhibited low and stable softness over time, outperforming whey, soy and other pea proteins.

The manufacturing method will affect the moisture level and potential microbial growth. Smith said almost all bars are made using one of three processing methods. “A bar dough can be formulated with a higher moisture level if it will be baked and some of that moisture will be driven off. Care should be taken not to over- or underbake so that bars stay safe to eat but do not dry out,” he cautioned. “Extruded and cold-formed bars see very little to no heat, so the water activity level of the dough will be the water activity level of your final product. Product developers must formulate with this understanding.”

Mosteller noted that increasing the water activity may produce a softer bar at the beginning of shelf life, but the texture advantages may diminish over time as the proteins continue to hydrate. She said several manufacturers have formulated refrigerated bars to minimize those concerns.

Other important ingredients

Binding syrups typically hold bar ingredients together. When using a sugar syrup, Mosteller recommended choosing one with a higher dextrose equivalent (D.E.), as it generally allows for a bar with softer texture over time. “Some polydextrose syrups can be used to reduce sugars and calories while improving texture,” she advised. When nutritional limitations restrict the amount of syrup that can be used, she suggested incorporating pectin – especially

Formulator focus



when preparing a cooked syrup. Lower sugar products require a shift from more traditional syrups like corn, tapioca or rice toward alternative syrups such as maltitol or allulose.

Skorge suggested Ingridion's liquid allulose helps control moisture. He recommended the company's maltitol, which he claimed would not only aid moisture management, but also provide stability, add sweetness, improve texture and provide cohesion.

According to Ocean Spray Ingredients' senior research chef Charles Morrill, the selection of sweeteners in bars can contribute additional properties beyond just sweetness, including structural integrity and production flexibility. "These characteristics would usually come from a syrup or paste-type sweetener, which have a higher moisture level than powder/dry-based sweeteners," Morrill noted.

He emphasized that ingredients serving multiple functions must balance their moisture contribution carefully. Morrill advised that manufacturers should thoroughly examine sweetener specifications to ensure the final product maintains appropriate water activity levels for optimal shelf stability and longevity.

Ingredients that can add perceived moisture to a bar without contributing to that moisture in the form of actual water will help reduce the moisture level of the bar. Smith suggested, "Ingredients like nut butters, vegetable glycerine and oils work well in this regard. Ingredients like fruit purees/pastes and concentrates can be used to impart sweetness and help with softness in bars," although he cautioned the moisture levels of these ingredients should be taken into consideration when formulating a bar.

Despite its desirability as an ingredient, fruit may have a high moisture content that could negatively impact a product. Ocean Spray Ingredients offers an option in its Glycerated Sweetened Dried Cranberries, which are available in a variety of sizes. Morrill said they can combat moisture migration from the fruit in lower moisture bars. They are also suitable to be ground down into a paste or puree, best suited for a filled fruit bar.

The growth of the plant-based bar category created some challenges for formulation scientists. As new ingredients are being developed to encourage moisture retention and softness in bars, though, Smith remarked it will be fascinating to continue watching this category change over time. ■



[Cindy Hazen](#) is a food industry professional with decades of experience in food formulation and food safety. She is PCQI, HACCP and ISO 22000 trained.



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The Game Changers

Here's a spotlight on 10 top brands leading the industry with successful concepts, mindful execution.



Jambar

Afar



Wise Bar



Earnest Eats



Verb



Unite



Menowell

Mush



David



Speka

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10 leaders race to build **the perfect bar** by Nick Collias



These brands are up to the challenge of fitting fiber, protein, energy and functional ingredients in the palm of the hand.

Still think bars are just for snacks and workout fuel? Times have changed. Today's bars are a full-fledged food group – not to mention the vessel of choice for the nutrition that matters most to today's consumers.

Jacquelyn Rodenkirch-Schuh, global senior director of specialty ingredients for ADM, explained, "Protein and fiber are high-priority macronutrients for shoppers. There's a growing market for both – individually *and* combined – within the nutritional bars aisle."

What makes a bar stand out in that aisle? In a word: more. More fiber, more protein, more flavor options, more transparency and more science backing up functional ingredients and dosages.

Yes, it's tough making the perfect bar. Nevertheless, these 10 brands are showing that it's possible to hit the sweet spot.





Earnest Eats – Breakfast rounds

Founder: Andrew Aussie

The story: Aussie has been an entrepreneur, brand-builder and marketing strategy consultant for nearly 20 years. His brand provides coffee shops and a loyal direct-to-consumer audience with more substantial morning options than pastries, including superfood and adaptogen-enriched oatmeals. His most recent innovation is a hearty (10 g protein, 4 g fiber) oatmeal-and-almond-butter creation known as a “breakfast round.”

Why it’s a game changer: Each round comes in a clear wrapper with an ingredient list easily browsable while standing in line. Unlike bars, rounds haven’t gone through a second shaping and cutting process, giving them a less processed appearance, shape and texture. A round is also toast-able – and Aussie works with coffee shops to ensure they offer that option.



Afar Foods – Savory protein bars

Founder: Gene Zhu

The story: Afar Foods launched as a Covid-era side project for Zhu, a business school student and avid bar eater who admittedly had a love-hate relationship with his snack of choice. “I loved how convenient and relatively healthy they were, but I didn’t like how boring they were to eat,” he recalled. “Everything was chocolate and peanut butter, mushy, and in most cases, overloaded with 20 grams of sugar.”

Why it’s a game changer: Each Afar bar starts from a crunchy base of almond, soy crisps and rice crisps. From there, the flavors travel the world: Japanese Miso, Italian Bruschetta, American Everything Bagel, Indian Masala and Mexican Chili Lime.



Jambar – Organic artisan energy bars

Founder: Jenny Maxwell

The story: Nutritionist and food scientist Maxwell and her late husband Brian helped introduce the world to bars in 1986 when they founded Powerbar, partially to help fuel Brian's elite marathon running. The pair sold the brand to Nestlé in 2000, but Jenny returned to food with the music-themed, small-batch energy bar brand Jambar in 2021.

Why it's a game changer: Jambar hits the "just enough" protein mark with 10 g from whey isolates and sunflower seeds, alongside sweetening from fruit, maple syrup and honey. The snacks are family-made and artisanal. "We make our own products. We're not co-packed. We're not a marketing exercise," Maxwell said.

Spēka – Cottage cheese bars

Founders: Anita Batarags and Juris Blodnieks

The story: A pair of importers/exporters launched Speka (pronounced "speeka") as an American take on cottage cheese bars from Latvia, where Batarags' family originated. The only problem: Cottage cheese was viewed in the U.S. as bland, goopy "grandparent" food ... until TikTok made it the next big thing in protein. "You'd think it was a brand-new invention," Batarags said.

Why it's a game changer: To ride the viral wave, Speka boosted the protein and cut down the sugar from the European version of the bars. In addition to traditional Latvian vanilla, the brand nailed down contemporary flavors like Greek yogurt, salted caramel and lemon cream. The bars also lend themselves to different presentations: frozen in boxes alongside ice cream bars in grocery stores, or as refrigerated singles in bodegas.





Wise Bar – Organic adaptogen bars

Founders: Chris Dominick, Chris Hassig, Ryan Nuccio and Josh Dominick

The story: Wise Bar was founded by a group of childhood friends who couldn't find a bar up to the challenge for their biking, skiing and river adventures. "They'd either leave us bonking, or they were basically like a candy bar," Nuccio recalled. "At that point, I'd almost rather eat a Snickers." What he said they really wanted – and created – was a portable "trail mix in your pocket" with a few strategic upgrades.

Why it's a game changer: Wise Bar's recipes pair carb staples like dates and oatmeal with culinary adaptogens and super-spices like ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) and turmeric (*Curcuma longa*). The brand also incorporates clinical doses of adaptogenic mushrooms and ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*), derived from extracts to minimize the taste impact and maximize bioavailability.

Check out the rest of the list of game-changing brands, on page 22.



watch

What does each generation want or need in its bars? – webinar

A panel takes up the question of how generational preferences, ingredient trends and economic factors influence food bar development.

The taste of performance: Flavorful formulations prove how far protein bars have come

by Kimberly J. Decker

Contemporary protein bars are frequently criticized for being little more than glorified confections, donning a dubious health halo, thanks to a protein callout or a handful of other trendy functional ingredients, which may not even constitute efficacious doses.

Auke Zeilstra, managing director for North America at supplier FrieslandCampina Ingredients, actually welcomes the candy comparisons.

“The lines between sports nutrition and confectionery are blurring,” he proposed, “as the rise of better-for-you snacking creates a seismic shift in consumer preferences.”

The upshot: It’s no longer just “gym bros” or ultra-athletes filling their carts. “Now everyday consumers want protein bars for a healthy way to fill the gap between meals,” Zeilstra said.

Raising the bar

Those everyday consumers – and the hardcore athletes – also want sensory appeal. According to Melanie Luangrath, senior director of new business development for the plant-based platform at ingredient supplier dsm-firmenich, “This is requiring brands to address great taste and texture while also delivering on a wider range of preferences and nutritional

needs.” The result is more protein, high fiber and functional ingredients aimed at targets such as digestive health, stress management and improved immunity.

“While this offers greater opportunity for innovation,” Luangrath continued, “it also creates more complexity from a formulation standpoint.”

Sticking points

Ingredients like branched-chain amino acids (BCAAs), electrolytes and botanicals may confer functional benefits, but Tim Gallagher, category development manager of dairy and nutrition for North America at ingredient supplier Tate & Lyle, noted they also confer bitterness, astringency and, in the case of some vitamins, “flavors that consumers might consider ‘chemical’ or ‘artificial.’”



Flavor



Formulators have gotten these bars to compare favorably with candy – and they’ve done so principally via savvy flavor manipulation.

Alas, protein – one of bars’ most popular marquee macros – can taste worst of all, Luangrath added. “Some plant-based proteins, for example, are known to carry bitter, earthy or beany notes, and may create a chalky or gritty mouthfeel,” she pointed out.

Flavor savers

Despite the organoleptic challenges, somehow formulators have gotten these bars to compare favorably with candy – and they’ve done so principally via savvy flavor manipulation.

For example, David Banks, head of marketing in the Americas for ingredient supplier Roquette, said, “Earthy or vegetal notes from plant proteins can often be balanced by warm, rich flavors like chocolate, coffee or caramel, which have deeper profiles that naturally mask bitterness or chalkiness. Sweet spices, such as

cinnamon or cardamom, also provide a sensory distraction while enhancing indulgence.”

Gallagher noted that flavors with modifying properties (sometimes referred to as FMPs) may mask unwanted notes even as they amplify desirable ones. He offered Tate & Lyle’s NATROSE FLAVOR 2.0 as an illustration, maintaining it can tone down a protein’s astringency while intensifying vanilla and total flavor in high protein bars.

Similarly, Sonia Huppert, global innovation marketing leader of the Re-Imagine Wellness program at ingredient supplier IFF, touted her company’s FLAVORFIT taste-modulation technologies for their ability to “inhibit, block or neutralize unwanted taste components, such as bitter and sour notes, enabling healthier wellness bars with natural flavors.”

The sweet spot

Beyond flavors, sweetener selection also pays dividends for a protein bar’s profile; and the more diverse the sweetener selection, Gallagher contended, the better.

Case in point, stevia ingredients comprising a mix of steviol glycosides – particularly Rebaudiosides (Rebs) M and D – take a bigger bite out of bitterness than do those that rely on Reb A alone, he claimed. “Additionally,” he continued, “combining sweetener sources,



Flavor

like monk fruit or allulose and stevia, can help achieve less bitterness perception in protein bars than stevia can by itself.”

Banks advised leveraging “complementary ingredients” like soluble fibers to balance sweetness and smooth out profiles. “These synergistic combinations both enhance taste and texture and support nutritional positioning with added fiber to offer a more rounded and appealing experience,” he said.

Ahead of the game

As effective as sweeteners and flavors may be, experts insist that starting with better-tasting functional ingredients beats making post-formulation corrections any day.

For instance, Banks said, “Not all proteins are created equal in taste or functionality. Choosing protein ingredients with clean, mild sensory profiles that naturally limit off-notes while delivering functional benefits is a key first step.”



Susan Butler, senior technical service manager of beverage and confection for North America at Tate & Lyle, suggested, “A great way to neutralize the flavor of hydrolyzed protein is to use less of it. Selecting the right fiber or hydrocolloid for your binder syrup lets formulators increase use of whole-protein ingredients and reduce hydrolyzed protein,” the latter of which can be known for a suboptimal taste profile. She said this better balance can help achieve the desired mouthfeel, adding, “Ingredients such as fructooligosaccharides [FOS] and allulose are excellent for providing this soft texture throughout shelf life.”

Protein bars have come a long way, but as Zeilstra emphasized, “Creating these offerings relies on one key factor: the right ingredients. Choosing the right components is essential if manufacturers want to achieve ideal protein bar taste and texture.” ■



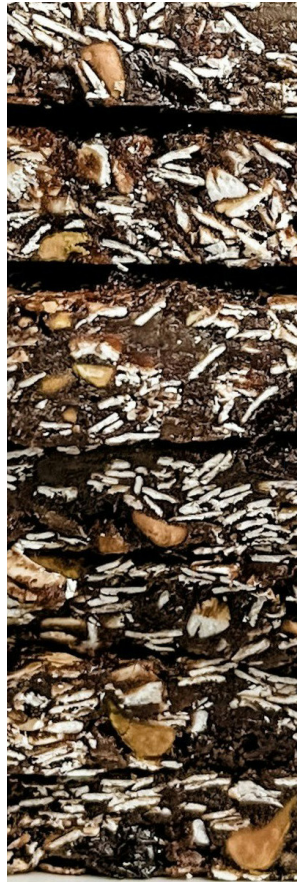
Kimberly J. Decker is a Bay Area food writer who has worked in product development for the frozen sector and written about food, nutrition and the culinary arts. Reach her at kim@decker.net.



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Healthy and indulgent: Women’s snacks

Check out this separate digital magazine, which takes a deep look at female-focused snack offerings and new opportunities to address women’s specific needs.



Texture and flavor drive new protein snack formats

by Melissa Kvidahl Reilly

Protein bars have long been the go-to for convenient nutrition, appealing to a broad consumer base that's increasingly interested in fortified snacking.

Proprietary research from ingredient supplier Ingredion Inc. indicated that about 70% of U.S. consumers actively seek protein in the products they buy; however, these bars often come with texture and flavor challenges, which may help drive interest in alternative formats.

"There are other opportunities to deliver the protein and positive nutrition consumers want while maintaining convenience," Rob Skorge, project leader of customer innovation for the U.S. and Canada division of the Texture and Healthful Solutions segment at Ingredion,

explained. He offered examples such as "bagged extruded puffs, ball-shaped particulate or nougat protein snacks; and even bite-sized protein cubes with a layered fusion of a fiber-added cereal bar, a protein core, and a fruit and vegetable filling all enrobed in a no-added-sugar dark chocolate."

Solving the texture challenge

One of the biggest challenges bar manufacturers and brands face is consumer fatigue with texture. Protein bars can be dense, chewy or hard, which can be off-putting or tiresome for many consumers.

Ingredion's proprietary research on the topic showed that consumers enjoy foods

Novel approaches



People like to have a **crunch** in their snack foods.

with multiple textures, and that this variety enhances appeal and influences their decision-making at retail. “With 60% liking multisensorial experiences, snack manufacturers have an opportunity to (re)captivate their audience, and meet an under-realized want,” Skorge added.

Nutrition solutions provider Glanbia Nutritionals is helping brands create crunchy, high-protein bar alternatives – such as cereal and savory snacks – through advanced extrusion techniques. Niki Kennedy, the company’s director of insights and content, noted, “Barriers in bars like grittiness and earthy flavors are not challenges that cereals or snacks need to overcome – gritty textures don’t pose negative associations in a crunchy format.”

In fact, CPG company Scott’s Protein Balls is embracing texture by using whole chia seeds instead of ground chia. CEO and co-founder Lori Levine maintained, “People like to have a crunch in their snack foods.”

Flavor freedom

Flavor is another key challenge for protein bar brands, which often struggle to move beyond staples like chocolate and peanut butter due to formulation constraints.

That’s not the case at Catalina Crunch, which leans into bold and nostalgic flavors across its protein-forward cereals, cookies and new Protein Snack Mix, which features 10 grams of protein per serving, primarily from pea, soy



read

TikTok, nostalgia, sustainability shape consumer preferences for F&B products

Younger consumers prioritize sustainability and transparency in ingredient sourcing. That was a major takeaway from a recent SupplySide session in Las Vegas.

Novel approaches



and nuts. The cereals come in comfort-food varieties like Cinnamon Twist and Blueberry Muffin, and the Protein Snack Mix is available in savory flavors like Cheddar and Spicy Kick. CEO Doug Behrens suggested, “Our products feel more like everyday snacks than workout supplements, making it easier for consumers to prioritize protein without sacrificing taste, texture or convenience.”

By offering a wider range of flavors and experiences, these protein snack formats appeal not only to bar shoppers, but they also expand the category to a broader consumer base. “Overall, we believe the markets for cereals and snack mixes are larger than traditional bars alone,” Behrens stated, noting that athletes and fitness enthusiasts get the protein and fiber they need; kids enjoy the fun and variety of flavors and formats; and parents

appreciate a nutrient-dense, great-tasting snack to help fuel their busy days.

Plus, bars – though often positioned as meal replacements – don’t always feel like a true meal to consumers. In contrast, protein-fortified cereals fit naturally into breakfast routines, while crackers and chips feel more like part of a lunch. “These options fit seamlessly into our consumers’ daily routines, whether it’s breakfast at home, a midday snack at work or a better-for-you treat on the go,” Behrens explained.

That said, dessert-inspired flavors remain popular across bars and alternative high-protein formats alike. At Scott’s Protein Balls, indulgent options like Red Velvet and seasonal picks like Peppermint Bark have resonated with consumers seeking healthier ways to satisfy a sweet tooth or manage their weight. That flexibility is part of why Levine sees the ball format as a step above traditional bars. “You can choose the amount and portion size that you want,” she pointed out. “If you buy one of our four-packs, you can eat two and save the other two in our resealable bag for later. With a bar, once it’s opened, you pretty much need to eat the whole thing.”

As more consumers seek convenient ways to get protein without the drawbacks of traditional bars, alternative formats bring variety and wide appeal – signs of a category on the rise. ■



[Melissa Kvidahl Reilly](#) is a freelance writer and editor with 10 years of experience covering news and trends in the natural, organic and supplement markets. She lives and works in New Jersey.



Verb – Caffeinated protein bars

Founders: Andre Monteiro, Bennett Byerley, Isaac Morrier and Matt Czarnecki

The story: Czarnecki came up with the idea for a caffeinated bar while walking out of a coffee shop – spending \$8 and 20 minutes to get an afternoon coffee and a granola bar. Verb’s caffeinated, 10 g protein bars quickly built a loyal following while keeping caffeine at just 75-80 g, or approximately a shot of espresso (albeit from green tea caffeine).

Why it’s a game changer: Caffeinated drinks often promise “smooth” or “jitter-free” energy, but caffeinated foods are actually better equipped to deliver on that promise. “When you eat your caffeine, it is inherently metabolized slower in your gut because of the presence of food,” head of product development Matt Houghton said. “This leads to a smoother energy boost without the unintended side effects.”



UniTE – Protein bars

Founder: Clara Paye

The story: Paye found herself bored with current bar flavors and thought she could do better. She knew just where to look for inspiration. “I went to Hispanic supermarkets and Asian supermarkets. I was also my own target market because I am an immigrant,” she recalled. “And I looked at U.S. Census data. Half the U.S. population is like me.”

Why it’s a game changer: UNITE’s bars depart from the chocolate and peanut butter playbook but still hit familiar nostalgic flavor notes. An almond butter base gives the churro, bubble tea, Mexican hot chocolate and baklava bars heft and depth while still hitting 10 g of protein and 4-5 g of fiber per bar.



David – Protein bars

Founder: Peter Rahal and Zach Ranen

The story: Rahal is co-founder of the weight-room staple RXBAR. But unlike the RX, which is famous for its “no bs” ingredients approach, David starts with what Ranen calls “optimal macros” and delivers 28 g of the one macronutrient that consumers are seeking most. (Protein, of course.)

Why it’s a game changer: David stands out from other high protein bars by utilizing a whole new nutritional acronym: “calories from protein,” or CFP. “Modern consumers seek nutritional efficiency – they want a product with as much protein and as few calories as possible,” Ranen explained. “David packs 28 g of protein into 150 calories and puts this efficiency front and center.”



MenoWell – Female formulated energy bars

Founder: Julie Gordon-White

The story: MenoWell bars began as a Covid-era project, launched by an experienced CEO and executive coach who found herself struggling with sugar cravings and other telltale indicators of perimenopause. This led her to iterate a bar designed to meet women’s nutritional needs during this decade and beyond, using fiber, plant-based protein and maca root (*Lepidium meyenii*, an adaptogen with a long history of [helping with](#) menopause symptoms). The bars got a big boost with an endorsement from Oprah Winfrey in 2024.

Why it’s a game changer: Gordon-White mused, “There’s a huge piece of this brand that’s just about feeling good saying, ‘It’s OK to talk about this.’ The empowerment aspect is as important as the functional aspect.”



Mush – Oatmeal protein bars

Founder: Ashley Thompson and Cat Thomas

The story: Mush was founded by a pair of former Wall Street traders who were looking for new ways to feature one of the original (and often underappreciated) superfoods, oatmeal. Along with single-serving overnight oats and oatmeal smoothies for kids, the brand launched three flavors of gluten-free, organic oatmeal protein bars at 15 g per bar in fall 2024.

Why it's a game changer: Mush's bars skip the increasingly popular protein isolates and opt for old-school milk protein concentrate. This simple swap brings a little more fat, a lot more flavor and longer-lasting fullness than most bars can offer. It's like full bowl of "proats" (protein oats) that fits in a pocket. ■



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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