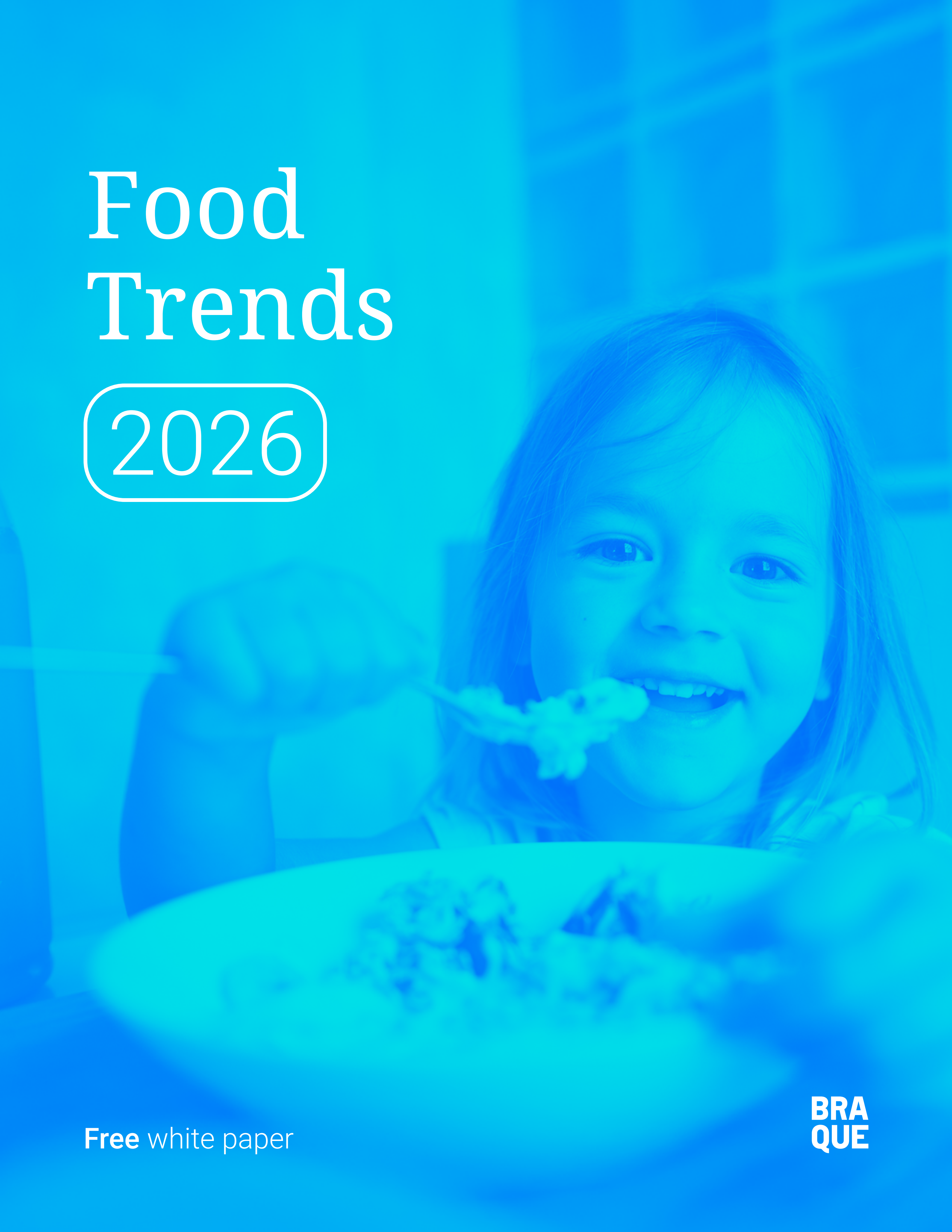
Food Trends

2026



Free white paper

BRAQUE

Table of Contents

“Kitchen Couture” Packaging

1

The “Kitchen Couture” trend is transforming food packaging into decorative objects. Gone are the days when containers were used solely for protection or information. Today, they have become real design elements in our kitchens and pantries. Canadian food companies now have the opportunity to innovate by creating packaging so stylish that consumers proudly display it on their counters.

This evolution is part of a quest for everyday aesthetics. “It is often said that packaging is consumed before the product itself, and this is even more true today,” says Phil Jones, Creative Director at Braque. “When a product is beautiful, we naturally want to show it off, share it, and integrate it into our daily lives.” Packaging is no longer simply functional; it has become a vehicle for emotion and personality. In a world where every detail counts in creating an environment that reflects who we are, food products now contribute to the visual ambiance of the home.

> “It is often said that packaging is consumed before the product itself, and this is even more true today.”

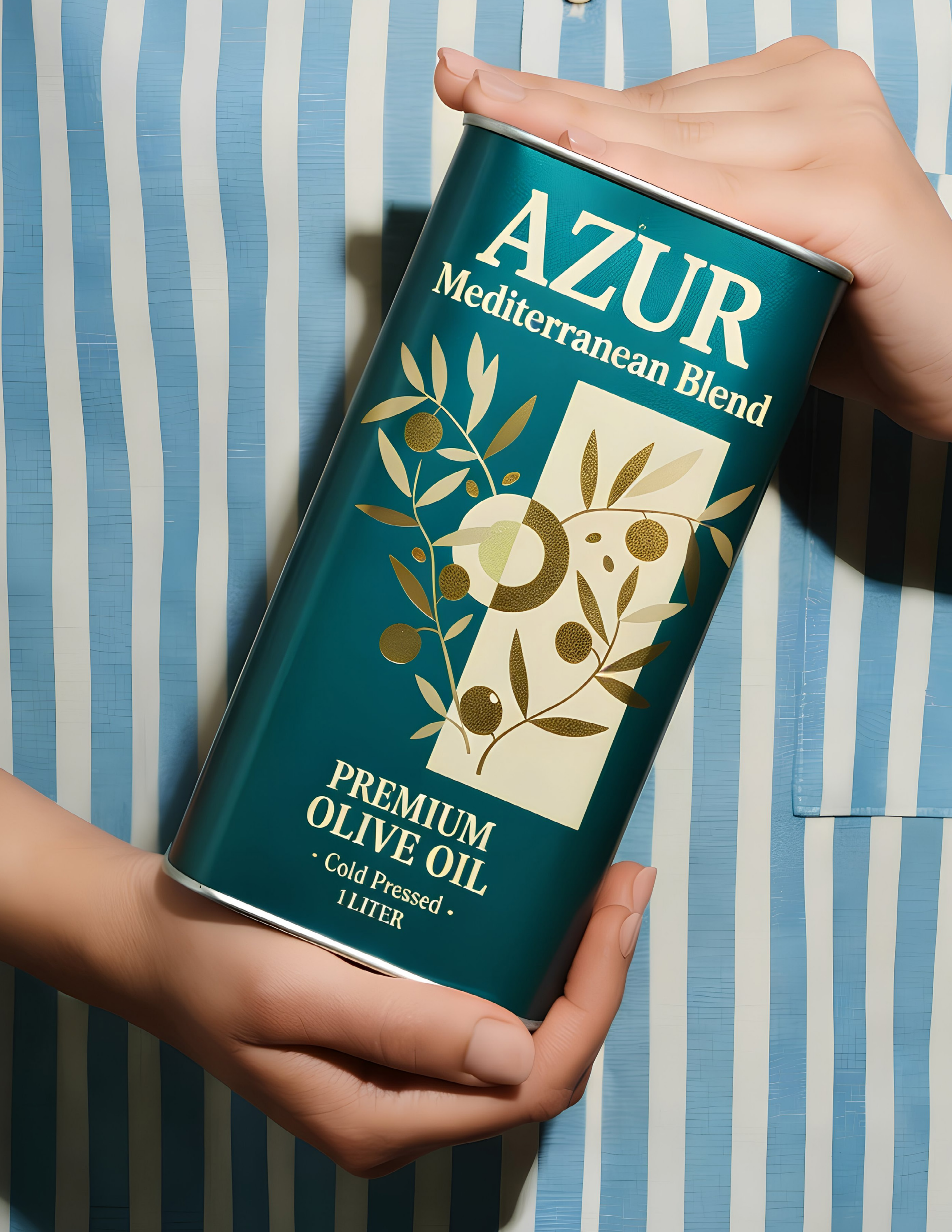
Forces driving this trend

Brands are relying on packaging design to express their personality, differentiate themselves in a saturated market, and create a real buzz among their customers. This strategy makes perfect sense in the age of social media, where an attractive photo of packaging can quickly go viral on Instagram or TikTok, giving each product valuable organic visibility. Spontaneous sharing then becomes a powerful lever for brand awareness.

At the same time, affordable luxury is attracting more and more consumers. People want beautiful things in their homes, without necessarily spending a lot of money. Packaging then becomes an accessible way to add a touch of elegance and refinement to everyday life, transforming the act of purchasing into a small visual pleasure.

Visual codes that define haute couture packaging

Bright colours dominate the current landscape. Vibrant, contrasting shades create what is known as a “love at first sight” effect, or dopamine design. The goal is clear: to evoke feelings of pleasure, joy, and energy at first glance. These bold colour choices are difficult to miss on store shelves.


AZUR
Mediterranean Blend
PREMIUM
OLIVE OIL
· Cold Pressed ·
1 LITER

Packaging becomes a work of art, designed to be photographed, admired, and shared.

Typography is becoming more imposing and expressive. The text displayed on packaging is bold, and the graphic illustrations are original and artistic. Each visual element tells a story and asserts a strong identity. There is a deliberate shift away from minimalist simplicity toward maximalism, with visual abundance, a proliferation of details, and rich patterns. Packaging becomes a work of art, designed to be photographed, admired, and shared.

Impact on marketing and purchasing decisions

Worldmetrics figures speak for themselves: nearly half of consumers share photos of their favourite packaging on social media.[1] For companies, this represents free advertising, generated by genuine customer enthusiasm. Packaging is becoming a particularly powerful viral marketing tool.

Furthermore, according to an Ipsos study, packaging directly influences the purchasing decisions of nearly three-quarters of shoppers, particularly young consumers and families looking for something new.[2] A successful design can make all the difference whether a product stays on or flies off the shelves. Brands that deliver packaging that feels both inspiring and expressive earn a place in consumers' everyday lives, as people take real pleasure in displaying beautiful items on kitchen counters that were once cluttered and hard to keep clear.

Opportunities for Canadian food processors

Adopting this trend allows companies to project a high-end brand image without veering into unaffordable luxury, an approach that resonates particularly well with Quebec and Canadian buyers who are concerned about both quality and their budget. The sweet spot lies in striking a balance between aspiration and accessibility. Companies can explore several concrete courses of action:

- **Think of packaging as decoration:** Design each format and colour so that they deserve a place on the counter. Create objects that people will want to keep on display rather than immediately stowing away in the pantry.
- **Focus on virality and sharing:** Offer eye-catching designs, special seasonal editions or interactive QR codes that extend the experience beyond the physical product.
- **Tell a story:** Make each package meaningful, whether through its visuals, typography, or staging. Consumers are looking for authenticity and want to understand what makes a brand unique.

Innovative international brands such as Fishwife and Graza have led the way, but every Canadian processor can find its own identity and distinctive visual language in this movement.

The Swicy Explosion: The Marriage of Sweet and Spicy

2

The “swicy” trend, a clever contraction of “sweet” and “spicy” first reported by the New York Times[3] a few years ago, is now shaking up the global food scene with bold creations that skilfully combine sweetness and spice. Far from being a mere fad, this marriage of flavours offers a sought-after sensory experience that particularly appeals to young consumers and those who like to think outside the box, with 64% of consumers surveyed by Datassential reporting that they like or love sweet and spicy combinations.[4]

This fusion of flavours is not limited to a simple juxtaposition of contradictory tastes. It creates a sophisticated balance where sweetness coats the spice, where sugar softens the heat, where each bite becomes an exploration. It is this complexity that fascinates and explains the growing popularity of these products with their assertive taste identity.

Where this craze began

Global influences are reshaping consumer food preferences. The growing convergence of Asian, South American, and North American culinary traditions is expanding demand for new flavour experiences. These cross-cultural combinations introduce unexpected yet accessible pairings that broaden consumer palates and create opportunities for product innovation.

Consumers are actively seeking products that stimulate their taste buds, but without going overboard. They want intensity, certainly, but in a controlled manner. The balance between creaminess and heat is becoming the holy grail, with enough heat to awaken the senses, but enough sweetness to make the experience enjoyable and repeatable. It is precisely this balance that swicy products manage to achieve.

> Consumers are actively seeking products that stimulate their taste buds, but without going overboard.

Social media amplifies this phenomenon, where swicy recipes and product reviews regularly go viral. Food influencers test the latest products, share their discoveries and create a ripple effect. Influencer marketing has played a key role in propelling many sauces, drinks and snacks into the spotlight, transforming niche products into mainstream trends.

Formats that captivate the market

Sauces are leading the trend. Products such as honey sriracha, which tempers the heat of the Thai original; spicy maple syrup, which reimagines a Québec staple; and spicy lemon mayonnaise, which elevates a classic condiment with added intensity, illustrate how familiar formats can be reinvented through flavour. Their versatility and ease of use make them particularly well suited to everyday cooking — lowering the barrier to trial while driving repeat purchase.

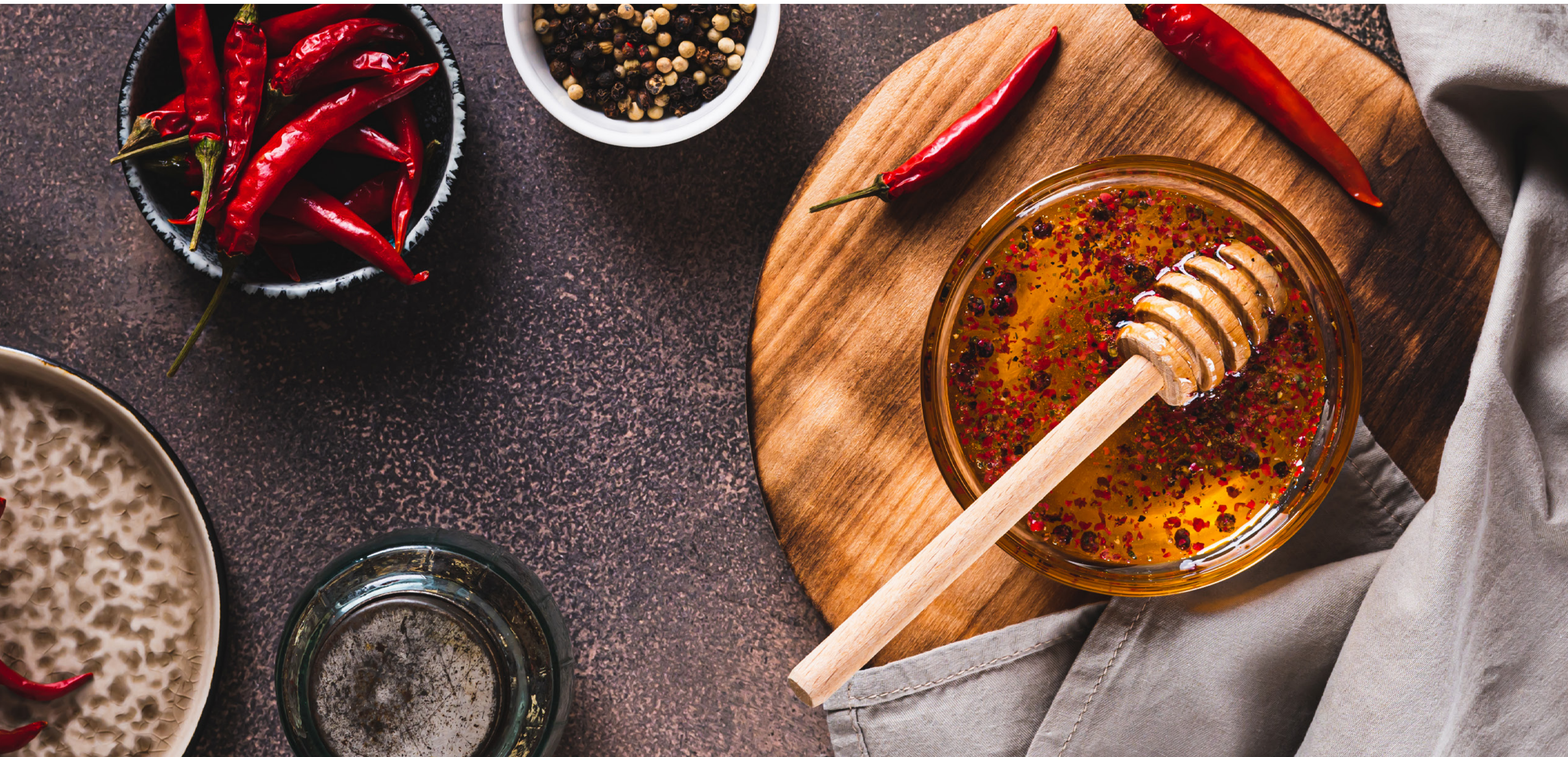
Sweets, nuts and snacks that combine sugar and chilli offer a striking contrast, perfect for snacking. The alternation between sweet and spicy creates an addictive dynamic that invites you to keep tasting. These snacks find their place in convenience stores as well as delicatessens.

Beverages and desserts are also creatively exploring this flavour territory, with creations that combine peppery, fruity and sweet flavours, sometimes enhanced with a hint of ginger or chilli. These daring flavour pairings challenge conventional dessert norms and deliver distinctive, memorable finishes to the meal.

Inspiring examples around the world

Several brands have established themselves as leaders in the swicy segment through differentiated flavour positioning. Fly By Jing, with its famous Sichuan Chili sauce that combines chilli and sugar in an irresistible texture, has won over lovers of intense flavours from China to the United States. Mike's Hot Honey has succeeded in creating a new classic with its chilli-infused honey, which has become a staple in many kitchens.

Closer to home, maple sriracha sauce perfectly illustrates how to adapt the trend to the Canadian context by combining maple syrup and chilli. In the United States, Blue Diamond launched its Sweet Thai Chili almonds, which combine sweet, salty and spicy flavours with exotic spices, demonstrating how an established brand can reinvent its classics. And it's impossible to ignore South Korea's famous Samyang Buldak noodles, whose slightly sweet spiciness has created fans all over the world.



Opportunities for Canadian food processors

Canadian processors can seize this opportunity by focusing on several strategic areas:

- **Drawing inspiration from classics and adapting them locally:** Maple syrup lends itself wonderfully to spicy variations, as do cranberries combined with chilli peppers in original condiments. Maple or spicy cranberry snacks represent a largely underdeveloped opportunity within the current flavour landscape.
- **Promote local ingredients:** Quebec-grown chillies, Canadian honey and boreal fruits can be used to create authentic local products with a story to tell. Anchoring innovation in regional ingredients reinforces brand credibility while responding to growing consumer demand for products that are distinctly tied to their place of origin.
- **Imagine formats adapted to our culture:** Create swicy bites or sauces designed for local cuisine or aperitifs, those convivial moments that deeply embedded in our consumer habits. Think of formats designed for sharing and gatherings.
- **Focus on transparency:** Provide simple, clear ingredient lists, explanations about spice origins, and the desired balance between sweetness and heat. People want to understand what they are eating and want to know more about the heat level of the ingredients.
- **Explore limited editions and collaborations:** Partner with local microbreweries, fruit or spice producers to create exclusive products. These partnerships generate enthusiasm and create natural media opportunities, while allowing collaborating brands to reach new audiences with affinities for potential loyalty.

From Field to Plate in One Scan

3

The days when a simple logo on packaging was enough to reassure consumers are coming to an end. In 2026, transparency will become radical: people want to know where their food really comes from, who produced it, how it was processed and what journey it took before ending up in their shopping cart. This thirst for knowledge is transforming packaging into a digital information portal, thanks in particular to dynamic QR codes that provide access to a wealth of details with a simple scan.

This evolution is no longer a mere desire, but a firm expectation. Regulations are multiplying: in the United States, as of January 2026, the FDA is imposing mandatory traceability requirements for certain high-risk foods. In Europe, packaging regulations strongly encourage digital traceability. In Canada, new nutrition labelling rules coming into effect in 2026 are part of this same drive for greater transparency. Canadian consumers are no longer satisfied with half-truth: 70% consider accurate labelling to be essential to maintaining their trust in the industry, according to Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.[5]

Forces driving this thirst for transparency

Trust can no longer be assumed, it must be earned. A NielsenIQ study reveals that 94% of consumers say that food brand transparency influences their purchasing decisions.[6] This impressive figure shows that transparency has gone from being an ‘added value’ to a ‘prerequisite’ for entering the market.

Food scandals of recent years have left their mark, and consumers want to be able to verify claims. Is this coffee really fair trade? Are these vegetables truly organic? Was this fish caught sustainably? QR codes offer instant verification, turning marketing claims into tangible evidence.

At the same time, consumer behaviour is changing rapidly. A GS1 survey reports that 79% of consumers would be more likely to buy products with a QR code.[7] This percentage continues to rise, particularly among younger generations who consider this action as natural as checking their phones. Scanning is becoming a reflex, a normal step in the purchasing process.

What radical transparency can reveal

New-generation QR codes, built according to the GS1 Digital Link standard, go far beyond a simple link to a website. They create a personalised and evolving experience that adapts to the consumer, their region, their language and even the moment of scanning. This technology makes it possible to deploy a wealth of information that cannot be printed on packaging.

Complete traceability becomes accessible: each product can tell its story, from the farm to the point of sale. Consumers can find out which farm grew their vegetables, which boat caught their fish, and what agricultural practices were used. Brands such as Starbucks have led the way by making it possible to trace each bag of coffee back to its plantation of origin, information that they have been managing for twenty years but which is now becoming accessible to the general public.

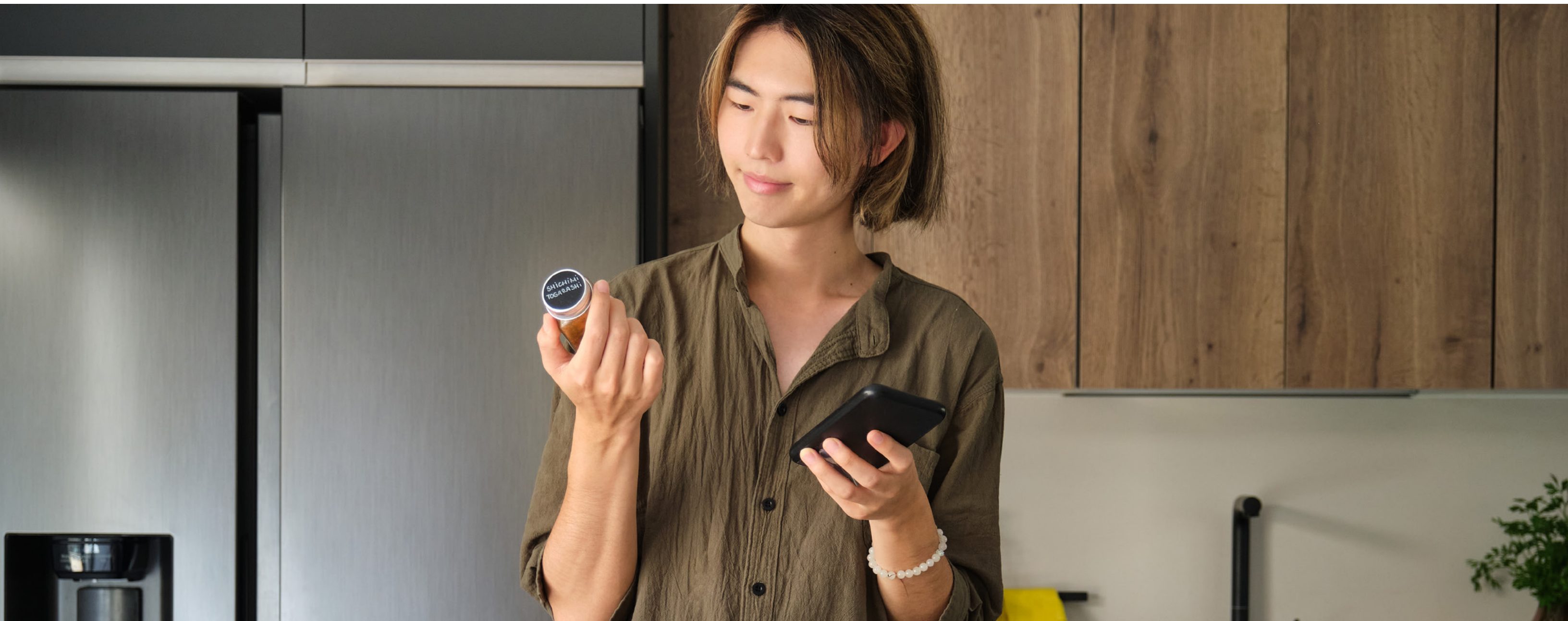
Nutritional information is also being enhanced. Beyond the mandatory tables, brands can offer details on allergens, advice on use adapted to different diets, recipe suggestions, and even real-time alerts in the event of a product recall. This proactive approach reinforces the brand's perception of responsibility.

The environmental footprint becomes measurable and comparable. Consumers can view the product's carbon footprint, understand the impact of packaging choices, learn about sustainability certifications, and even receive recycling instructions tailored to their municipality. This granularity of information transforms ecological intentions into concrete actions.

Benefits that go beyond simple compliance

The beauty of dynamic QR codes lies in their flexibility. Unlike printed information, which freezes content at the time of production, these codes allow information to be updated in real time without reprinting packaging. A change in recipe? A new certification? A recall to communicate? The information is updated instantly, avoiding waste and reprinting costs.

This technology also reduces visual clutter on packaging. No need to cram in paragraphs of tiny text, a single code gives access to everything. Packaging remains clean and attractive, while offering more information than ever before. This approach even supports sustainability efforts by reducing the need for paper inserts or additional labels.



For businesses, the data collected becomes valuable. Each scan generates information, such as the identity of the person performing the scan, where and when the scan was performed, and with which device. This data provides insight into consumer behaviour, identifies the most viewed information, and continuously refines the experience offered. It is a direct and measurable channel of communication.

Opportunities for Canadian food processors

Adopting radical transparency is a strategic investment that positions brands for the future. Here are some concrete actions to consider:

- **Start with the basics:** Integrate QR codes that lead first to the most requested information: origin of the main ingredients, certifications, detailed nutritional values. Build gradually from this foundation.
- **Tell the human story:** Highlight the producers, farmers, and artisans behind the products. Faces and stories create emotional connections that data alone cannot generate. This is particularly relevant for Canadian products with strong regional stories.
- **Use dynamic technology:** Invest in dynamic rather than static QR codes. The ability to update content without changing the packaging offers essential flexibility and reduces long-term costs.
- **Create added value:** Beyond traceability, offer content that enriches the experience, such as video preparation tutorials, pairing suggestions or storage tips, for example. Turn scanning into a moment of discovery rather than a simple check.
- **Prepare systems upstream:** Traceability begins at the source. Ensure that data is captured throughout the supply chain, from suppliers to the market. Investing in data management systems now avoids last-minute rushes to comply with regulations.
- **Measure and optimise:** Use scan data to understand what really interests consumers. Adjust content based on observed behaviours, test different approaches, and continuously improve the experience.

Radical transparency is no longer a luxury reserved for big brands. Current technologies make it accessible to all processors, regardless of size. Companies that adopt it today are positioning themselves as pioneers, gaining the trust of increasingly demanding and information-hungry consumers, and preparing for tomorrow's inevitable regulations.

4

Hyperlocal: Sourcing Locally as a Competitive Advantage

Hyper-local sourcing is becoming a strategic reflex for Canadian food brands. Consumers, affected by trade wars and price increases, are increasingly turning to "made here" products which they perceive as more reliable, fresher and better for the local economy. Amplified by the pandemic, the local buying movement has gained significant momentum in Quebec, but now that the "Buy Canadian" movement is also gaining ground, Canadian origin is becoming a real trigger for purchases as much as price and flavour.

How consumer habits are evolving

The desire to buy locally has never been stronger. According to a recent PwC study, 75% of Canadians say they are willing to pay extra for locally produced food[8]. This willingness reflects a genuine attachment to local products and recognition of their value.

However, the reality remains nuanced. Consumers remain very price-sensitive: 62% of them still choose a cheaper imported product when faced with a choice between two options. This tension between values and budget reflects the current economic climate, where every dollar counts. Brands must therefore navigate this duality intelligently, offering a clear value proposition that justifies any price difference.

Food inflation and economic uncertainty are nevertheless reinforcing the reflex to buy local. Choosing a local product is seen as a concrete way to support Canadian farmers and processors, contribute to the local economy and reduce the carbon footprint associated with transportation. It is a meaningful gesture that resonates with consumers' current concerns.

From "Made in Canada" to "Made near me"

A "Product of Canada" or "Made in Canada" seal reassures and inspires confidence. But today's consumers want to go further. They increasingly want to know which province or region the ingredients or processing come from. This quest for proximity reflects a desire for a more authentic connection with what they eat.

A "Product of Canada" or "Made in Canada" seal reassures and inspires confidence.

The example of Aliments du Québec, with its rigorous product origin verification, is particularly telling. According to a 2025 Léger study, 94% of Quebecers trust the province's certification programs[9], which are widely recognized and demonstrate the level of credibility a trusted seal can achieve in the marketplace.

Brands that clearly indicate regional origin, whether from Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, the Gaspé Peninsula, British Columbia or the Prairies, stand out on store shelves. They give products a human face and make it easier to identify with a territory. This geographical precision transforms a purchase into a story, and that story creates value.

We are thus moving from a simple mention of "Canadian" to true food geolocation. Consumers want to know that their flour comes from Saskatchewan, their maple syrup from Quebec and their apples from the Okanagan Valley. This granularity reinforces the credibility and authenticity of the local message.

How local brands are adapting

Canadian retailers have recognised the scale of this trend and are adjusting their strategies accordingly. They are featuring more local products in their flyers, aisles and online banners in response to growing demand. Sections labelled "Aliments du Québec" (Quebec foods) or "Proudly Canadian" are expanding and benefiting from prime display space.

Alliances between producers, processors and retailers are also multiplying. These partnerships aim to secure local supply chains, reduce dependence on imports and limit the risk associated with customs tariffs. In an uncertain geopolitical context, this resilience is becoming a major strategic asset.

There has also been a remarkable increase in transparency. Brands are mentioning their partner farms, presenting profiles of producers, using maps of Canada to locate the origin of ingredients and sharing figures on their local economic impact. This openness directly responds to consumer expectations and builds trust.

Opportunities for Canadian food processors

Canadian food processors have concrete levers at their disposal to capitalise on this trend:

- **Put origin at the heart of positioning:** Clearly indicate Canadian, provincial and regional origin on packaging (text, seals, certification marks or pictograms) and in all digital communications, favouring benchmarks from organizations recognized by target markets. Origin must be visible, legible and proudly displayed, not hidden on the back in small print.
- **Build visible partnerships:** Collaborate with local producers (dairies, mills, market gardeners or fisheries, for example) and showcase these collaborations on packaging and in stores. QR codes can provide access to videos or mini reports that humanise the supply chain.
- **Adapt product lines to include more local ingredients:** Incorporate more Canadian ingredients, such as wheat, legumes, berries, maple products, cranberries, and local fish and seafood. The "hyper-local" message must be tangible in the ingredient list, not just in marketing.
- **Leverage regional channels:** Launch limited-edition products rooted in a specific region through independent grocery stores, farmers' markets and local online platforms. Test these innovations on a small scale before rolling them out.

For Canadian brands, hyper-locality is no longer just a source of pride, it is a real competitive advantage. It justifies a slight premium, secures supplies in an unstable commercial environment, and creates a lasting emotional bond with local consumers. In a globalised economy, proximity paradoxically becomes a powerful differentiator.

Freezer Fine Dining

5

Frozen meals are undergoing a real upgrade. Gone are the days of "quick fix meals" that we reluctantly reheat on exhausting weeknights. No, today's frozen products offer experiences that are close to a restaurant dinner, straight from the freezer. Major retailers such as Whole Foods are already identifying this wave of "Freezer Fine Dining", driven by more gourmet frozen meals, elaborate starters and side dishes that focus on quality ingredients and flavours inspired by world cuisines.

This transformation of frozen food is shaking up the established codes. What was once perceived as a compromise is now becoming a legitimate option for treating oneself. The freezer is no longer a last resort, but a gourmet pantry where culinary discoveries await.

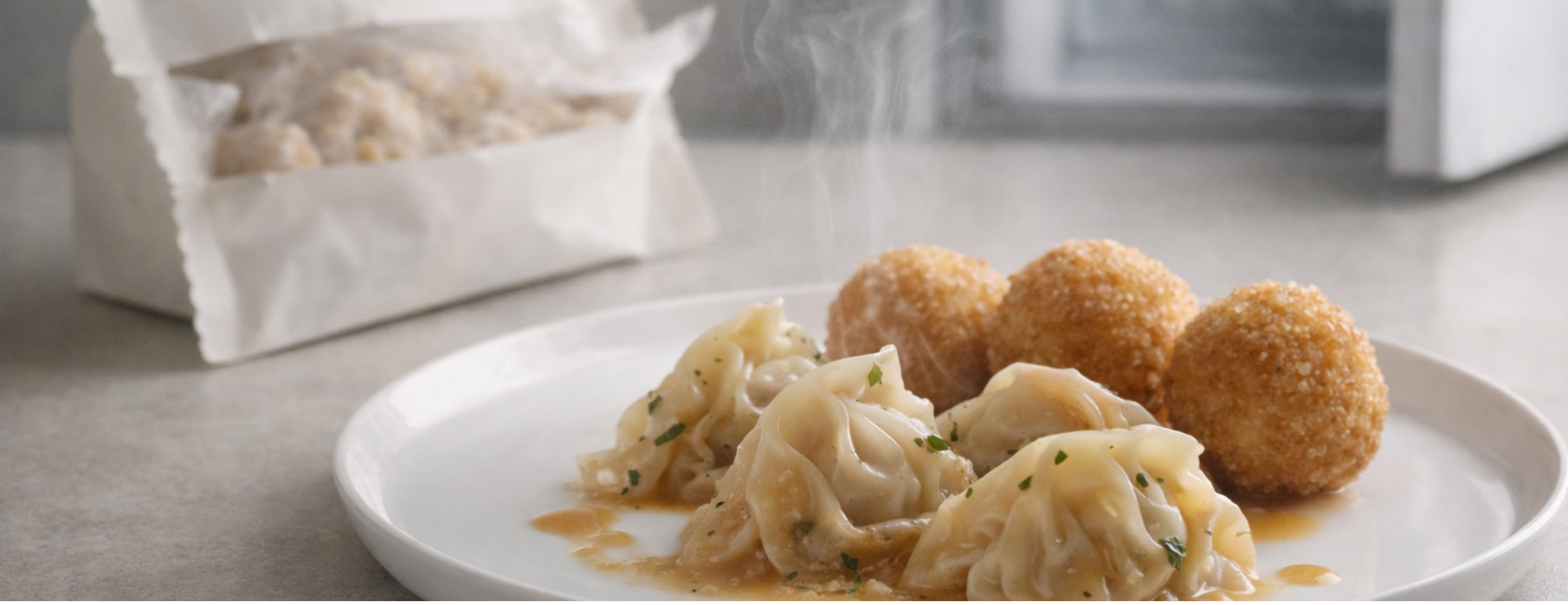
Why frozen meals are making a comeback

Consumers are trying to balance three often conflicting imperatives: tight budgets, limited time and the desire to eat well. Eating out is becoming increasingly expensive, but the desire to "treat oneself" remains strong. Frozen meals are becoming a way to enjoy a more refined experience at home, while reducing the cost and preparation time.

> Frozen food is no longer synonymous with compromising on quality.

Several studies note that the perceived quality of frozen products has increased significantly in recent years. This improvement can be explained by better freezing techniques that preserve texture and nutrients, simplified ingredient lists that reassure health-conscious consumers, and recipes developed by real chefs who bring their culinary expertise to bear. Frozen food is no longer synonymous with compromising on quality.

Food inflation is also playing a role in this return to favour. With restaurant prices soaring, premium frozen foods offer attractive value for money. You can enjoy a gourmet experience for a fraction of the cost of a restaurant meal, without sacrificing taste. It constitutes an affordable luxury.



Key role of air fryer

Air fryers have become the natural ally of this trend. An air fryer allows you to achieve a crispy texture and restaurant-quality results without turning on the oven, while using much less oil. Its ease of use is a game changer: in 15 minutes, without preheating or constant monitoring, you can achieve results that rival traditional frying.

For many households, particularly young couples or those living in apartments, the air fryer is gradually replacing the traditional oven for some meals. This reality is encouraging manufacturers to develop frozen formats specifically optimised for this appliance. Cooking times, portions and even the shape of products are designed with this new way of cooking in mind.

What's changing in frozen food offerings

The frozen food aisle landscape is changing before our eyes. We are seeing more restaurant-inspired dishes such as crispy arancini, gourmet dumplings with refined fillings, authentic pupusas, ramen enhanced with complex broths, and special edition chef's dishes. These products no longer hide their gastronomic ambitions.

Complete meals are also evolving. They are beautifully plated, with elaborate garnishes and careful presentation. The goal is clear: to allow consumers to "plate up like a restaurant" using a frozen product. Manufacturers are now thinking about the visual experience as much as the taste, knowing that we eat with our eyes first.

Products now intelligently combine convenience and added value. They offer higher-quality protein, authentic international influences, "better-for-you" options with more plant-based ingredients and fewer additives, as well as individual or two-person formats that cater to new lifestyles. Frozen foods are adapting to the diversity of contemporary households.

Market research confirms this trend: according to Research and Markets, the frozen food segment in North America is expected to continue growing by nearly 4% per year until 2033[10], driven by this move upmarket and the perception that frozen food helps reduce food waste. By buying only what we are going to consume and when, we waste less.

Opportunities for Canadian food processors

For local processors, this trend opens up several concrete avenues:

- **Develop frozen meals inspired by our cuisine:** Create products inspired by Quebec and Canadian cuisine, such as bistronomy, revisited comfort food or world cuisine with a local twist. Design these products for air fryers or toaster ovens, optimising cooking times and results.
- **Highlight Canadian origin:** Clearly promote the Canadian origin of ingredients such as meat, vegetables, cheese, and sauces on the packaging. Explain how the product allows consumers to recreate a “restaurant dinner” at home, at a more affordable price, while supporting local producers.
- **Pay attention to packaging design:** Show the result on a plate rather than just a picture of the tray. Take inspiration from restaurant codes, with careful presentation, appetising lighting and elegant tableware to reinforce the gastronomic promise. The packaging must sell the dream, not just the contents.
- **Explore collaborations with chefs:** Partner with chefs, restaurants or well-known local brands to create limited edition frozen food ranges. These collaborations create a novelty and collectible effect while giving the product immediate culinary credibility.

In a context where value, pleasure and time savings are at the heart of decisions, “frozen gastronomy” allows Canadian brands to position themselves as everyday allies. They become able to offer dining experiences at home without major compromises on taste or budget. Freezer is no longer a plan B, but a destination in itself.

Fibre Frenzy

6

Dietary fibre is the new star of functional food, in the same way as or even ahead of protein in several 2026 trend forecasts. The explosion of interest in digestive health, the microbiome and metabolism make fibre a key ingredient in everyday products, from cereals and snacks to drinks and ready meals.

This rise of fibre marks a turning point in how consumers think about nutrition. For years, protein reigned supreme, omnipresent in marketing messages and food choices. Today, fibre is claiming its place in the spotlight, driven by a more nuanced understanding of its role in overall health.

From protein to gut health

Consumers are no longer satisfied with just counting grams of protein. They are increasingly interested in fibre, prebiotics and food that feeds the “good bacteria” in the microbiome. This shift in perspective reflects a more holistic view of health.

> The gut is becoming the body’s nerve centre, and fibre its preferred fuel.

Recent surveys, such as the one conducted by Léger, show that a majority of consumers now associate gut health with other aspects of their well-being, including energy, immunity, mood, sleep and even skin appearance, rather than digestion alone. The gut is becoming the body’s nerve centre, and fibre its preferred fuel.[11]

This awareness is accompanied by increased curiosity about the microbiome, the ecosystem of billions of bacteria that inhabit our digestive system. People now understand that feeding these bacteria with the right fibre can have repercussions far beyond digestive comfort. It benefits overall health.

A massive deficit... and an opportunity

Despite this growing interest, very few people reach the recommended daily fibre intake.[12] Analysts describe this phenomenon as a major “consumption gap”. The gap between what people know they should eat and what they actually eat, as reported in the latest Food Trends study by Nextin.[13]

This gap creates a significant business opportunity for food processors. Products enriched with fibre, naturally fibre-rich recipes and convenient formats that make it easier to meet daily targets are finding a receptive audience. The advantage: this deficit can be filled without resorting to dieting. Fibre can be naturally incorporated into tasty products.

From fibre madness to fibre diversity

The discourse is evolving rapidly. As Hubert Cormier, Doctor of nutrition and founder of the *Bon pour toi* website, points out, “we are moving from simply chasing grams, which could be called 'fibre maxing', to a more nuanced approach focused on the diversity of fibre sources. Whether we’re talking about whole grains, legumes, fruits and vegetables, nuts, or functional fibres such as inulin or fructo-oligosaccharides, each source has its own benefits.”

Successful brands intelligently combine soluble and insoluble fibre. They rely on complete food matrices rather than simple powders added after the fact. Above all, they explain the role of fibre in digestive health in simple language. No intimidating scientific jargon, just clear and accessible communication that demystifies the subject.

This diversity of fibres becomes a selling point. A product that combines several sources of fibre can be positioned as more complete, more balanced, closer to a varied diet. It is a sophistication of the nutritional message that resonates with increasingly informed consumers.

What’s happening in Canada

Functional foods and beverages Canadian market, including fibre-rich products, are experiencing sustained growth. This expansion is driven by concerns about chronic diseases, weight management and healthy ageing. Canadians are investing in their long-term health, and fibre fits perfectly into this preventive approach.

Industry analyses, such as that conducted by Mintel, reveal a particularly interesting trend: the rise of products incorporating fibre in categories previously perceived as “purely for pleasure”.[14] Fibre is now found in snacks, desserts, baked goods, ready-to-drink beverages, and even prepared meals. Fibre is no longer confined to austere ‘health’ products but can be found everywhere.

This democratisation of fibre is transforming the market dynamic. Consumers are no longer forced to choose between pleasure and health. They can have both in the same product, which removes a significant psychological barrier to adopting healthier eating habits.

Opportunities for Canadian food processors

For local processors, the “Fibre Frenzy” opens up several promising avenues:

- **Incorporate local fibre sources:** Use whole grains, oats, legumes, fruits and berries, or flax, all of which are locally available ingredients. Incorporate them into everyday products, not just in “health” lines. Normalise the presence of fibre everywhere.
- **Focus on gut health:** Communicate simply and factually about benefits such as satiety, energy, digestion and blood sugar stability. Avoid intimidating scientific jargon. Make the message accessible to everyone, not just nutrition insiders.
- **Develop products with a dual promise:** Create products that offer both gourmet pleasure and added or naturally occurring fibre. Avoid the punitive image of functional products of the past, those we ate out of duty rather than desire. Fibre should be a bonus, not a sacrifice.
- **Play the transparency and education card:** Explain on the packaging the types of fibre present, the amounts per serving, and ideas for everyday consumption. Extend this education online to help people fill their fibre deficit without complicating their lives.

In a context where overall health and well-being are top priorities, fibre is becoming a strategic tool for Canadian brands. It allows them to enhance existing products without radically transforming them, create new functional ranges that meet real demand, and help fill a recognised nutritional gap. Fibre nourishes both the body and the microbiome, and brands that understand this are positioning themselves for the future.

7

Private Label Evolution

Private labels from major retailers are no longer just discount options relegated to the bottom of the shelves. They are establishing themselves as genuine brands, capable of competing with national brands in terms of quality, innovation and even image. This profound change is transforming the grocery landscape in Canada, where house brands are rapidly gaining market share, buoyed by inflation, the search for value and increased consumer confidence.

What was once a marginal segment is now becoming a strategic pillar for retailers. Private labels are stepping out of the shadows and into the spotlight, shaking up the rules of the game that have been established for decades. This quiet revolution is redrawing the power dynamics in the food industry.

What is changing among consumers

Canadians are increasingly confident in private label brands. They no longer perceive them as cheap copies or last-resort choices, but as good value options that deserve a place in their shopping baskets. This shift in perception marks a significant break from attitudes just a few years ago.

Canadians are increasingly confident in private label brands.

Analyses by EY, NielsenIQ and other industry players reveal a particularly significant phenomenon: many households that switched to private label during price increases continue to buy it even when promotions on national brands return.[15, 16] This persistence reflects a lasting change in habits rather than a temporary reflex dictated by the purse strings.

The younger generation, particularly Gen Z, is particularly open to private labels, as demonstrated by a recent study by Numerator[17]. For these consumers, born into a world saturated with advertising and marketing promises, and with increasingly tight personal budgets, the prestige of a national brand matters less than substance. They value transparency, healthy options, sustainability and thoughtful design, attributes that modern private labels can offer as well as, and sometimes better than, their established competitors.

Private labels go premium

Retailers no longer use private labels solely to offer the lowest possible prices. They are now developing "signature" ranges that are organic, local, gourmet or wellness-focused, with genuine brand positioning that can compete with any national product. This premiumization strategy is a complete game changer.

We are seeing the emergence of private labels that offer exclusive recipes, higher quality ingredients, local or sustainable products, and sophisticated packaging that rivals national brands on the neighbouring shelf. The care taken in design, highlighting attributes and visual consistency reflects an ambition that goes far beyond the old utilitarian approach.

This premiumization allows retailers to play on several fronts simultaneously. They offer a highly competitive entry-level range for price-sensitive buyers, a reassuring mid-range for everyday use, and a specialised high-end range for special occasions or enthusiasts. All while maintaining control over their margins at each level and control over merchandising, a sophisticated range architecture that was once the preserve of the biggest national brands.

A new brand dynamic

This evolution is profoundly changing the way shelves are "read". The store brand is becoming a player in its own right, not just a comparison at the bottom of the page or an alternative to save a few pennies. It has its own identity, its own visual codes, its own promise. Consumers are even starting to actively seek it out. And while Canada lags behind in consumer adoption of private labels, according to figures published by Circana, growth is happening faster here than elsewhere in the world.[18]

Retailers are intelligently leveraging their shopping cart data to quickly launch highly targeted in-house products. They know which flavours appeal, which formats are convenient, and which healthier versions find buyers. And they can react faster than national brands, without the burdens of a complex organisational structure or the constraints of an extensive distribution network.

For certain categories, private labels are even becoming the driving force behind innovation. This is particularly true for ready-to-eat formats, local products, plant-based ranges and health-conscious offerings. Retailers are testing, adjusting and relaunching with an agility that national brands envy. And that is not to mention the possible entry into the Canadian market of retail chains that heavily favour their private labels, such as the European chains Aldi, with 90% of products under private label, and Lidl, with 80%. A new balance of power is certainly emerging.

Opportunities for Canadian food processors

For domestic processors, this evolution represents both a threat and a strategic opportunity. The challenge lies in navigating this new landscape intelligently:

- **Develop distinctive value propositions:** Create products based on local ingredients, unique recipes, functional benefits, or strong storytelling that private labels will find difficult to imitate quickly. Differentiate yourself with elements that cannot be copied overnight, such as the mission of the company's founders or the vision of the artisans behind the product.
- **Position yourself as a partner of choice:** Become the preferred manufacturer for certain private labels, especially when expertise, industrial capabilities or local market knowledge give you an undeniable competitive advantage. Manufacturing for private labels is no longer an admission of weakness but can become a viable strategy.
- **Invest in innovation and brand image:** Avoid competing solely on price, an area where private labels excel. Focus on what they cannot easily replicate, such as authentic origins, expertise passed down from generation to generation, genuine community involvement or specialised niche expertise. Consumers recognise and appreciate the authenticity of brands born out of community or passion.
- **Work on portfolio strategies:** Develop approaches that allow coexistence with private label rather than fighting it head-on. Offer complementary products, different formats or limited collaborations that benefit both the processor and the retailer.

In this new landscape, private label is no longer just a competitor at the back of the shelf that can be ignored or despised. They are key players that are redefining expectations in terms of value, quality and innovation. Canadian food brands that clarify their role, assert their difference and strategically choose their alliances will have a head start in this silent battle for space in the shopping basket. The revenge of private labels is underway, and it is forcing everyone to reinvent themselves.

Sensory & Textural Innovation

8

Texture is no longer a mere detail that goes unnoticed. It has become an innovation driver and a selling point on par with flavour and ingredient origin. Consumers are increasingly seeking out products that offer crunchiness, crispness, softness, melt-in-the-mouth textures or striking contrasts. Each bite becomes a conscious and deliberate sensory experience.

Several industry observers are talking about a rise in 2026 of the “mouthfeel movement”, which could be translated as the Palate Revolution. Smell, hearing with the characteristic crunch, sight with the layered textures or bursting bubbles, and touch in the mouth now count as much as taste itself. Food is becoming a complete multisensory experience.

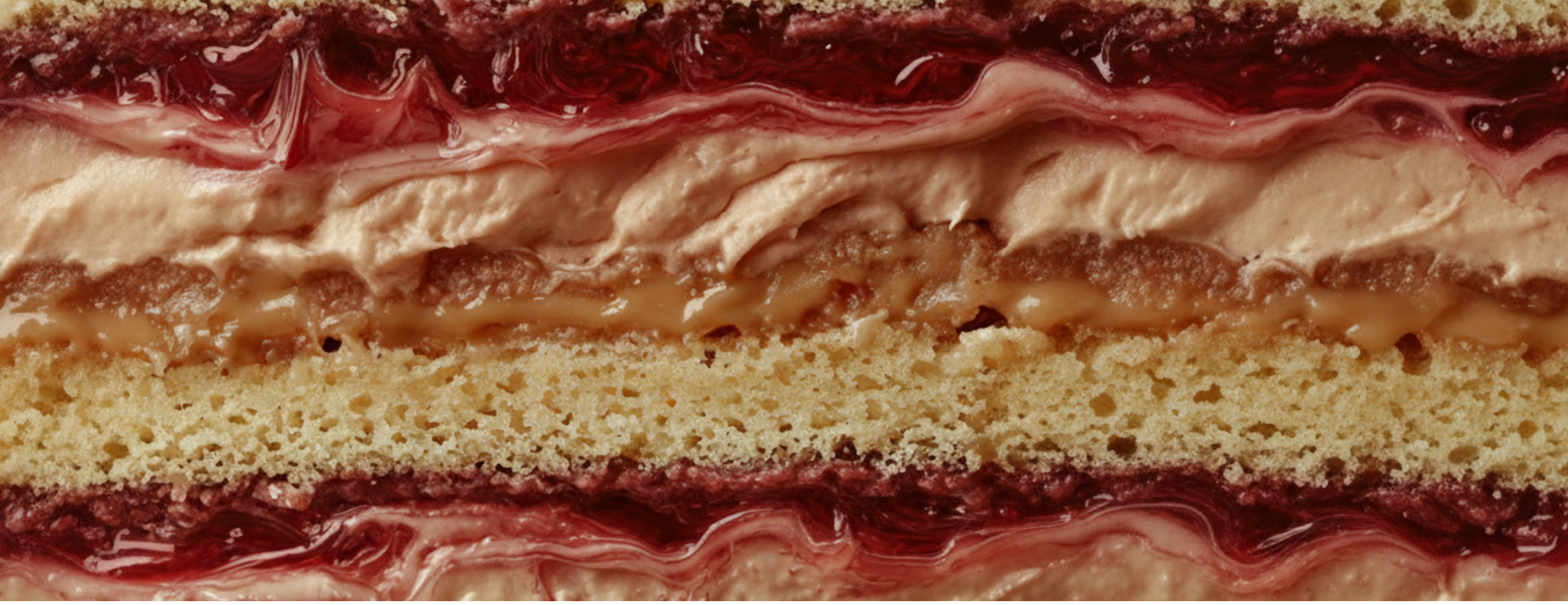
Why textures are so important

Several factors explain this craze. First, there is a certain fatigue with “ordinary” products that no longer surprise us. Consumers are looking for novelty, the unexpected, something that breaks the routine. Texture offers this dimension of discovery without necessarily radically changing recipes.

The time spent at home during and after the pandemic has also played a role. People have rediscovered the pleasure of eating mindfully, of appreciating every aspect of food. This increased attention to detail has naturally highlighted the importance of texture in the overall food experience.

The influence of video content is also radically changing the game. ASMR videos where the sound of crunching becomes almost hypnotic, tastings of ultra-crunchy snacks that generate millions of views, such as Chamoy Pickle, the spectacular effects of frozen desserts that break apart or freeze-dried sweets that melt instantly, all create a demand for foods that “sound” and “react” as much as they taste good.

For younger generations such as Gen Z and Millennials, texture makes a product more “shareable” on social media, and therefore automatically more desirable. A cake that cuts open to reveal colourful layers, ice cream with a satisfyingly crunchy coating, or a drink with perfectly formed foam? These are all moments that have the potential to go viral.



Contrasting texture boom

Recent trends particularly highlight products that play on contrast. The aim is to create surprise and maintain interest with every bite. A crispy exterior that gives way to a melt-in-the-mouth interior. Layered textures that offer different sensations. Crunchy bits, grains or bubbles that punctuate the experience. Evolving textures that transform in the mouth, like a cream that becomes mousse or a glaze that cracks and then melts. Innovation and boldness are key in the search for new sensations.

This phenomenon is evident in several categories. Crispy snacks and freeze-dried nibbles are experiencing remarkable growth. Very light but intensely crunchy, they offer a sensory experience that is disproportionate to their volume. It's concentrated pleasure.

Desserts and frozen products brilliantly exploit these contrasts. They combine a hard shell that breaks, a creamy centre that melts, pieces of biscuit that add crunch, and caramelised sugar chips that provide a crunchy note. Each element plays a role in the textural symphony.

Drinks are not to be outdone with their playful textures: tapioca pearls that burst in the mouth, gels that slide, thick mousses that create a creamy "cold foam". These innovations add an unexpected tactile dimension to the simple act of drinking, turning it into an experience to chew on and discover.

Texture thus becomes a way to increase the perception of pleasure without necessarily adding sugar or fat. In a context where consumers are increasingly health-conscious, this approach is particularly relevant. Indulgence can be created through texture rather than calories.

Comprehensive multisensory experiences

Brands are now exploring experiences that engage all the senses simultaneously. Bright colours that catch the eye, crunchy textures that satisfy the ear, melt-in-the-mouth effects that surprise the palate, intense flavours that envelop the senses, and sometimes even temperature effects, with hot and cold in the same product. It's a more holistic approach to food than ever before.

Brands are now exploring experiences that engage all the senses simultaneously.

Snacks inspired by social media perfectly illustrate this quest, with ice cream coated in crunchy dried fruit leaves, ultra-crispy crisps with amplified sound, and ultra-light puffed bites that melt instantly. Food must surprise, entertain and create a visual and auditory "wow" effect, becoming a spectacle before it is food.

This logic is even gaining ground in more traditional categories such as bakery. The crust, with its thickness, colour or crispness, becomes a selling point. Crumbs, with their texture and the way they fall apart, are part of the experience. Inclusions such as dried fruit, nuts or seeds add elements of surprise. Elements that were once taken for granted are now opportunities for differentiation.

Opportunities for Canadian food processors

For local processors, the trend toward textures and senses opens up a vast creative playground:

- **Work with distinctive textured profiles:** Develop signature textures in snacks, biscuits, bars, desserts and dairy products, from crispy and flaky to creamy and mousse-like. Think about both the mouthfeel and the potential for social media presentation. A photogenic and "Instagrammable" product already has an advantage.
- **Develop "layered" products:** Create layered dips, tiered desserts and snacks with multiple inclusions that offer visual and sensory contrasts. The important thing is to keep the preparation simple for home use; the spectacular must remain accessible.
- **Adapt existing formats:** Enhance established products by adding a signature textural element, such as a crunchy crumble, roasted seeds, crispy toppings or contrasting layers of sauce. There's no need to reinvent the entire recipe, just add that textural dimension that makes all the difference.
- **Highlight texture:** Emphasise this aspect on packaging and in all communications. Use macro photos that capture the crispiness, explicitly mention "ultra-creamy", "double texture", "irresistible crunch." Describe what the person will actually feel in their mouth, not just what they will taste.

By focusing on texture as an area of innovation, Canadian food brands can stand out in a crowded market where everything looks the same. They offer new value-added experiences that justify a premium price and particularly appeal to young consumers who are looking for products that are tasty, fun and "shareable" online. Texture becomes a universal language that transcends words and speaks directly to the senses.

Sustainable & Circular Packaging

9

Sustainable packaging is no longer just a marketing asset or a nice initiative to ease one's conscience. It has become a minimum expectation, a purchasing criterion, almost a prerequisite for being considered a responsible brand. More and more consumers are actively seeking solutions that reduce waste, use less virgin plastic and facilitate recycling or composting at home.

At the same time, new regulations are accelerating this transition. Europe in particular, with its future Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR), is imposing ambitious targets for reduction, reuse and recyclability.[19] These rules are pushing the entire industry towards more circular models that aim to systematically reduce, reuse and recycle materials. Disposable products are gradually becoming unacceptable.

Regulatory pressure that extends to Canada

The European PPWR regulation will gradually come into force from 2026 in all European countries. It imposes strict information requirements on the end of life of packaging, specific targets for recycled content and measurable recyclability requirements. Although Canada is not directly subject to these European rules, their influence is being felt here.

Major international brands and chains are aligning their practices globally to simplify their operations. This harmonisation is influencing the entire food chain, including Canadian exporters and processors who want to maintain access to international markets, a priority that has become essential with the recent economic measures imposed by the United States. For economic and logistical reasons, no one wants to create different packaging for each market.

In Canada, provinces are increasing Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) measures[20]. These programmes require companies to bear the financial cost of collecting and processing their end-of-life packaging. This financial responsibility is effectively pushing companies to rethink their packaging in order to limit the associated costs. Lighter, single-material, easily recyclable packaging is less expensive to manage at the end of its life.

Packaging is an integral part of the product itself, not just its container. In a production and distribution system as complex as that of the food industry, packaging must be both high-performance and versatile. It must protect, inform, attract and comply with the growing requirements of EPR.

Processors now must juggle multiple imperatives simultaneously. The Institute of Packaging Technology and Food Engineering (ITEGA) emphasises in its Food Packaging Guide that the best packaging choices balance environmental, technical and commercial issues rather than favouring just one.[21] This multi-factor approach is becoming essential for navigating current constraints without sacrificing performance.

What consumers want

Recent studies reveal a clear preference for materials perceived as more environmentally friendly. Cardboard, paper and reusable solutions inspire confidence, with 76% of Canadian consumers preferring paper packaging for its biodegradable properties.[22] Plastic, even when recyclable, has a negative image that is difficult to overcome. This perception is just as important as the technical reality.

A significant proportion of consumers say they are willing to choose one product over another based on its packaging. More significantly, a significant proportion would be willing to pay slightly more for packaging that is clearly more sustainable.[23] However, the condition remains total transparency. People want to know if the packaging is truly recyclable, compostable or made from recycled content.

However, there is still a great deal of confusion associated with package and container recycling for consumers. Many people do not know exactly what to put in which bin, especially as practices can vary from one municipality to another. They stand in front of their bins with multi-layered packaging in their hands, unsure what to do. This uncertainty highlights the importance of clear pictograms, explanatory QR codes and, above all, simplicity of materials. The simpler it is, the more likely people are to sort correctly.

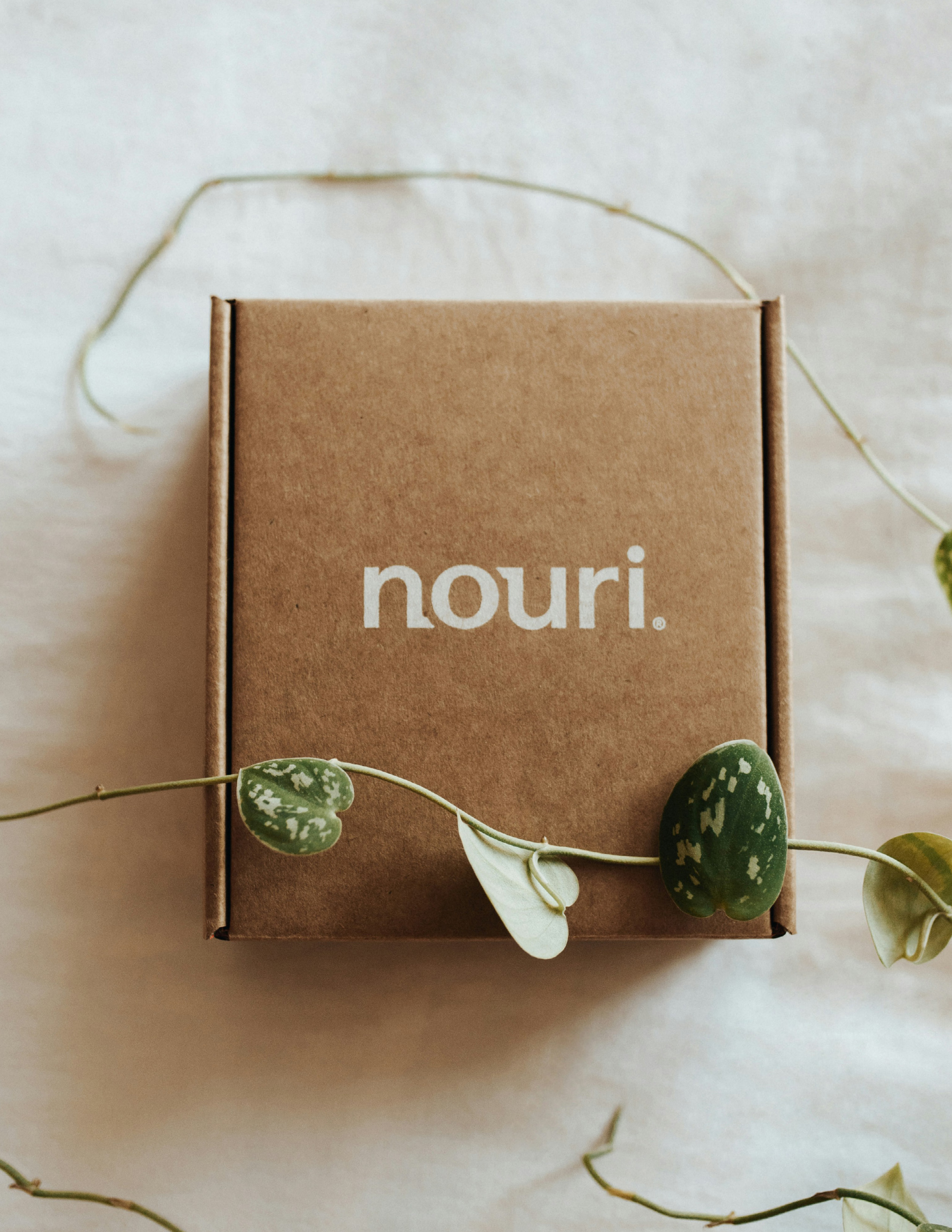
From plastic reduction to circularity

The current trend goes far beyond simply “banning plastic”. The focus is now shifting towards comprehensive circular systems that consider packaging throughout its entire life cycle. This approach is more sophisticated and potentially more effective than outright bans.

Single-material packaging is gaining ground. Whether it’s all cardboard, all PET or all polyethylene, the goal is to facilitate recycling by eliminating complex combinations that are difficult to separate. An all-PET container can be recycled cleanly, but a container made of PET with a paper label and a polypropylene lid poses a problem.

Post-consumer recycled content is becoming the expected norm rather than the exception. We are seeing more and more rPET for bottles and containers, and recycled fibres for boxes. Brands that achieve 50%, 75% or even 100% recycled content are shouting it from the rooftops, and consumers are rewarding this effort.

Compostable and biodegradable materials are also making progress, but cautiously. The key factor remains 100 days in an industrial or even domestic facility. Moulded fibres, certain advanced bioplastics and algae-based films are showing promising results. But beware of greenwashing: packaging that only degrades under unrealistic laboratory conditions is useless.


nouri

Reuse and refill models may represent the most radical future. Returnable jars that are brought back and refilled, durable reusable bags or bulk stations in shops – these systems reduce the amount of packaging at source rather than trying to manage it after the fact. This is conceptually more elegant, even if logistically more complex.

“Connected” packaging with QR codes is also gaining importance. It provides detailed information on end-of-life, carbon footprint, municipality-specific sorting instructions and even the complete history of the materials used. Packaging is becoming transparent, both literally and figuratively.

Opportunities for Canadian food processors

For domestic food processors, this transition represents both an operational challenge and an opportunity for strategic differentiation. There are many concrete actions that can be taken.

- **Simplify packaging structures:** Switch to single-material solutions that are compatible with local recycling infrastructure. Favour cardboard, PET, aluminium cans and glass. Reduce as much as possible complex combinations that end up in landfill because they cannot be separated effectively.
- **Gradually incorporate recycled content:** Use rPET, recycled cardboard, and other second-life materials. Clearly communicate these efforts on the packaging with specific percentages. Explain the environmental benefits concisely and credibly, without resorting to intimidating technical jargon.
- **Test compostable or reusable solutions:** Explore these options for specific categories such as ready-to-eat meals, takeaway food, or family-size formats. Work with retailers to validate logistical feasibility and gauge actual public acceptance before rolling out on a large scale.
- **Focus on education:** Use graphic design to make sorting and end-of-life intuitive. Universal colour codes, clear icons or informative QR codes. Integrate the sustainable packaging approach into the overall brand narrative rather than treating it as an isolated element. Packaging should tell the same story as the product itself.

By adopting sustainable and circular packaging principles early on, Canadian food brands can not only meet growing consumer expectations and prepare for upcoming regulations but also strengthen their credibility and competitive advantage. In a market where environmental responsibility is becoming a major, even priority, criterion for younger generations of consumers, packaging is no longer just a container but a message. The revolution is underway, from disposable to circular.

Global Fusion Flavours, Pan-Asian Style

10

Asian flavours are no longer confined to specialised restaurants or special occasions. They are now part of everyday life for North American consumers, in the sauces we keep in the fridge, the snacks we munch on in front of the telly, the frozen meals we reheat on weeknights and even the meals we prepare at home. Korean gochujang, Japanese yuzu, miso, Vietnamese pho flavours, banh mi spices, Filipino ube and Thai curries are no longer exotic curiosities but familiar ingredients.

The latest trends point to a veritable domination of East and Southeast Asian flavours in new food creations. This influence often manifests itself in the form of “global fusion”, where complex Asian profiles are adapted to very familiar formats. A kimchi burger, a gochujang pizza, a miso meal bowl, a banh mi-inspired sandwich. Asia meets North America, and from this encounter emerge hybrid products that speak two cultural languages simultaneously, much to the delight of consumers’ taste buds, which are increasingly eager for new discoveries.

Why Asian flavours dominate

Several factors converge to explain this rise. First, the demographic growth of the Asian diaspora in North America is changing the cultural composition of markets. These communities bring their culinary traditions with them, creating demand for authentic products and influencing the tastes of the general population.

The influence of K-culture also plays a major role. K-pop, K-dramas and K-beauty have created a fascination for everything that comes from Korea, including, of course, food. Young people discover kimchi while watching their favourite series, try gochujang after seeing a music video filmed in a Seoul restaurant, and want to recreate what they have seen on screen at home.

> The influence of K-culture also plays a major role.

The appeal of travel to the Asia-Pacific region amplifies this trend. Those returning from Bangkok, Tokyo, Seoul or Hanoi want to recreate the flavours they discovered there at home. They actively seek out products that allow them to recreate these experiences without having to get back on a plane.

The growing media coverage of chefs and content creators of Asian origin is also democratising these cuisines. These authentic voices teach, explain and share their family recipes, making what once seemed mysterious or complicated accessible, breaking down barriers and increasing curiosity.

Finally, young consumers, particularly Gen Z, are looking for precisely what Asian cuisines offer in abundance, such as bold, spicy, umami-rich, tangy and slightly sweet flavours that stimulate taste buds accustomed to more neutral tastes. Taste adventure is becoming a form of personal expression.

Concrete examples in North American markets

The trend is not limited to analysts' predictions. It is already clearly visible in products available in Canada and elsewhere in North America. Grocery store shelves bear witness to this ongoing transformation.

Korean sauces and condiments are experiencing spectacular growth. Gochujang, a fermented chilli paste that was virtually unknown five years ago, now occupies entire shelves. It is used in traditional Korean dishes as well as in fusion burgers, creative tacos and barbecue marinades. In Canada, brands such as Jongga and O'Food, from Daesang, have established a strong presence at Costco, Walmart, Loblaws and Sobeys. Their kimchi, gochujang and other condiments are no longer niche products but mainstream choices.

Local players are also seizing the opportunity. Asia Sauce, a Quebec-based company, produces Korean BBQ, satay, teriyaki and sambal sauces here. These products combine local expertise with Asian flavour profiles to build cultural bridges. It's a fusion made in Quebec, designed for the Canadian palate while respecting Asian traditions.

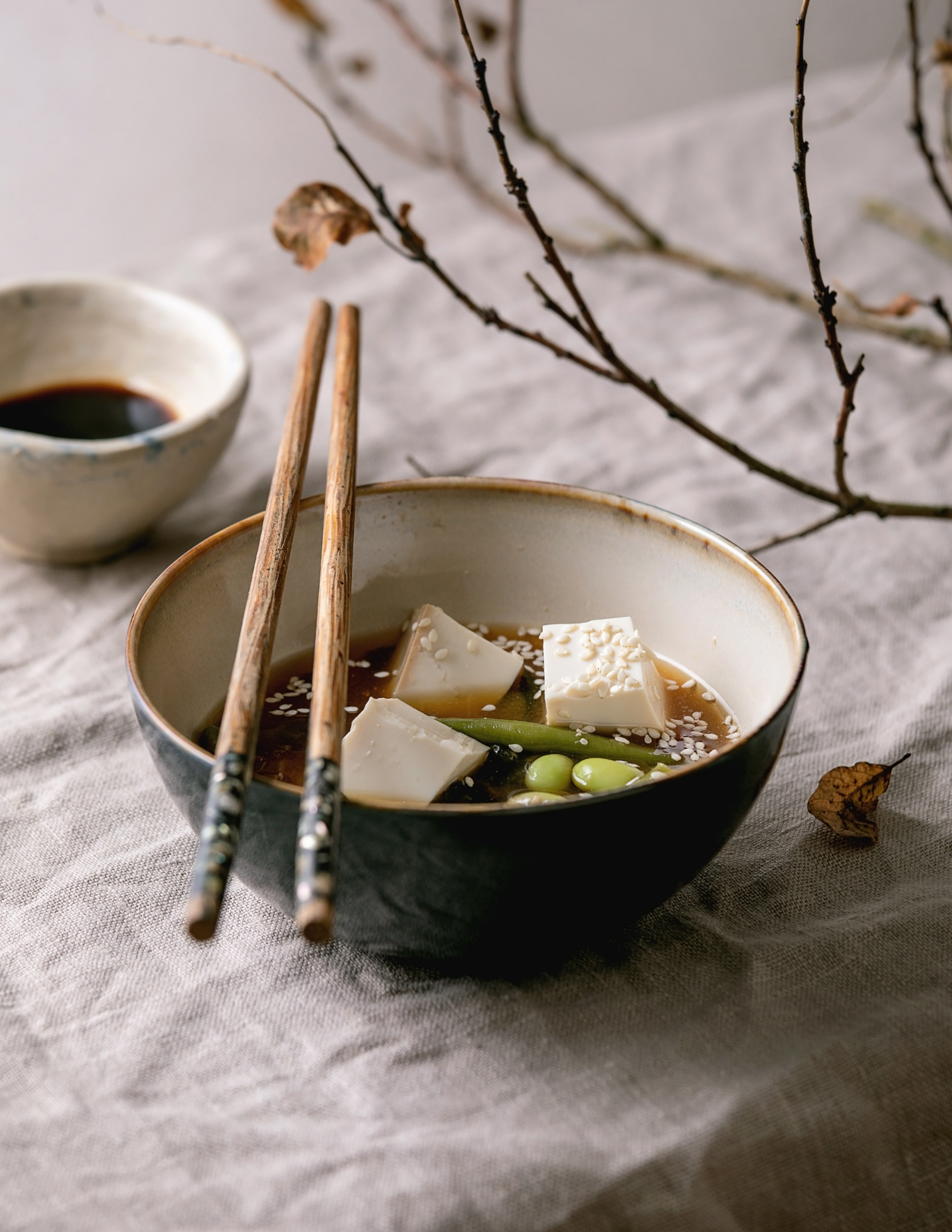
Ramen and Asian noodles have completely changed status. Korean and Japanese ramen from brands such as Samyang and Maruchan are now common grocery items, not curiosities found only in specialty stores. Local initiatives such as Umami Épicerie in Quebec even produce Japanese-inspired noodles and broths. This creative appropriation shows that local artisans are embracing these traditions and adapting them.

Large retailers themselves have shifted gears, with major chains setting their sights on specialised Asian retailers, such as Loblaw acquiring T&T and Sobeys taking a majority stake in Kim Phat, introducing their flagship Asian products into their general grocery stores. Korean products such as Jongga kimchi, Bibigo dumplings and Melona ice cream are among the favourites at Costco warehouses. These products generate enthusiastic online conversations, with consumers sharing their discoveries and recommending their favourites.

A fusion that increasingly respects authenticity

Trend reports note a significant shift in the very nature of this fusion. We are moving away from a "superficial fusion" towards a more respectful and informed approach. Previously, adding soy sauce to a Western dish was enough to claim exoticism. Now, consumers expect more, and better.

There is a greater focus on authentic techniques, such as the crucial role of fermentation in miso, kimchi and fish sauces, and the complex flavour profiles that truly characterise these cuisines. People want to understand why a particular ingredient is used, what tradition it represents and how it transforms the dish.



Fortunately, this quest for authenticity coexists with highly accessible formats. Brands offer ready-to-cook sauces, instant broth bases, complete ramen kits and snacks inspired by Asian street food, such as gochujang seaweed sheets. These products allow people to explore these flavours without having to prepare everything from scratch or master complex techniques.

Opportunities for Canadian food processors

For Canadian food processors, the dominance of Asian-inspired flavours offers fertile ground for innovation. There are many promising avenues to explore.

- **Collaborate with Asian chefs and entrepreneurs:** Co-create sauces, broths, snacks or ready-to-eat meals that combine culinary authenticity with formats adapted to Quebec and Canadian habits. These collaborations bring credibility, expertise and a real connection to traditions, while also avoiding the pitfalls of clumsy cultural appropriation.
- **Develop accessible "discovery" ranges:** Create ready-to-cook sauces such as gochujang-maple, miso-maple, ready-to-assemble pho kits or Korean-style BBQ marinades. Offer Vietnamese or Japanese-inspired ramen or bowl kits that simplify home cooking.
- **Create locally rooted fusion products:** Reinvent Canadian classics with Asian touches. Kimchi poutines, gochujang burgers, hoisin sauce pizzas, or banh mi-style pulled pork sandwiches with local marinated vegetables. Incorporate Canadian ingredients such as beef, pork, poultry, maple, or local vegetables. Offer innovations that are both familiar and exotic.
- **Pay attention to brand narrative and cultural respect:** Explain the origin of recipes, talk about collaborations, share cultural inspiration. Avoid simplistic appropriation that reduces millennia-old traditions to marketing gimmicks. Highlight the role of Asian communities in Canada, the true history of products and a deep respect for culinary traditions.

By focusing on Asian-inspired fusion flavours, Canadian brands can meet a real demand for bolder and more complex taste experiences. This trend also promotes authentic intercultural collaborations, celebrates Canada's growing diversity and demonstrates that innovation can arise from mutual respect between culinary traditions. Asia does not impose itself, it enriches. It does not replace, it expands. And in this respectful fusion, everyone gains in flavour.

Convenience Premium: From Fast-Food to Fast-Good

11

Instant food has long had a dubious reputation. We automatically think of low-end noodles in Styrofoam packaging, bland soup packets that we mix with boiling water out of desperation, and instant meals that sacrifice everything for speed. That era is coming to an end, with a new wave of instant products emerging that are much more nutritious, significantly more gourmet, and infinitely better formulated.

Retailers such as Whole Foods clearly identify this evolution in their trend forecasts. We are seeing the emergence of ready-to-dissolve coffee and matcha sticks, office ramen enriched with bone broth or topped with crispy chilli, canned meals that rival homemade fare, and instant mixes that can be prepared with hot water or a single pan. This upmarket move responds to concrete realities, with our hybrid work rhythms, our kitchens equipped simply with an air fryer, a microwave and an electric kettle, and our constant desire to save time without completely sacrificing quality or pleasure.

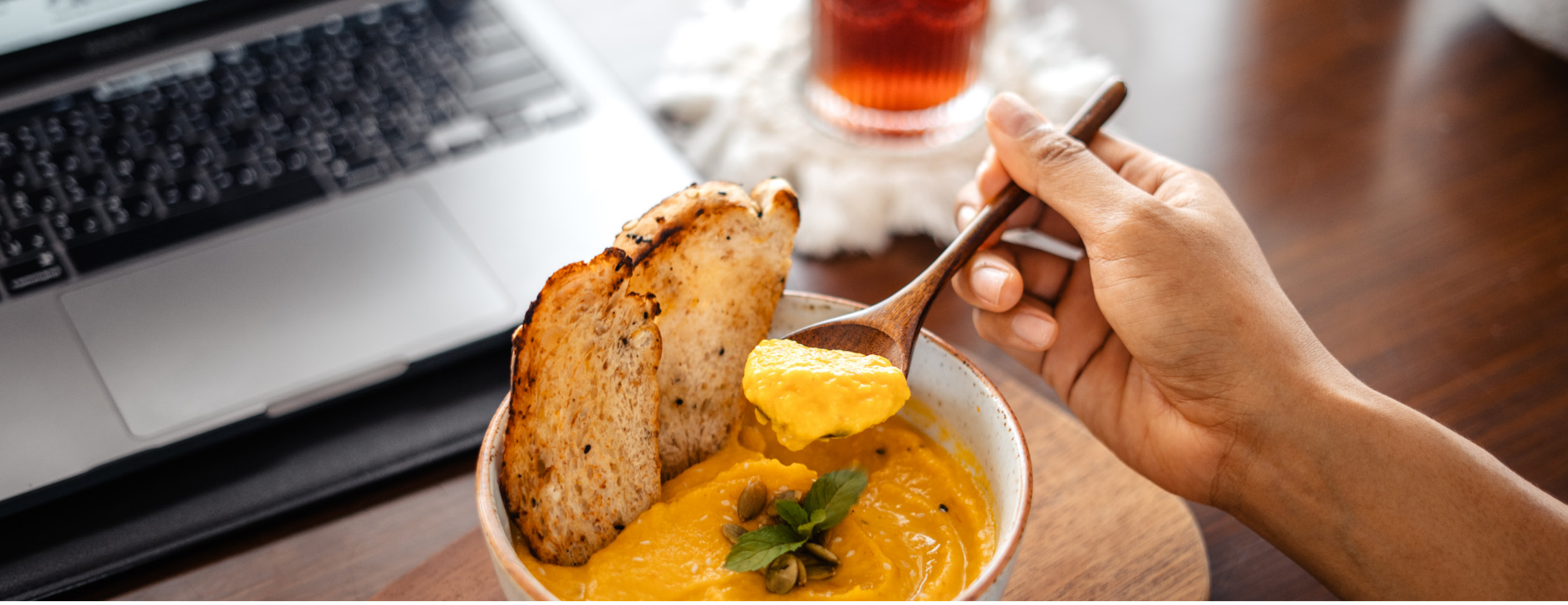
From “ready-to-eat” to “better-to-eat quickly”

According to Statista, the Canadian ready-to-eat meal market is expected to grow by approximately 6.6% per year between now and 2030, driven by busier lifestyles, urbanisation and increased demand for convenient solutions that better meet consumer expectations in terms of taste and nutrition.[24]

> Consumers are turning to solutions that combine convenience and value.

According to Whole Foods’ 2026 trend report, consumers are turning to solutions that combine convenience and value, such as bowl meals, enriched instant noodles, more gourmet canned meals, functional instant oatmeal mixes, as well as ready-to-drink cold coffees, matchas and protein drinks that can be consumed on the go.[25]

Individual formats are gaining particular ground. Portions designed for the office or home office, just enough for a satisfying meal without embarrassing leftovers, these packages are also evolving to adapt to new preparation methods, whether they are self-heating for emergencies, compatible with air fryers for improved texture, or designed for microwaves with results that go beyond the usual mush.



Impact of remote working and new lifestyles

According to a recent study by Stanford University, Canada is the country where hybrid and remote working is most widespread, with an average of 1.9 days of working from home per week.[26] This reality is shifting a significant portion of food consumption away from restaurants and toward the home, with profound implications for the food industry.

Quick lunches are becoming a key moment, with no more lining up at the salad bar or grabbing a sandwich on the go. Instead, people are enjoying a bowl of upgraded instant noodles or a gourmet frozen meal heated up during their Zoom meeting. Midday snacks are also changing, with people reaching into their desk drawers or cupboards at home rather than the vending machine in the hallway or the convenience store counter.

“Express dinners” are exploding in popularity. After a day of juggling work and personal life, no one wants to spend an hour in the kitchen. But ordering delivery every night is expensive and becomes repetitive, which is why quality instant products offer the perfect compromise. As fast as delivery, cheaper than restaurants, and healthier than traditional fast food, this new category of meals is gaining ground.

Consumers want to spend less time cooking without completely sacrificing taste, nutritional balance, or culinary variety. They are looking for global flavours, credible healthy options, and ideally local products.

Online ordering and delivery platforms have also accustomed everyone to instant gratification. This expectation of speed is now being transferred to grocery products. If an app can deliver a meal in twenty minutes, why should my product take more than ten minutes to prepare? The bar is constantly being raised.

Opportunities for Canadian food processors

For domestic processors, this trend toward instant and convenience opens up strategic territory to be quickly occupied. The concrete opportunities are numerous and varied.

- **Create "enhanced" instant products:** Develop noodles, soups, cereal bowls, groats, and meal mixes in cups that go beyond the basics. Add more fibre, more protein, and recognizable local ingredients. Work on flavour profiles that are more sophisticated than generic chicken or bland vegetables. Show that instant can be synonymous with sophistication.
- **Develop formats designed for new realities:** Design individual portions, complete bowls, frozen or ambient meals optimized for teleworking. Aim for preparation in 5 to 10 minutes maximum while allowing for proper plating. With the air fryer becoming a standard appliance, products must be designed with this in mind.
- **Focus on transparency and simplicity:** Display short, clear ingredient lists. Clearly communicate benefits such as energy, satiety, protein, or fibre. Include ingredient origin to distinguish yourself from standardized, anonymous imported options. Transparency reassures consumers and justifies a slightly higher price.
- **Explore innovative packaging solutions:** Develop self-heating packaging for emergencies, containers optimized for microwaves and air fryers that deliver real results, and recyclable materials that reinforce the message of responsible modernity. Packaging should communicate "modern convenience" rather than "worthless instant meals."

By reinventing instant food, Canadian brands can occupy a valuable strategic space between laborious home cooking and expensive restaurant delivery. They can offer fast, affordable, and high-quality solutions that are perfectly suited to today's realities of hybrid work, tight budgets, and health concerns. Instant food is no longer an admission of culinary failure, but rather a smart choice. From fast food to fast-good, the transformation is well underway.

12 Mindful Sweetness & Natural Sugar Reduction

Reducing sugar is becoming a major focus of innovation in the food industry. However, demand for sweetness is not disappearing. People still want to treat themselves, enjoy moments of pleasure, and indulge their taste buds. But they want to do so in a more thoughtful, conscious, and balanced way.

This trend is reflected in a reduction in added sugars in many categories, a marked preference for simple sugars such as fruit, honey, or maple syrup, and an avoidance of ultra-sweet flavours in everyday consumption. Sweets are becoming occasional rather than systematic, and a choice rather than an obligation.

At the same time, several concerns are converging to reinforce this pressure. With overweight and obesity affecting a significant proportion of the population, type 2 diabetes is growing at an alarming rate and could affect more than seven million people in Canada by 2034, according to the organization Frontiers.[27] GLP-1 drugs for weight management are entering mainstream conversations, and metabolic health is becoming a common concern. All these factors are pushing the industry to offer products that remain enjoyable but are better dosed and better designed.

What is changing among consumers

According to Ingredion, 64% of consumers say they are trying to reduce their sugar intake, targeting beverages first, followed by snacks and everyday sweet products.[28]

However, these consumers are wary of solutions that are perceived as too artificial or "chemical." Synthetic sweeteners have a negative reputation that is difficult to overcome, even when science confirms their safety. People clearly prefer short ingredient lists and sugars they can understand and visualize, such as fruit, fruit juice concentrate, honey, maple syrup, or date puree. Even if these alternatives provide slightly less sweetening power, they are reassuring because of their familiarity.

64% of consumers say they are trying to reduce their sugar intake, targeting beverages first, followed by snacks and everyday sweet products

In Canada, market analyses show that the sweeteners and sugar reduction solutions segment is growing, driven by increased demand for natural and low-calorie sweeteners. According to an Innova study cited by Food in Canada, 55% of Canadian consumers say they limit their sugar intake and look for products that offer a balance between indulgence, naturalness, and good taste.[29]

From reduction to repositioning of sweetness

Rather than abruptly eliminating all sugar, which often results in disappointing products that no one buys twice, the industry is moving toward more nuanced and gradual reformulation strategies.

One approach is to gradually reduce sugar content in existing product lines without aggressive marketing, to avoid immediate rejection. Reducing sugar by 10% this year and another 10% the following year allows consumers' palates to gradually adapt without noticing a dramatic change. This method works particularly well for regularly consumed products.

A second strategy focuses on the increased use of whole fruits, purées, dates, or concentrated juices. These ingredients simultaneously provide sweetness, interesting texture, and beneficial fiber, replacing isolated refined sugar with a more complex and nutritionally richer food matrix. The product becomes more satisfying overall, not just sweeter.

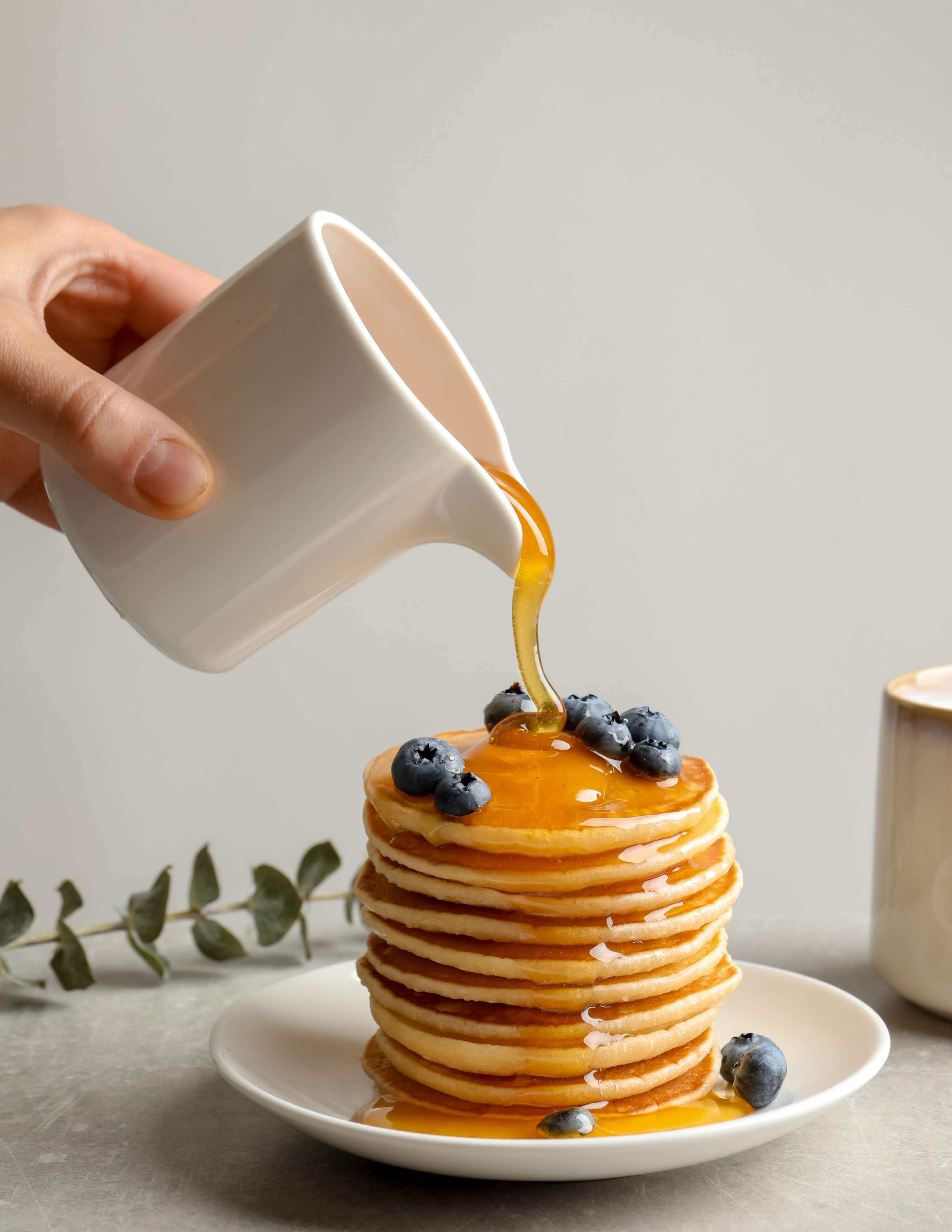
A third approach explores the integration of next-generation sweeteners in certain targeted categories, innovations such as allulose, better-balanced sucralose combinations, stevia reformulated to minimize bitterness, or sweetening proteins such as brazzein. These solutions are particularly suited to beverages and certain snacks where the flavour profile can be adjusted to limit the unpleasant aftertaste that has long plagued this segment.

In confectionery and desserts, an interesting segmentation is emerging. On the one hand, there are more occasional products that fully embrace their indulgent status, such as treats that are consciously enjoyed, in full knowledge of the facts, to celebrate or comfort oneself. On the other hand, there are reduced-content or repositioned options for everyday consumption, such as desserts that can be eaten regularly without excessive guilt. This duality allows each consumer to choose according to the context and their needs at the time.

GLP-1 effect and metabolic health

The dramatic rise of GLP-1 drugs for diabetes and weight management is transforming the landscape of food consumption. Contrary to what one might think, this rise does not negate efforts to reduce sugar intake. On the contrary, several analysts believe that it reinforces the focus on overall calorie intake and the quality of carbohydrates consumed.

An article in Bakery & Snacks based on Mintel data highlights that claims such as “source of protein” or “high in fibreer” can generate 2 to 3 times higher purchase intent among GLP-1 users.[30] These users, as well as those who identify with this approach to weight control, are generally looking for products that are lower in sugar. But that doesn't mean they're giving up sweet treats entirely. They're managing them differently, choosing them more carefully, and savoring them more attentively.



This shift is prompting brands to rethink the positioning of their snacks, desserts, and beverages. Smaller formats are becoming more relevant. Protein-enriched options are finding a wider audience. Products that combine pleasure and nutritional function are becoming more attractive. Sweets are evolving to adapt to these new metabolic realities.

Opportunities for Canadian food processors

For local food brands, the trend toward reducing and reinventing sweetness offers several concrete opportunities for innovation and differentiation.

- **Focus on naturally sweet local ingredients:** Use maple syrup, Canadian fruits, cranberries, blueberries, apples, or local honey as alternative sweeteners. Play the local and natural card rather than relying on artificial sweeteners, which raise concerns. These ingredients tell a story, create an emotional connection, and justify a premium positioning.
- **Gradually reduce sugar and create consistent product lines:** Gradually reduce sugar in existing products to allow consumers' palates to adjust without shock. Develop "reduced-sugar" lines that remain consistent in taste with the original versions, rather than very different diet products that disappoint. The transition must be smooth, not abrupt.
- **Develop recipes that combine pleasure and satiety:** Compensate for the reduction in sugar with more fiber, more protein, and high-quality fats. Create a rich sensory experience through texture, complex flavours, and a lasting feeling of fullness. Pleasure does not come from sugar alone, but from the overall experience.
- **Communicate with transparency and simplicity:** Clearly state the grams of added sugars on the packaging. Explain the origin of the sugars used and why these choices were made. Highlight the progress made in reducing sugar over time. But avoid guilt-inducing rhetoric that makes consumers uncomfortable and alienates them.

By approaching sugar from a "better" rather than a "zero at all costs" perspective, Canadian processors can meet a very strong demand for more responsible sweet treats. This approach preserves the crucial emotional and social role that sweet foods play in consumers' daily lives, providing them with moments of celebration, comfort, and sharing. Sugar is part of life; it's not about eliminating it, but rethinking it, moving from a quantitative obsession to a qualitative focus. Evolving from "less sweet" to "better sweet" makes all the difference.

References

Page 4 - “Kitchen Couture” Packaging

1. Worldmetrics (2025)
Customer experience in the food packaging industry — Private Study

2. Ipsos (2018)
Most Americans Say That the Design of a Product’s Packaging Often Influences Their Purchase Decisions — Read here

Page 5 - The Spicy Explosion: The Marriage of Sweet and Spicy

3. The New York Times (2022)
How Will Americans Eat in 2022? The Food Forecasters Speak — Read here

4. Datassential
Cited in an article by Simplot (2025) — Read here

Page 8 - From Field to Plate in One Scan

5. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (2023)
Survey on consumer perceptions of food - Wave VI — Read here

6. NielsenIQ
Cited by Blogs Psico Smart — Read here

7. GS1
How Product Data Influences Shoppers — Read here

Page 11 - Hyperlocal: Sourcing Locally as a Competitive Advantage

8. PwC (2025)
PwC Canada’s ‘Voice of the Consumer’ Report — Read here

Page 12 - Hyperlocal: Sourcing Locally as a Competitive Advantage

9. Léger (2025)
Post-campaign study, may 2025 Read here

Page 15 - Freezer Fine Dining

10. Research and markets (2025)
North America Frozen Food Market Report by Product Type, Category, Distribution Channel, Countries and Company Analysis, 2025-2033 Read here

Page 17 - Fibre Frenzy

11. Léger (2025)
The Gut Reset: Gut Health is Becoming the New Wellness Standard Read here

12. ASN (American Society for Nutrition) (2021)
Most Americans are not getting enough fiber in our diets Read here

13. Nextin (2025)
Food Trends: Insights Report, Charts, & Data Package Read here

Page 18 – Fibre Frenzy

14. Mintel (2025)
The Rise of Fiber: How Brands Can Win with the Next 'Must-Have' Nutrient Read here

Page 20 – Private Label Evolution

15. EY (2025)
Canadian consumers driving major shift toward private labels: EY Canada Read here

16. NielsenIQ (2025)
Key Grocery Trends for 2025 Read here

17. Numerator (2025)
Private Label's Next Power Players: Gen Z Read here

Page 21 - Private Label Evolution

18. Circana (2025)
From Growth to Transformation: A Global Private Label Perspective — Read here

Page 26 - Sustainable & Circular Packaging

19. TOMRA
PPWR: The EU Packaging Waste Regulation — Read here

20. RECYC-QUÉBEC
Responsabilité élargie des producteurs — Read here

Page 27 - Sensory & Textural Innovation

21. ITEGA
Guide Pratique : L'emballage alimentaire écoconçu au Québec — Read here

22. TAPPI
2025 Trend Tracker Reveals Consumer Preferences For Packaging — Read here

23. Towards Packaging
Sustainable Packaging Market Size and Segments Outlook (2026–2035) — Read here

Page 34 - Convenience Premium: From Fast-Food to Fast-Good

24. Statista (2025)
Ready-to-Eat Meals - Canada — Read here

25. Whole Foods Market
Whole Foods Market Forecasts the Top Food and Beverage Trends for 2026 — Read here

Page 35 - Convenience Premium: From Fast-Food to Fast-Good

26. Stanford University, SIEPR (2025)
Working from Home in 2025: Five Key Facts — Read here

Page 37 - Mindful Sweetness & Natural Sugar Reduction

27. Frontiers (2021)
Global, regional, and national burden of type 2 diabetes mellitus caused by high BMI from 1990 to 2021, and forecasts to 2045: analysis from the global burden of disease study 2021 — Read here

28. Ingredion (2025)
Solutions for reduced-sugar products: Meeting consumer trends at scale — Read here

Page 38 - Mindful Sweetness & Natural Sugar Reduction

29. Food in Canada (2025)
Rising demand for sugar reduction: Opportunities and obstacles for the industry — Read here

30. Bakery & Snacks (2025)
Ozempic nation: Why GLP-1s are forcing bakers and snack makers to rethink everything — Read here

The information presented in this article is based on sources available at the time of writing and may change over time.

BRAQUE