Intense Market

Europe's Taste for Sweeteners

Increasing consumer demand for low-fat foods is encouraging food manufacturers to use products that provide sweetness without the extra calories of sugar. At the same time, soaring obesity rates and the increasing number of diabetics are creating opportunities for food and beverage manufacturers to expand the number of products that contain sugar substitutes.

Global consulting company Frost & Sullivan has valued the European intense sweetener market at $221.8 million in 2005 and estimates it will reach $362.4 million in 2012. Consumers are becoming increasingly concerned with health issues, such as weight gain, and this has led to the development of a wide range of low-fat products in the market. Although taste has been compromised in the past, consumers today are unwilling to accept low-fat foods with an unsatisfactory sensory profile. "Some intense sweeteners such as Neohesperidine DC and thaumatin are used for their flavoring properties, as they are capable of improving the overall flavor profile," notes Kaye Cheung, Frost & Sullivan research analyst. "Strong projected growth in low-fat and low-sugar foods and beverages market will continue to drive the expansion of the total European intense sweeteners market."
The rapid upsurge in diabetes across Europe will also drive demand for intense sweeteners. Diabetes is the fourth leading cause of death in Europe, and according to the International Diabetes Federation, the number of diabetics across the globe is anticipated to rise from the current figure of 230 million to 350 million by 2025. "Sweeteners have played an important role in providing diabetics with a safe alternative to sugar," explains Cheung. "With the escalating rates of obesity continuing and the growing number of diabetics, opportunities are emerging for food and beverage manufacturers to increase the availability of sugar-free products sweetened with sugar substitutes."
However, the mass media has focused on the potential cancer risks of intense sweeteners. Such reports covering "first-generation" sweeteners such as saccharin, cyclamate and aspartame, as well as "new generation" sweeteners such as acesulfame-K and sucralose, have resulted in consumer skepticism. "Investment in credible scientific validation studies will help build consumers' confidence in the use of intense sweeteners and limit criticisms from the media," advises Cheung.

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