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Healthy snacking: a breakthrough crunchy protein crisp

Consumers love breakfast cereals, tortilla chips and a host of other crunchable snacks – but they don't always love the carbs that come with them. With the global appetite for more protein in our diets increasing, Glanbia's customers are ready for a crunchy, crispy ingredient based on protein rather than starch.

"We first saw the better-for-you trend with the protein bar," says Eleanor Miller, product strategic manager at [Glanbia Nutritionals](#). "Consumers were searching for a healthier option to a candy bar. Now, consumers want better-for-you salty snacks and cereals – they have the same expectations around taste and texture but they want added benefits too."

Thanks to its deep expertise with protein and added insights from two recent acquisitions, PacMoore and Foodarom, Glanbia Nutritionals conquered the technical challenges and created Crunchie™ semi-finished extruded pieces – a range of protein pieces that are low in carbs and have exceptional starch-like textures.

Application and flavour scientists continue to collaborate in the lab, helping customers develop new products using proprietary ingredients including Crunchie crisps, bites, loops, puffs and curls at the Glanbia Innovation & Collaboration Centre in Twin Falls, Idaho.

"It's exciting to play in this space and be able to offer something really excellent to our customers," Eleanor says. "And through our recent acquisitions, they get additional tailored knowledge, working together."

When it comes to the crunch, taste is everything

Crunchie semi-finished extruded pieces can be made from both milk and pea protein, and provide a great base for building a phenomenal snack. Spicy Dill Pickle Protein Puffs, Chocolate Brownie Plant-based Cereal and Peazza Pizza Plant-based Protein Curls? These are just some of the sweet and savoury prototypes the team has developed to show ingredient customers what's possible.

They're fun too. "There's a kids' cereal prototype called Tiger's Blood made with Crunchie Milk Protein Bites based on a coconut, watermelon and strawberry snow cone flavour popular on the West Coast of the US," Eleanor says. "And one of our low-sugar, dessert-like snack prototypes – Birthday Cake Milk Protein Bites – is sprinkled with EdiSparklz® edible glitter, is a good source of calcium and has a ton of Instagrammable visual appeal."

Boosting Glanbia's power to innovate

[Glanbia Nutritionals specialises in altering protein chemistry](#). Adding best-in-class processing and extrusion capability to the organisation helped with the development of protein with more starch-like characteristics and the technical challenges of puffing it up into various shapes.

Milk protein has a clean flavour, but pea protein, like other plant-based proteins, can be trickier to flavour, so the expertise of Foodarom, which Glanbia acquired in 2020, was key to creating great taste combinations that consumers would love.

"Our team at Foodarom call themselves flavour designers and I think that's an accurate way of describing it," Eleanor says. "They help us make products taste amazing so that our customers have really enticing offerings for their consumers."

Working alongside the customer in the lab

Eleanor explains the process: "Some customers will say exactly what they want and we do our best to match that.

"Others will say 'I want to launch a cereal,' and might need a little more direction and we use the prototypes library as a starting point.

"Working at the bench with our application and flavour scientists is helpful for our clients. They learn the vocabulary to describe what they're looking for," she says.

"We try to match the customer's own personal perception of what a flavour profile should be with the sweetness or the salt level that they want. They might say something like: 'I want banana bread, but I want it to be like my mom's banana bread, not banana bread from the store!'"

Speeding up the innovation process

Working alongside a customer for a day or two in the lab the team can produce 20 iterations of a product and finalise four or five formulas, saving months of back and forth.

And having both flavour designers and application together in-house means Glanbia is more aligned to flavour trends. "We're already having conversations with customers now about flavours for next year," says Eleanor.

The Crunchie product showcases how Glanbia Nutritionals is [helping its customers create game-changing products](#) and how the business as a whole is satisfying consumer desire for fun, protein-rich, healthy snacks.

"It's an interesting process," Eleanor says, "and surprising too. I'm not sure many people realise just how much of the development work for brands that you see on the shelf happens with a formulation and ingredients partner like Glanbia Nutritionals."

"That's the best part of the job, when you see all the teamwork that goes into it," she says. "We're united around the same core value of being the customer champion. It's great to be part of that."

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