



# Cleaning Up The Beverage Aisle

“Clean label” is the buzzword of the moment in the food and beverage industry. While it’s often associated with simplified ingredient statements, creating a label-friendly beverage is anything but simple. Part of the challenge is there’s no single definition of clean label, and no regulatory guidelines for what comprises a “clean” product.

## Sweet and Natural

While a clear definition has yet to emerge, for many consumers embracing clean-label products, less is more. That’s especially true when it comes to added sugars. A number of factors, including changing consumer attitudes about sweeteners, global regulations and taxation on beverage sugar content and upcoming changes to the U.S. nutrition facts panel, are placing growing pressure on formulators to keep sugar levels in check. Making the task even more difficult, consumers are increasingly wary of artificial sweeteners. Fortunately, a new group of plant-sourced, high-intensity sweeteners is taking hold, with stevia emerging as the rising star – especially in beverage formulations.

Historically, sugar reductions with high-intensity sweeteners were limited by the quality of sweetness or the presence of aftertastes. Cargill’s ViaTech® stevia portfolio changed that paradigm. Designed to provide significant improvements in sweetness quality compared to traditional stevia leaf extracts, ViaTech® stevia sweeteners enable deeper levels of sugar reduction, without the need for flavor maskers. Equally important, consumers know and trust stevia leaf extract, making it a label-friendly sweetener choice.

Case in point, Cargill developed a 50 percent reduced-sugar sweet tea using ViaTech®, which consumers found indistinguishable from its full-sugar counterpart. Yet it still lived up to today’s clean label demands. On package, the only change was the addition of stevia

leaf extract in the ingredient declaration. It needed no additional flavor modulators or artificial flavors to meet consumers’ taste expectations.

## Simply Functional

Finding the right sweetener combination is only part of the clean-label equation. Consumers are scrutinizing every part of the ingredient statement. The result: some tried-and-true beverage stabilizers and texturants have fallen out of favor. Depending on the consumer target, beverage developers may choose to avoid options like carrageenan, modified food starches and carboxymethyl cellulose (CMC). For formulators charged with maintaining mouthfeel, texture and stability, losing these tools can be a real blow.

Fortunately, Cargill can help replace these ingredients with label-friendly options. Cargill’s portfolio includes pectin, citrus fiber and locust bean gum, plant-based solutions that look good on a label and also function well in the final product. Cargill can even identify and source ingredients that enable desirable claims – including non-GMO and organic – and develop Custom Texturizing Systems.

The company also offers proprietary technology based on tribology to help speed beverage product development. Consider the challenge presented with reduced-sugar beverages. Taste isn’t the only issue when cutting sugar content, texture is often altered as well. Using this advanced technology, Cargill developed

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the Trilisse™ QMF hydrocolloids system, specifically designed to optimize and improve mouthfeel in reduced-sugar beverages.

In similar fashion, the company has developed customizable, label-friendly solutions for a wide array of beverage categories. For pH neutral protein beverages, including dairy-, soy-, almond- and coconut-based products, Vitex™ stabilizer systems improve creaminess, body and viscosity, while controlling phase separation during shelf life. With options based on just corn starch and pectin, Vitex™ systems also stand up to today's clean-label demands.

Protein beverages that bring juice and dairy together are another growing market segment. In these acidic pH, smoothie-style beverages, protein precipitates out of solution, resulting in a chalky taste. To stabilize proteins in this pH environment, Cargill offers pectin, which coats the surface of the protein, preventing sedimentation problems.

## Health Benefit Focus

This product portfolio enables Cargill scientists to help solve an array of ingredient replacement challenges. However, some consumers want more. For them, “clean label” is really about choosing products that they perceive to be healthful. To be sure, they're looking for product labels with fewer, simpler ingredients and less sugar – but they also want something with a tangible health benefit, be that protein, fiber or some other added benefit.

While protein continues to hold center stage, interest in other health benefits is on the rise. Cargill's Oliggo-Fiber® chicory root fiber is a prime example. It's a soluble, invisible fiber, making it a natural choice for beverages. Among its health benefits, chicory root fiber is a prebiotic fiber that supports digestive health and enhances dietary calcium absorption.

It also provides key functional properties, especially valuable in reduced-sugar applications. Mildly sweet in its own right, chicory root fiber can help modulate the flavor of some high-intensity sweeteners. Additionally, it acts as a bulking agent when removing sugar from a formulation.

Best of all, chicory root fiber fits with today's clean-label trends. Oliggo-Fiber®, which may appear on ingredient statements as chicory root fiber, offers a label-friendly, non-GMO option to promote digestive health.

## Partnering for Solutions

Today's clean-label trends often center on three simple words: replace, reduce or enhance. Replace chemical-sounding ingredients with simpler, easier-to-understand options, reduce the number of ingredients (or in the case of sugar, the amount) and enhance products with beneficial ingredients like protein or fiber. Of course, as any experienced beverage formulator will admit, there's nothing simple about it.

**Balancing consumer wants with functional realities requires an experienced partner. With Cargill, customers gain access to beverage application specialists who have extensive experience delivering tailored solutions that meet consumers' expectations. Creating label-friendly beverages may not be easy, but consumers stand ready to reward those beverage makers who accept the challenge.**