

UNLOCKING FLAVOR

Katie Beaver, Flavorist

When it comes to a successful packaged food or drink product, flavor is essential. Those that support product development are most often familiar with flavor as an ingredient and understand its role and benefits in product formulation. From delivering consistent, desirable taste to extending shelf life, flavor is an important piece in a developer's toolbox. However, being able to confidently speak about flavor to peers further away from product formulation or those new to the industry may be a challenge.

Flavor University® is our organization's customer education program, designed to help the food industry better work with flavor. Katie Beaver, Flavorist and Flavor University® faculty member, explains how she teaches the ins and outs of flavor.



“ I am passionate about creating flavors and enjoy introducing others to the world of flavor. Whether it is in a conversation with a customer or speaking at a Flavor 101 course, it is fun to educate others on how flavor plays a role (and often takes the stage) in food and beverage products. ”



Q. How do you explain flavor to someone new to the term?

A. I always like to start with references they can relate to, whether it's the flavor of their favorite candy, baking cookies with family or the memory of a holiday meal. This reminds them not only how much our memories, experiences, and preferences guide what we eat personally, but also the types of products that we see out on the market.

I then explain how flavor is linked to the unique identity of food products. The use of flavor in product formulation offers consistency in the manufacturing process and helps ensure the final product has the taste that we all know and love every time we purchase.

Q. How do you “demystify” any negative perceptions of flavor?

A. Most people have some familiarity with the idea that their food contains flavors, but there is often a negative perception of chemicals that are both hidden within the “natural flavor” label as well as those that are listed on ingredient statements. Since chemicals can have a negative association, I try to use different terms like raw materials, ingredients, or molecules driving the idea that the natural world is made up of the same materials we use in our flavors.

It feels like a personal triumph to see the shift in perception as people make the realization that flavors and the materials within them are not inherently bad and are found in and often isolated from the food source themselves.

VOICE OF THE EXPERT:

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Q. Since flavor preferences can be personal, how do you speak objectively when developing a new flavor?

A. With the help of Sensory Science, we can understand the flavor and sensorial aspects of a product through descriptive analysis. This analysis is used to compare flavors and identify the profile of a target product. With it comes taste evaluations and a whole new flavor language to learn, which can be intimidating. I know when I first began my training, I often struggled with choosing the correct terms when participating in tastings.

Tasting and utilizing a dictionary of descriptors is an acquired skill; however, those new to working with flavor can learn from a common lexicon shared by their peers. Many companies and industries have developed lexicons that offer standard references when discussing the taste attributes of specific food and drink products. Check out the vanilla flavor lexicon we use at McCormick. Connecting typical flavor descriptors with familiar foods, experiences and everyday items can help anyone learn to speak our language.

Q. What is key to understand about flavor perception?

A. It is important to understand that humans are complex and thus the flavor perception of food and beverages is equally complex. The way we “taste” is multisensorial. We can use all our senses when we eat and ultimately identify the flavor of a product.

While this concept guides Flavorists every day, it can still be difficult to grasp. Therefore, it is important to experience a flavor in application and understand the context of the full eating or drinking experience. Your partners in sensory can be vital in uncovering how your target consumer will respond to a flavor in that full context.

Ready to learn more about flavor?

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Vanilla Flavor Lexicon

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