# REFORMULATING THE 'FREE-FROM' PROPOSITION
## From Personal Needs to Lifestyle Choices

The definition of 'free-from' is evolving holistically from the initial focus around prevention to consumers taking a more proactive view, and although still considered a niche market, brands are developing product associations that speak to a broader market. In 2020 alone, 'free-from' products accounted for 37% of European launches according to *Mintel GNPD* data, showing growth of 8% from 2016.

Claims on food and non-food items are becoming widely available in retail stores with 'free-from' labelling being one of them. A shift was noted in 2021 in the UK's mainstream status of 'free-from' with 52% of consumers reporting avoidance of some foods or ingredients in their household, peaking at 63% in under-25's.

**Global View | B-Well, One World & Lifestyle Choices**

In terms of the FMCG space 'free-from' products partner two key trends of the Daymon **Trendwheel™** - those that don't contain certain ingredients answering to the B-Well health drive and those that are free of undesirable practices around the One World way of thinking as consumers relate to the impact, they have on the world around them.

The **B-Well** concept is a key megatrend defining consumers who take a more pro-active, holistic approach to their well-being. They consciously search for products that are good for them, taking a more considered approach to eliminating undesirable ingredients from their diets. Termed 'de-junking', this trend is influencing the preventative 'free-from' approach where particular attention is paid to product formulation, avoiding allergens and the removal or reduction of as much fat, salt, and sugar consumption as possible. At the same time selecting products that incorporate more protein, fibre, vitamins, and minerals. In response, *Waitrose* in the UK introduced *Gut Health* a holistic range of drinks carrying a certified health claim and *Coop Italy's Rolled Pancetta* comes from animals raised without using antibiotics. *Capri-Sun* introduced BPA-free pouches and *ECOVER Zero* now offer a chlorine-free biodegradable bleach.

For 57% of European consumers, health means a balanced diet with the UK government announcing as from April 2022 that promotions on foods high in fat, salt, and sugar (HFSS) will be restricted.

Further, according to a *GlobalData* survey 38% of consumers world-wide are trying to reduce their consumption of gluten, with the *Celiac Disease Foundation* reporting that only 1,4% of the world's population has a gluten intolerance (based on a blood test). Product choice is not purely based on a health condition anymore but instead is seen more as a preventative measure to avoid allergens and improve overall well-being.

As behavioural patterns shift consumers are gradually re-prioritising their purchasing habits to spend money on products that share their beliefs as the 'eco citizen' trend is on the rise where consumption is all about conscious choices and a **One World** partnership with the planet. These shoppers are aware of the link between environmental, social, and personal well-being. From ‘free-from’ pesticides, microplastics and other ingredients or behaviours that may harm the planet and the consumer, to manufacturing practices such as labour, equal wages, and animal welfare. For example, *Garnier’s* leaping bunny logo indicates cruelty-free manufacturing processes and ethical chocolate brand *Tony’s Chocolonely* is pioneering a fair-trade cocoa industry. Earlier this year *Lidl* became the first discount retail chain to launch *Way to Go!,* a Private Brand chocolate bar that supports workers and local communities by increasing wages and promoting diversification – doing a world of good for famers in Ghana.

The concept of ‘free-from’ is therefore extending beyond personal needs to include **lifestyle choices** around this connection that consumers have with the world around them. The idea of being held responsible for the planet is driving new ‘free-from’ production expansion as consumers want to know not only what ingredients are in a product, but also how they were made. For example, Portugal’s *Continente’s MyLabel* have removed microplastics from more than 300 of their cosmetic products.

**Regional View | Middle East & Africa**

Looking further afield in the global marketplace, 77% of consumers in the Middle East prefer to buy food ‘free-from’ artificial colouring and preservatives while 22% of consumers in the Middle East and Africa believe that gluten has a negative impact on their health. 39% of consumers in this region, as reported in a *GlobalData* survey, are actively trying to reduce their consumption of sugar as 1 in 8 adults have diabetes with the figure expected to double by 2045. This has pushed their respective governments to introduce more intense, broader policies and preventative measures to reduce the consumption of unhealthy goods and modify consumer behaviour. Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Oman now have sugar taxes on soft drinks and energy drinks – with 55% of respondents in a *YouGov Omnibus* survey voicing their support of this new measure to fight obesity and diabetes.

**MOVING FORWARD**

‘Free-from’ is clearly becoming increasingly relevant as consumers attempt to avoid ingredients or substances, they believe are harmful. In the Middle East and Africa, 56% of consumers ‘somewhat’ or ‘completely agree’ that they prefer to see simple or fewer ingredients on packaging. Private Brands focusing on these simpler credentials along with innovative product development and the related value-for-money these rangers offer, will provide significant differentiation for retailers.

**‘Free-From’ Credentials**

With ‘free-from’ foods shifting mainstream, consumers are demanding higher levels of transparency from retailers and brands. By conveying simple, easily understandable ‘free-from’ credentials, consumers will be able to make buying decisions that are aligned with their health needs, their lifestyles, their beliefs, and values.

**Product Development**

As we come to understand the deeper relevance of food intolerances, retailers and brands should create food and drink alternatives that address this need without sacrificing taste, texture, or quality. Furthermore, to reach a wider audience 'free-from' products should no longer exclusively target food intolerance groups but partner B-Well and One World practices and accommodate lifestyle choices.

**Private Brand**

Retailers should use their Private Brand ranges to encourage more savvy consumption patterns and strengthen the value for money image of their 'free-from' products. More cautious spending patterns will present an opportunity for Private Brands if retailers can guarantee and communicate better value for these ranges, resulting in a stronger differentiation factor.

---