food & beverage REPORTER

January 2026

VEGANUARY & THE FUTURE OF VEGAN FOOD

ROBOTIC PRODUCTION
where hygiene matters most

INGREDIENT INNOVATION
as a strategic lever

The trends redefining food and packaging innovation in 2026

From the editor

January 2026 has delivered an unexpected but welcome tailwind for South Africa's food and beverage sector. The Rand's recent strengthening — driven by improved fiscal signals, easing inflationary pressure and renewed global appetite for emerging market assets — is already reshaping the export conversation. A firmer currency reduces imported input costs, supports capital investment planning and creates breathing room for manufacturers navigating margin pressure. For exporters, it sharpens the focus on value, premiumisation and brand strength rather than price alone — a healthy evolution for the industry.

This issue reflects a sector moving with confidence. Woodlands Dairy Group's acquisition of Ladismith Cheese Company and its subsidiaries signal strategic consolidation in dairy, strengthening local supply chains while expanding product depth across UHT, cheese and powders. It is a clear vote of confidence in South African manufacturing capacity and long-term consumer demand.

Our wine coverage underscores similar momentum. Vinimark's expanding international footprint — from Africa and the Middle East to Scandinavia and Canada — demonstrates how South African brands continue to compete globally through innovation, sustainability and storytelling, even amid volatile trade conditions.

We also examine structural shifts shaping demand closer to home. From the maturation of the vegan and plant-based market beyond Veganuary hype, to the explosive growth of online grocery and dark-store logistics, consumer behaviour is redefining how food is produced, packaged and delivered.

Encouragingly, easing load-shedding constraints, early logistics reforms and renewed investment appetite are aligning with these trends. The opportunity now is execution.

As 2026 unfolds, this industry's challenge — and responsibility — is to invest boldly, collaborate across value chains and champion locally made excellence. The fundamentals are improving. Let's use this moment to build scale, resilience and global relevance for South African food and beverage manufacturing.

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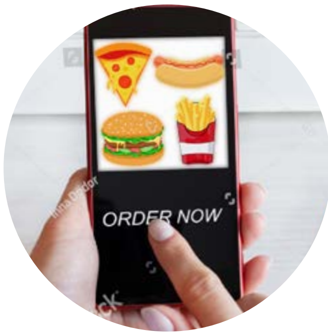

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Air Products makes history with first SANAS accreditation for Cryogenic and CO_2 Flowmeters

Air Products South Africa has achieved a national first by securing Verification and Repair Body accreditation from the South African National Accreditation System (SANAS) for cryogenic and liquid carbon dioxide (CO_2) flowmeters — a milestone that significantly strengthens local metrology capability and regulatory compliance.

The accreditation answers a growing demand for legally traceable measurement in a high-risk, precision-driven sector. It marks a turning point for flowmeter verification and repair in South Africa, ensuring greater confidence, consistency, and compliance across the value chain.

Raising the bar for legal metrology

The rigorous accreditation journey sharpened technical expertise and deepened regulatory understanding, delivering measurable benefits across four key areas:

- Legal traceability
- Reduced fragmentation in verification services
- Improved local capability
- Enhanced technical excellence

Dual accreditation delivers end-to-end capability

According to Gift Nyambe, General Manager: Technical at Air Products South Africa, the accreditation rests on three critical pillars: technical astuteness, legal compliance, and system efficiency.

"This integrated framework enables us to deliver both verification and repair services under a single, compliant solution — directly benefiting customers through accuracy, reliability, and reduced risk," says Nyambe.

The process included master meter approval by the National Regulator for Compulsory Specifications (NRCS), certification by a verification officer, and final accreditation by SANAS.

Compliance that creates commercial advantage

Beyond regulatory alignment, the accreditation delivers tangible commercial value. Improved metering accuracy and traceability reduce the risk of non-compliance, while in-house capability significantly improves turnaround times and cost efficiencies.

"Teamwork and tenacity were critical," Nyambe adds. "From project planning and documentation to audits and system design, metrological rigour was essential. Our systems are fully traceable to certified weighbridge standards and supported by a robust quality management system aligned to SANAS requirements."

Investing in skills and sustainability

The achievement has also strengthened human capital. Newly certified Verification Officers and Repairers now hold nationally recognised qualifications, building sustainable metrology expertise within South Africa.

Nyambe concludes: "Together with our ISO/IEC 17025:2017 accreditation for laboratory testing and calibration, these milestones strategically differentiate Air Products South Africa and reinforce our commitment to superior service and quality."

Commitment to transformation and financial performance sees Tiger Brands achieve Level 1 B-BBEE status

Tiger Brands has achieved Level 1 Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) contributor status for the year that ended 30 September 2025 in accordance with the Amended AgriBEE Sector Codes of Good Practice.

This achievement is the result of a strengthened transformation drive across the business over the past year, driven by collaboration with partners across the Tiger Brands value chain, agile delivery of the turnaround strategy and a strong financial performance.

Notably, the company improved performance against the Ownership, Skills Development and Preferential Procurement elements of the scorecard, while maintaining a solid and long-standing performance on Socio-Economic Development.

"We are very proud to reaffirm our position as an industry leader in transformation. In the last year, Tiger Brands has made swift progress in delivering on its turnaround strategy and unlocking the company's full potential. While delivering a strong set of financial results this past financial year, we also strengthened our continued commitment to drive transformation and contribute to the South African economy," says Joe Ralebepa, Chief Legal and Corporate Affairs Officer, Tiger Brands.

"Core to our strategy is working to make quality food and essential products affordable and available, from the biggest cities to the smallest villages. We do this by partnering with farmers, businesses and customers, uniting the efforts of our people and the power of our value chain to serve the diverse needs of every household and empower and support our communities. These are some of the many ways in which we live our purpose to cultivate and nourish lives, every day and every tomorrow."

Access the Tiger Brands B-BBEE Certificate **here**

Kerry secures long-term agreement to anchor regional innovation hub in Dubai

Kerry has signed a long-term lease agreement with Expo City Dubai to establish a Regional Customer Co-Creation Centre, marking a major step in the company's expansion across the Middle East.

Located within Expo City Dubai — the UAE's first Green Innovation District — the facility will serve as a state-of-the-art hub for research, development, and applications. It will enable closer collaboration with customers, supporting innovation from concept to commercialisation while accelerating the delivery of high-quality, market-ready food and beverage solutions.

"Our partnership with Expo City Dubai is a significant milestone in strengthening Kerry's regional capabilities," says Peter Dillane, President and CEO of Kerry APMEA. "It positions us at the heart of one of the world's most dynamic innovation ecosystems and reinforces our commitment to advancing food and beverage innovation at scale."

Building a Global Ecosystem for Food Innovation

The new centre is designed to elevate co-creation and support the development of sustainable, nutritious, and consumer-led products. It will:

- Connect customers, manufacturers, academia, government, and industry experts
- Showcase Kerry's science-backed portfolio across Taste, Proactive Health, Enzymes, and Food Protection and Preservation
- Enable deeper collaboration to develop solutions tailored to Middle Eastern and global consumer needs

Marjan Faraidooni, Chief of Education and Culture at Expo City Dubai, says Kerry's arrival strengthens the district's mission. "Kerry's expertise in sustainable nutrition is a powerful addition to our growing innovation ecosystem as we work towards a more resilient, decarbonised future."

DF-SA backs government crackdown on illicit alcohol trade

The Drinks Federation of South Africa (DF-SA) has welcomed the Minister of Finance's strong stance against illicit alcohol trade, describing it as a critical step in addressing a growing national crisis.

According to an independent 2025 Euromonitor International study commissioned by DF-SA, illicit alcohol accounted for an estimated 18% of all alcohol sold in South Africa in 2024 — costing the fiscus R16.5 billion in lost tax revenue, up from R6.4 billion in 2017.

A threat to revenue, safety, and jobs

"Every illicit bottle sold undermines legitimate businesses, erodes public revenue, and — in the case of counterfeit alcohol — poses serious health risks," says DF-SA CEO Angela Russell.

The research shows that counterfeit alcohol now represents 31% of the illicit market. Nearly half of surveyed consumers knew someone who became ill after consuming illicit alcohol, while 29% knew someone who died.

A global criminal enterprise

Illicit alcohol is increasingly linked to organised crime. Internationally, the Transnational Alliance to Combat Illicit Trade estimates annual global fiscal losses of US$3.6 billion from illicit alcohol.

"This is not a marginal issue," Russell says. "It is a sophisticated, transnational criminal economy that requires a coordinated national response."

Call for coordinated action

DF-SA is urging a multi-stakeholder strategy involving government, enforcement agencies, industry, retailers, and civil society. The federation has formally invited National Treasury to engage in dedicated dialogue with the alcohol sector.

"Together, we can protect consumers, secure vital tax revenues, and build a fair, sustainable marketplace," Russell concludes.

Fish sidestreams emerge as nutrient powerhouses in sustainable seafood innovation

New research from Finnish seafood technology company Hailia reveals that fish products made from filleting sidestreams — including heads, frames, and fins — contain dramatically higher levels of essential nutrients than traditional fillet products.

According to the data, sidestream-based products can deliver up to 20 times more calcium, five times more marine collagen, double the iron, and ten times more zinc per 100 grams than salmon fillets, alongside elevated levels of vitamin D and omega-3 fats.

Unlocking Hidden Nutrition

The increased bone and cartilage content in sidestream products explains the higher calcium and vitamin D levels — nutrients that work together to improve calcium absorption. Marine collagen content can reach up to 2g per serving, matching levels found in many supplements.

"These raw materials have always been valued in traditional cooking," says Hailia CEO and founder Michaela Lindström. "Our data shows they can now play a far bigger role in delivering everyday nutrition, while reducing waste and maximising the value of every catch."

Addressing Global Nutrition Challenges

Iron deficiency remains the world's most common micronutrient deficiency, particularly affecting women. Hailia's findings show that sidestream-based products contain twice the iron of fillet products, offering a natural way to enhance iron intake through everyday foods.

CTO and co-founder Otto Kaukonen adds: "For years, seafood processing prioritised fillets, even though other parts contain far greater nutritional value. With our technology, sidestreams can become the next naturally nutrient-rich, sustainable superfood."

Woodlands Dairy Group confirms strategic acquisition of Ladismith Cheese Company and subsidiaries

Chairman of Woodlands Dairy Group, Lex Gutsche and Woodlands Dairy Group CEO, Helen McDougall

Woodlands is pleased to announce the acquisition of 100% of Ladismith Cheese Company together with its subsidiaries, Ladismith Powder Company (Pty) Limited and Mooivallei Suiwel (Pty) Limited, from Sea Harvest Group Limited.

As a prominent entity in the dairy sector, Woodlands Dairy Group, comprising Woodlands Dairy and its wholly owned subsidiary Fairfield Dairy (Pty) Limited, specialises in UHT milk, yoghurt, cheese, custard, flavoured milk, and a diverse range of other dairy products. This acquisition represents a significant advancement in the Group's strategic growth trajectory, further solidifying its dedication to the South African dairy industry while enhancing supply chain efficiencies and expanding its consumer offerings.

"This transaction aligns perfectly with our vision to deliver high-quality, sustainable dairy products to a growing market," comments Woodlands Dairy Group CEO Helen McDougall. "By integrating Ladismith's established regional presence and expertise with our extensive network, we are well positioned to provide customers with an enhanced and more specialised product portfolio."

Continued on page 10

About Woodlands Dairy Group

With a 30-year legacy, Woodlands Dairy Group has become one of South Africa's leading manufacturers of UHT milk, prominently marketed under the renowned First Choice brand.

The company also specialises in the processing, production, and packaging of premium dairy products for both its inhouse brand (First Choice), and for house brands supplied to respected South African retailers. Woodlands Dairy Group is deeply committed to sustainability, focusing on reducing its environmental footprint through responsible sourcing, efficient production, and recyclable packaging.

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Chairman of Woodlands Dairy Group, Lex Gutsche, adds that the acquisition of the Ladismith Cheese Company is extremely exciting. “This transaction will expand the Group’s geographical production facility presence, reaching the full breadth of South Africa, bringing us closer to more farmers and customers. I’m also very pleased and indeed proud that this transaction will lead to us becoming the largest wholly South African-owned, 25% Black-empowered dairy in the country - a clear testament to our belief in South Africa and its people.”

The completion of this transaction remains subject to certain conditions and regulatory approvals. Ladismith Cheese Company will continue to operate under its existing brand, benefiting from ongoing support provided by Woodlands Dairy Group’s leadership and expertise.

Sea Harvest Group CEO, Felix Ratheb, says, “In line with the strategic objectives presented to shareholders in early 2025, Sea Harvest intends de-leveraging its balance sheet through the disposal of non-fishing assets, and re-focusing on its seafood businesses. We will utilise the proceeds from the disposal to repay a portion of the long-term debt in our South African operation.”

www.woodlands.co.za

Innovation is reshaping South Africa’s beer industry — from tech to sustainability

South Africa’s beer industry is undergoing a profound transformation, blending centuries-old craft with cutting-edge technology and sustainability-driven thinking.

Across the sector, breweries are adopting advanced tools to improve quality, consistency, and environmental performance. HEINEKEN Beverages’ Sedibeng Brewery in Gauteng reflects this shift, demonstrating how innovation is redefining modern brewing.

Smarter brewing through Ai and data

Artificial intelligence is increasingly embedded in brewing operations. At Sedibeng, predictive software forecasts wort colour and beer turbidity early in the process, helping brewers reduce waste and enhance flavour consistency.

AI-driven mash filtration systems optimise extraction efficiency, while precision yeast measurement tools improve fermentation stability — contributing to consistently high-quality beer.

Digital operations and safer workplaces

The move from manual quality logs to integrated digital systems is improving traceability and speeding up problem resolution across breweries. At Sedibeng, remote drone surveillance adds an extra layer of safety by identifying risks in real time.

Sustainability takes centrestage

Environmental responsibility is now central to brewing strategies. Investments in returnable bottles, reduced plastic packaging, and circular systems are helping cut waste, emissions, and resource use.

Phumlani Zwane

“Innovation is the backbone of a resilient beer industry,” says Charlene Louw, CEO of the Beer Association of South Africa. “The sector is actively investing in future-fit technology, greener production, and better consumer experiences.”

People power the future of brewing

Skills development remains a priority. Traineeship programmes continue to convert learners into full-time employees, ensuring long-term talent development and job creation.

As BrewMaster Phumlani Zwane notes, “Brewing will always be an art — innovation simply allows us to practise that art with greater precision and care for the planet.”

Exploring fresh frontiers for South African wine

Vinimark will continue to explore fresh frontiers for South African wine while adapting to a global market that has become more competitive and more unpredictable. Even as conditions shift, the organisation is going forward with a renewed sense of momentum, ensuring South Africa's wine story continues to resonate beyond the country's borders.

2025 marked an important evolution for Vinimark's international portfolio. Under its dynamic new director De Bruyn Steenkamp and in tandem with Vinimark celebrating its 40th year, it crystallised its position as a wine company that supports brand development and distribution as the team expands its focus beyond export logistics to support a growing portfolio and make its broader expertise and experience available to its brand partners.

Significant new additions to its International portfolio, such as Vilafonté and Kasteelberg, joined established global favourites including Krone, Reyneke, Barista and Robertson Wines. Together, these brands present a clear and compelling view of modern South African wine that blends heritage with innovation and authenticity. In 2026, its international offering is now centered on curiosity, quality and long-term brand building.

Markets opening, relationships deepening

While Vinimark continues to strengthen its already established routes-to-market in preparation for the year ahead, 2025 showed meaningful progress in newer regions.

Africa and the Middle East were especially buoyant, with strong importer engagement, fast-growing hospitality sectors and a rising appetite for premium South African wine.

Industry body Wines of South Africa (WoSA) noted that Africa remains a young, fast-developing market at a fledgling stage, yet full of momentum and untapped potential. Education and training continue to play a vital role, and the enthusiasm from consumers, hospitality groups and wine students is unmistakable. From safari lodges to luxury resorts, curiosity about wine is rising rapidly, and the opportunities are plentiful.

In more traditional markets, the UK remained South Africa's largest and most consistent export destination across the industry. Vinimark also nurtured long-standing partnerships in Europe, from Switzerland to Scandinavia, where interest in organic wine remains strong and Sweden's demand for bag-in-box continues to rise. A highlight in this region was the strong traction gained by Robertson Winery's milestone innovation, the world's first fully recyclable 3L bag in box wine. Developed and manufactured in South Africa, the pack can be recycled in its entirety, offering a genuinely sustainable choice without compromising convenience or quality. South African innovation continued to resonate globally through Reyneke Wines, whose biodynamic and organic practices align naturally with Scandinavia's commitment to eco-driven and ethically produced wines.

Beyond the Western world, Asia offered a mixed but fascinating landscape. China's volatility did not dampen Vinimark's pursuit of opportunity, and Japan's appreciation for premium quality and long-term collaboration remained closely aligned with the company's approach. In North America, evolving tariff discussions in the USA put pressure on lower price points. At the same time, Canada showed renewed interest in wine, influenced by shifting import patterns and changing consumer behaviour.

www.vinimark.co.za

Código 1530 Ultra-Premium Tequila debuts in South Africa

México's ultra-premium Código 1530 tequila has officially launched in South Africa, bringing artisanal craftsmanship and elegance to local shelves. Made from 100% blue Weber agave and aged in Napa Valley Cabernet French white-oak barrels, the range includes Blanco, Rosa, Reposado, and Añejo variants. Celebrated globally with awards for quality and taste, Código 1530 promises a refined experience for tequila enthusiasts, whether sipped neat, on the rocks, or in cocktails. The launch marks a new chapter for South Africa's growing premium spirits market.

Schweppes sparkles again with bold new look and straight drinking flavours

Schweppes, the world's first sparkling drink since 1783, has unveiled a fresh visual identity, the return of its iconic Skittle bottle, and a new trio of straight drinking flavours: Pineapple Coconut, Pomegranate, and Tangerine. Designed for modern social moments, these premium beverages require no mixing, offering full flavour for any occasion. The new cans feature metallic hues of gold, teal, coral, and blush pink alongside the signature saffron ribbon and bold black wordmark, blending heritage with contemporary style. Available nationwide, Schweppes is catering to a generation seeking sophistication, taste, and memorable moments—without compromise."

Oreo introduces a nutty new flavour in South Africa

Indulge in the latest limited-edition treat from the world's favourite cookie, OREO. Introducing new OREO Chocohazelnut, a delightful twist on the classic.

Each bite blends the crunchy cocoa biscuit layers with a smooth, creamy chocolate and hazelnut crème filling. Perfect for snacking, twist-lick-and dunking, or enjoying on the go, these biscuits are a sweet treat to brighten any moment.

"Ensuring we continue to stay playful is at the heart of everything we do as OREO. We're always looking for new ways to excite our fans and what better than a just nutty enough inspired flavour drop," says Simone Van Zyl, Category Lead Biscuits, Mondelēz Southern Africa. " Whether it's introducing new flavours or forging strategic brand partnerships – we want Mzansi to enjoy all the delights we bring to the market."

The 125g packs contain 14 delicious OREO Chocohazelnut flavoured biscuits, which are available from retailers nationwide.

Bernini elevates the sunset aperitivo with "Pop It, Swirl It, Breathe It In"

Bernini, South Africa's only real wine spritzer, has launched a new campaign celebrating slow, intentional living. With a sophisticated new look, the brand invites consumers to savour the sensory ritual of "Pop It, Swirl It, Breathe It In." Enjoy Classic white, Blush rosé, or Mimosa sparkling with real orange juice during sunset aperitivo moments. Bernini's updated flint glass bottle and iconic blue stripe design reinforce its premium, feminine aesthetic while offering a moment to pause, reconnect, and enjoy life beautifully.

Gordon's and BOS launch G&Tea Alcoholic Ice Tea

Gordon's Gin and BOS Tea have joined forces to launch the G&Tea alcoholic ice tea, a low-ABV, non-carbonated drink combining crisp gin botanicals with rooibos tea flavours. The launch event in Johannesburg featured interactive tasting zones, photogenic can lounges, and live performances, reflecting both brands' playful, vibrant energy. Now available nationwide, G&Tea caters to consumers seeking refreshingly unexpected flavours and a new approach to socialising, balancing moderation with enjoyment.

Veganuary and the future of vegan food: A dynamic but complex growth story

In 2026, the global vegan food ecosystem continues to occupy a curious strategic position: growing steadily in market size and technological innovation, yet challenged by questions about its cultural momentum and commercial vibrancy. Veganuary — the annual campaign prompting millions to try vegan living in January — remains a valuable catalyst for trial and awareness, but its long-term impact must be measured in the context of broader consumption and product innovation trends rather than as an isolated fad or decarbonisation drive.

The market today: Growth meets maturation

Recent industry forecasts underscore that vegan and plant-based foods are far from a niche. The global vegan food market is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) near 9–10% over the next decade, with some estimates forecasting expansion from around USD 27–24 billion in 2025–2026 to USD 60–70+ billion by the mid-2030s.

Even broader data that includes cosmetics and personal care projects the total global vegan products market exceeding USD 1.2 trillion by 2035 — a reflection of veganism's reach beyond food alone.

Yet growth is uneven across segments and geographies:

- **Vegan beverages** are among the fastest-growing categories, with forecasts estimating nearly triple expansion over the next decade — driven by plant-based milks, functional drinks with prebiotics/probiotics, and enhanced plant-protein beverages.
- **Ready meals** are also growing, though more modestly (CAGR ~6–7%), as convenience and ready-to-eat plant-based nutrition attracts flexitarians seeking healthful, time-savings options.
- **Plant-based ingredients markets** — including proteins, fibres, emulsifiers, and functional additives — are surging at even higher rates (15%+), signalling innovation upstream in food formulation.

This macro view suggests that vegan food is not contracting — it is maturing: category growth remains strong, but stakeholders must navigate a more sophisticated consumer environment.

Veganuary's role: More than January traffic

Veganuary's influence is easiest to see in consumer behaviour spikes: for example, data from the UK shows around a third of adults plan to buy plant-based products during Veganuary, with many reporting they continue plant-based habits beyond January.

This suggests Veganuary functions less as a fad and more as a trial gateway — drawing mainstream consumers into plant-based categories with lighter commitment, often via familiar formats (e.g., vegan meat substitutes, plant milks).

However, the campaign's ability to sustain long-term behaviour change depends heavily on product quality, accessibility and price once the spotlight moves on. Veganuary can inspire trial, but market stickiness requires year-round relevance.

Category deep dive: Where innovation is driving momentum

To assess where the vegan sector is ripe for reinvention and growth, let's explore key product categories:

1. Beverages: Functional, health-forward and mainstream friendly

The vegan beverages space is rapidly diversifying beyond dairy alternatives into functional and performance-oriented drinks. Plant milks like oat, almond, and soy dominate, but newer formulations — such as prebiotic probiotic drinks, adaptogen-infused refreshments, and protein-fortified plant waters — are attracting wider consumer segments.

This segment's appeal lies in its cross-consumer relevance: lactose-intolerant consumers, wellness seekers, and mainstream drinkers all see value in plant-based drinks that deliver taste, nutrition and perceived health benefits.

2. Ready-to-eat meals and convenience foods

Convenience continues to be a powerful driver in food choice, especially among urban and younger consumers. Plant-based RTE meals — especially frozen formats — are growing steadily.

But this category also highlights where growth can stall: many current offerings lean on simplified product extensions of existing vegan basics, rather than exciting culinary innovation or functional benefit. The next frontier here lies in nutrition optimisation, ethnic flavour profiles and premium ready meals that feel fresh, not reconstituted.

3. Nutraceuticals, functional foods and ingredients

Here lies arguably the most exhilarating growth potential. The plant-based ingredients market — including probiotics, functional fibres, mycoproteins, and precision-fermented components — is expanding rapidly.

The inclusion of functional ingredients that deliver gut-health, satiety and metabolic benefits — often absent from conventional vegan products — addresses criticisms that vegan diets can be lacking in nutritional completeness.

Fermentation, including precision fermentation and fungal protein technologies (like mycoprotein), is reshaping protein profiles and sensory attributes, narrowing the gap between plant and animal analogues.

4. Beyond protein: Whole foods and fibre

Interestingly, industry bodies now highlight that consumers are looking "beyond protein", pivoting toward whole-food ingredients rich in fibre and micronutrients — a trend supported by interest in gut health and GLP-1 driven satiety narratives.

This shift opens strategic space for legumes, whole grains, seeds and root fibres to play bigger roles. Translating these into convenient formats — high-fibre snack bars, fortified meal bowls or fibre-rich dairy alternatives — represents a clear innovation pathway.

"This macro view suggests that vegan food is not contracting — it is maturing: category growth remains strong, but stakeholders must navigate a more sophisticated consumer environment"

A balanced view: Is vegan stagnating, or transforming?

Despite macro growth, some market observers and consumers describe vegan food as stagnant or less dynamic than in previous boom years. Anecdotal voices online point to shrinking vegan sections or fewer product launches in certain retail environments.

Yet this perception may reflect market normalisation rather than decline: plant-based products are increasingly integrated alongside conventional products rather than segregated, which can make them less visible to enthusiasts while signaling mainstream acceptance.

Moreover, sustained growth depends on practical value — taste, price parity, and nutritional relevance — not advocacy alone. The earliest waves of vegan innovation rode consumer curiosity; the next phase must win on quality and everyday utility.

Strategic implications for food manufacturers and retailers

1. Elevate nutrition and functionality.
Vegan food must move beyond mimicking animal products to offer distinct nutritional advantages that resonate with health goals and dietary shifts.

2. Innovate with ingredients, not just categories.
Manufacturers investing in novel proteins, fermentation technologies, functional fibres and probiotics will shape future value chains.

3. Leverage Veganuary as a launchpad, not a peak.
Use the campaign as a ramp for strategic launches and data-driven consumer acquisition, then sustain engagement via loyalty programs, cross-season marketing and culinary collaborations.

4. Embrace the flexitarian majority.
The fastest-growing segment is not strict vegans but flexitarians seeking better-for-you and better-for-planet options. Align product development with this broader audience.

A future of reinvention, not regression

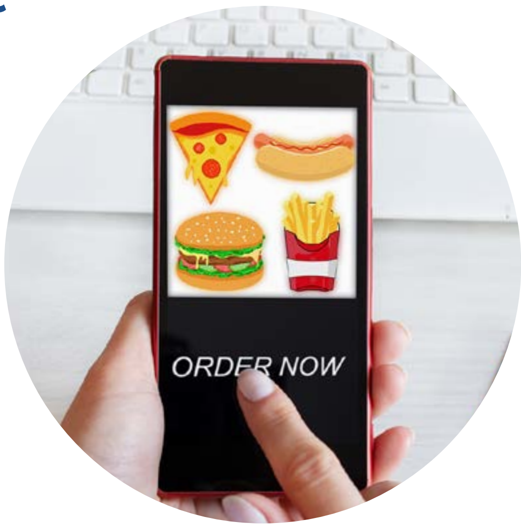
The vegan food sector is not just growing but evolving. Rather than an outright boom or bust, we're in a period of structural maturation — driven by differentiated innovation, consumer health priorities, and sustainability pressures.

Veganuary retains cultural relevance by driving trial and awareness, but its long-term impact will depend on industry's ability to deliver products that are nutritious, delicious, affordable and relevant year-round.

In that sense, the future for vegan food isn't merely about plant-based replication — it's about reinvention, category expansion, and creating food experiences that meet today's multifaceted consumer expectations.

South Africa's growing appetite for online food – and what it means for retailers

If one were looking for an indicator of how much food buying has moved online in South Africa, they could look to the roads. Conservative estimates put the number of delivery bikes moving from store to door each day at more than 50,000, a figure that would have been inconceivable only a few years ago.



As in much of the world, the initial surge, and the exponential growth that followed, began during the pandemic years, when restrictions forced a permanent shift in consumer behaviour. Both large retailers and small, independent stores have had to adapt: on one end, major chains have built dark stores and internalised delivery at scale; on the other, mom-and-pops have increasingly turned to online storefronts and third-party ordering platforms to stay visible and connected to their customers.

For instance, Checkers was among the first major retailers to open a **dark store** – a dedicated warehouse designed solely to fulfil online orders – in 2022 to support its growing on-demand shopping platform, Sixty60. The Shoprite Group now offers **Checkers Sixty60** deliveries from 694 stores across South Africa, up from 539 the previous year, generating R18.9 billion in online sales of groceries, liquor, and general merchandise – a 48 percent increase year on year.

The impact on in-store spending has been considerable.

Absa's latest **Merchant Spend Analytics** shows that online purchases have maintained strong double-digit growth, with their share of total card spending rising from 7% in August 2022 to 11% in August 2025. Food is one of the largest categories within that shift, increasing its share of online spending from 19.8% to 22.5% over the same period. At the same time, online food spend increased by 47% year-on-year in the year through August, compared to just 2% for in-store food spend.

There is clearly a growing appetite for buying food online, much of it centred on convenience – whether through saving time and transport costs by avoiding queues and travel to physical stores, or through the flexibility of shopping anytime, anywhere. That is not to say there are no downsides: delivery fees, inconsistent product availability, and uncertainty over the freshness of items selected by someone else are common concerns. Many of these issues are being addressed as the sector matures, but for now, much of the momentum comes from advances in technology and physical infrastructure.

The applications of artificial intelligence are perhaps among the most significant. The technology is already being used to learn from customers' spending patterns, recognising when certain items are purchased regularly and prompting reorders before they run out. As algorithms improve, they will begin to anticipate broader lifestyle preferences, tailoring product suggestions and even building carts that reflect household and dietary habits. Some systems are also being trained to identify discounts across retailers and recommend combinations that maximise value. In time, AI will connect more seamlessly with smart-home devices, such as fridges and pantries that track consumption, to automatically restock essentials as supplies fall.

> "Checkers was among the first major retailers to open a **dark store** – a dedicated warehouse designed solely to fulfil online orders – in 2022 to support its growing on-demand shopping platform, Sixty60"

The physical systems that move food from warehouse to doorstep are evolving just as quickly. Retailers are investing in moving fulfilment closer to the customer through smaller, strategically located dark stores that enable faster delivery, tighter control of stock, greater flexibility in managing demand, and more efficient use of labour. It is encouraging to see this model extending into townships and areas beyond major urban centres, widening access and improving service reach. This localisation, together with advances in last-mile logistics, is likely to accelerate further in the coming years.

What then does this all mean for retailers?

Those with strong store networks will need to find new ways to drive growth, whether by improving the in-store experience or by blending digital touchpoints into how customers shop. The retailers investing in solid online platforms and smoother delivery systems are already capturing a larger share of spending. Staying competitive now depends less on size and more on how quickly a business can adapt to where and how people choose to buy.

That means allocating capital with greater precision and directing it toward technologies that genuinely enhance how customers shop. Automation, whether for a small retailer or a national chain, is costly, and investment decisions should be guided by clear evidence of customer need rather than novelty. Retailers also need to manage what happens behind the screen, because digital demand only creates value when fulfilment systems can keep pace – when inventory is accurate, deliveries are predictable, service quality is consistent, and payments clear instantly. This shift will also require rethinking working capital cycles to align with a faster rhythm of smaller, more frequent purchases.

Local e-commerce turnover is expected to exceed R130 billion by the end of this year, which is nearly 10% of South Africa's total retail market. The demand for online services is not slowing, and retailers, food or otherwise, will have to move quickly or risk missing out.

www.absa.co.za

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State-of-the-art wine warehouse supports long-term growth

Vergelegen winemaker Luke O'Cuinneagain (left) and managing director Wayne Coetzer (right) toast the opening of the 4 226 m² warehouse.

Vergelegen Wine Estate has announced the completion of its new, purpose-built wine warehouse, a major investment that strengthens the Somerset West estate's long-term operational capacity and reinforces its position as one of South Africa's premium wine producers.

The 4 226m² facility can accommodate over two million bottles of wine, providing substantially expanded storage and creating a centralised hub for distribution, logistics and quality control.

The layout includes an 890m² dedicated tractor facility and a 150m² maintenance workshop, purpose-built to support vineyard operations and improve overall efficiency.

Designed and constructed by NK Construction, the project was delivered in just seven months. In line with Vergelegen's sustainability principles, the building incorporated reused and upcycled materials sourced from the farm and surroundings, including steel and paving.

The location, near the hilltop winery, was selected to minimise any visual or environmental impact. Strategically situated out of sight and sheltered from prevailing winds, the warehouse blends seamlessly into its surroundings among the vineyards and sheltering trees.

Managing director Wayne Coetzer says this investment is the latest demonstration of the estate's ongoing commitment to ensuring world-class wine quality in every bottle.

Vergelegen initiated a significant restoration and development programme after the estate was purchased in 1987. Following intensive soil and climatic tests, new vineyards were planted, and the multi-level, sunken winery was opened in 1992 by Baron Eric de Rothschild of Château Lafite.

The first vintage under this new stewardship was harvested in 1992, and the estate soon gained local and international recognition as a top wine producer.

Owning and controlling its own warehouse is the latest milestone in the strategic enhancement of operations, says Coetzer.

"Having our own warehouse gives us the flexibility to tailor operations to our specific needs, from layout to picking strategies. We have designed the space to suit our workflows, product range, and business model.

"Controlling our own inventory allows real-time stock tracking, reduces shrinkage, and, most importantly, improves service delivery to our customers, enabling faster and more accurate order fulfilment.

"While the initial investment was significant, owning the warehouse will reduce long-term costs by avoiding third-party storage fees and generating revenue through more streamlined operations."

Winemaker Luke O'Cuinneagain added: "The warehouse is a huge step forward for the estate, giving us full control of our production chain and reinforcing our commitment to uncompromising quality."

Minister of Agriculture, John Steenhuizen, commented that the new facility shows confidence in the South African wine industry. "Hot on the heels of CapeWine 2025, the largest wine trade show in the Southern Hemisphere, the new Vergelegen facility sends a signal that South African wine is ready to take its seat at the international table of premium wine producers. "The new facility builds on the tradition of excellent winemaking and intentional balancing of nature and business that has come to typify Vergelegen's approach to achieving excellence in all it undertakes.

"Vergelegen is a unique destination where you not only experience award-winning gardens, wonderful heritage, amazing restaurants and game viewing, but also some of the very best wines on offer in the Cape."

www.vergelegen.co.za

Leading pork producer unveils robotic production line for premium sliced meats

DID YOU KNOW?

Eskort is a 108-year-old proudly South African brand with small-town roots and a national footprint. It has two factories – in Estcourt, KwaZulu-Natal and Heidelberg, Gauteng – and 30 stores to date. Eskort is South Africa's leading antibiotic-free pork manufacturer.

Eskort, South Africa's leading pork producer, has made a multimillion-rand investment in robotic slicing, weighing and packaging machinery for its premium sliced meats range. The new equipment has been installed at Eskort's factory in Heidelberg, Gauteng, and CEO Arnold Prinsloo says it has improved productivity, product presentation and shelf life, as well as reducing energy consumption

Eskort's premium sliced range includes gypsy ham, pork pastrami, sandwich ham, cooked ham as well as sliced gammon. Prinsloo says the line starts with a slicing and check weighing system which measures individual slices and adjusts parameters such as thickness and cutting speed to ensure accurate portions. "This maximises the use of raw materials and ensures consistent product quality," he says.

Slices of meat are assembled into package quantities and conveyorised to a "pick and place" robot that can optimise placement on the packaging line to improve presentation and reduce waste.

"This can all be done without any physical handling of the product by factory staff. The system uses advanced servo drives and innovative technologies such as vacuum grippers to precisely pick and place products in trays.

"The whole system is designed to meet stringent food hygiene requirements, and the robots and grippers are designed for gentle product manipulation, which is crucial for delicate items like sliced foods."

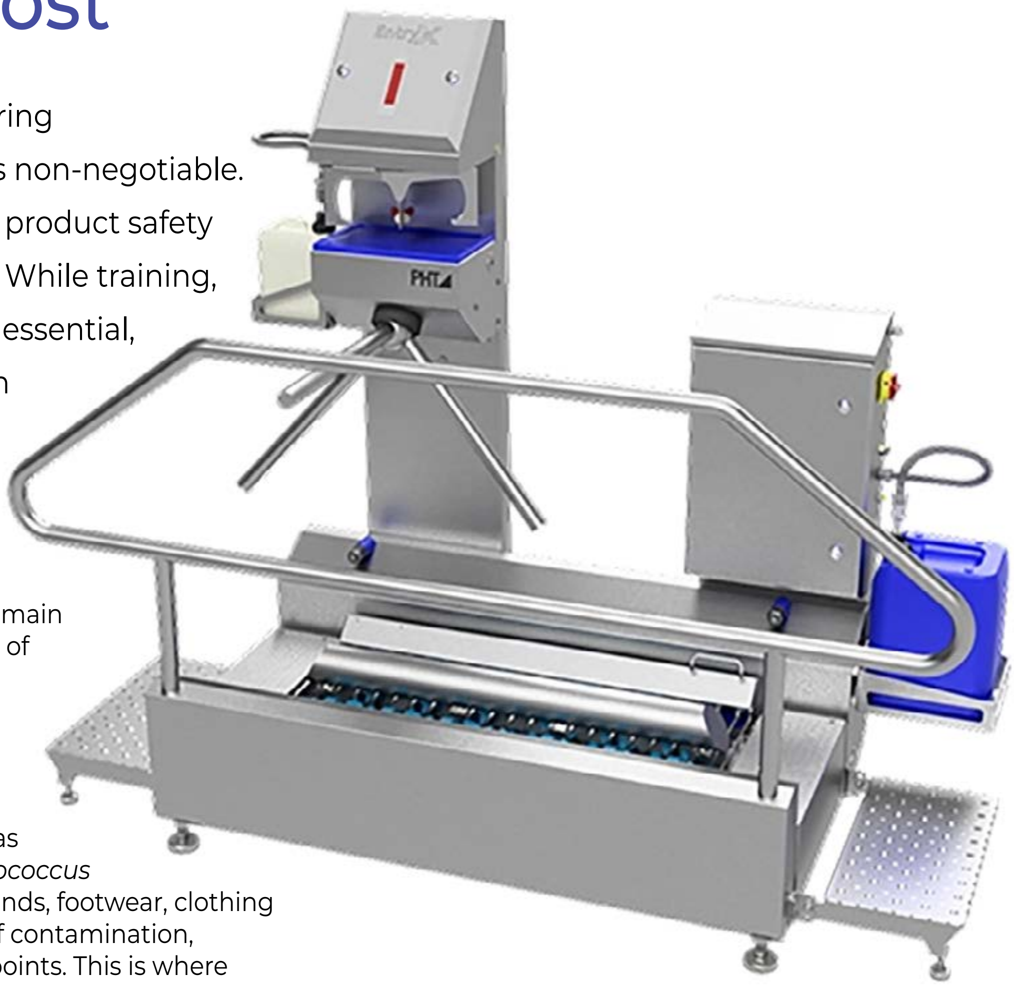
The new sliced meat line has an expected lifespan of 10 years. It is just the latest investment at Eskort's Heidelberg factory, where a 10,000 m² extension that increased production capacity by 50% was launched in February 2024.

The enlarged factory has the largest continuous box freezer in Africa, capable of freezing 120,000 kg of products to minus 18°C every 24 hours. Chilled and frozen warehouses have multi-level picking mezzanine floor systems, the first of their kind in the food industry in South Africa.

www.eskort.co.za

Hygiene automation for the food industry: Control hygiene where it matters most

In today's food manufacturing environment, food safety is non-negotiable. In 2026, the biggest risk to product safety remains the same: people. While training, procedures and audits are essential, they are no longer enough on their own. Consistent food safety now depends on automation.



Personal hygiene failures remain one of the leading causes of contamination in food production. The human body naturally carries millions of microorganisms, and even healthy staff can unknowingly transfer harmful bacteria such as *Salmonella, E. coli* and *Staphylococcus* into hygiene-sensitive areas. Hands, footwear, clothing and hair are the main vectors of contamination, especially at production entry points. This is where food safety automation makes the difference.

From policy to control
South African food manufacturers operate under strict legislation, including the Foodstuffs, Cosmetics and Disinfectants Act (Act 54 of 1972), Regulation R.638 of 2018, HACCP principles, SANS 10049 / ISO 22000, and the Occupational Health and Safety Act (Act 85 of 1993). Environmental Health Practitioners and certification bodies expect more than written procedures – they expect visible, enforceable hygiene control.

Manual hygiene programmes rely on people remembering and choosing to comply. Automated hygiene systems ensure that correct hygiene procedures are followed every time, without exception. Automation removes guesswork, shortcuts and inconsistency from personal hygiene.

Automating hygiene where it matters most
The most effective place to control contamination risk is at the entrance to hygiene-sensitive production areas. Automated hygiene stations manage this critical control point by ensuring staff complete all required hygiene steps before gaining access.

"Poor hygiene does not only lead to failed audits. It can result in product recalls, production stoppages, reputational damage and lost customer trust. In a highly competitive market, these risks are simply too high to ignore"

Automated systems:
- Enforce proper hand washing and hand disinfection
- Clean and disinfect footwear and soles consistently

- Prevent access until hygiene steps are completed
- Reduce cross-contamination at the source

This approach aligns directly with HACCP principles and significantly lowers the risk of contamination before it reaches the production line.

Smart hygiene technology for real-world production

PHT designs and supplies advanced hygiene automation systems developed through years of practical industry experience. These solutions are built for demanding food production environments and are easy to use, maintain and audit.

As production volumes increase and regulatory scrutiny intensifies, automation is becoming the standard for leading food manufacturers

Key solutions include:

- **HeliX hygiene stations** with automated hand disinfection and two-phase sole cleaning technology
- **EntryX access control systems** with smart, temper-proof nozzle positioning to prevent bypassing
- **WashX hand cleaning channels** with sensor-controlled operation and optional remote monitoring

By automating hygiene, these systems reduce reliance on human behaviour and deliver consistent hygiene performance across all shifts.

More than compliance – real business protection

Poor hygiene does not only lead to failed audits. It can result in product recalls, production stoppages, reputational damage and lost customer trust. In a highly competitive market, these risks are simply too high to ignore.

Food safety automation helps manufacturers:

- Protect product quality and consumer safety
- Demonstrate due diligence to regulators and customers
- Improve operational efficiency and staff discipline
- Safeguard brand reputation and business continuity

Automated hygiene systems also send a clear message: food safety is taken seriously at every level of the operation.

The future of food safety is automated

As production volumes increase and regulatory scrutiny intensifies, automation is becoming the standard for leading food manufacturers. Hygiene can no longer depend solely on signs, training and supervision. It must be built into the process.

With intelligent hygiene automation, food safety becomes consistent, measurable and reliable.

PHT delivers complete, automated hygiene solutions designed for South African food manufacturers. From hygiene entrances to staff facilities, we help you control contamination risks before they become costly problems. You can choose food safety automation with PHT.

www.pht.co.za

Ingredient innovation as strategy: A new chapter for South African food makers

Innovation in food ingredients today is no longer incremental — it is strategic. Across the global food system, manufacturers are being challenged to deliver products that are not only healthier and more sustainable, but also superior in taste, texture and overall consumer experience. For South African food companies, this shift presents both opportunities and imperatives: consumers are savvier and more globally exposed than ever, and success increasingly depends on the ability to interpret, adopt and even co-create innovation

In 2025 and early 2026, the world's major ingredient suppliers and solution providers returned to full -flux at leading trade platforms such as IFT FIRST 2025 in Chicago, SupplySide Global and Food Ingredients Europe, showcasing how they're responding with new ingredient technologies and prototypes that reflect the most important food trends shaping the decade.

These solutions — from advanced plant-based proteins and fibre systems to immersive texture labs and natural colour innovations — are mapped back to the four dominant forces driving product development: health & wellness, sustainability, sensory excellence and functional performance.

Redefining plant-based: Innovation beyond animal mimetics

One of the most pronounced narratives emerging from recent trade shows is how plant-based innovation has matured. At IFT FIRST 2025 — a bellwether event attended by food scientists and manufacturers from around the world — the trend was clear: plant-forward

prototypes are evolving from simplistic animal mimics to distinct, functional formulations that deliver nutrition, sensory appeal and simplicity.
Across the exhibition floor, companies presented a spectrum of plant-based concepts. Some showcased next-generation plant protein isolates and blends tailored for taste and functionality; others demonstrated how enzymes and texturants can dramatically improve the mouthfeel of plant-based dairy analogues and cheese alternatives. Several suppliers — from both established players and specialist innovators — demonstrated how high-protein plant beverages and functional staples are being reimagined to address common formulation challenges such as off-notes and textural gaps.

This shift reflects a deeper understanding of what consumers now expect: products that are defined by what they are — not simply by what they replace. Rather than promoting "just another plant-based burger," leading food scientists are showcasing products that embrace texture and sensory integrity, botanical nutrition, quality whether in beverages, snacks or ready meals.

For South African manufacturers, this evolution means moving beyond binary classification (animal vs plant) toward developing differentiated products that resonate with local flavour profiles and global health trends alike.

Health & wellness innovation: From nutrient removal to nutrient function

Health has historically been framed around reduction — less sugar, less fat, less salt. But at trade shows like IFT and SupplySide Global, health innovation is increasingly about functional outcomes and positive benefit delivery.

For example, soluble fibre systems and prebiotic fibres featured heavily in beverage and snack prototypes at recent industry showcases, demonstrating how digestive health, satiety and metabolic balance can be built into products with minimal sensory compromise. Fibre systems now play a dual role: they are nutritional enhancers while also helping to restore structure and mouthfeel when sugar or fat are reduced from formulations.

Additionally, health-driven ingredient activations — such as science-backed systems targeting cellular ageing or chronic inflammation — reflect a growing industry interest in "wellness beyond calories." These solutions were particularly spotlighted at SupplySide Global 2025, where exhibitors framed proactive health support as a central innovation theme.

South African food makers can harness these functional ingredients to position products not just as healthier versions of existing lines, but as holistic wellness foods that address lifestyle needs — from gut health to energy management.

"Health has historically been framed around reduction — less sugar, less fat, less salt. But at trade shows like IFT and SupplySide Global, health innovation is increasingly about functional outcomes and positive benefit delivery"

Texture & sensory innovation: The new competitive frontier

One of the most talked-about launches at IFT FIRST 2025 was the introduction of immersive formulation tools such as interactive Mouthfeel Labs, designed to help manufacturers explore how multidimensional ingredients can elevate texture and eating experience in ways that resonate with consumers.

This trend underscores a fundamental insight: sensory quality is non-negotiable. Ingredient developers are increasingly presenting tools and prototypes that allow R&D teams to quantify, simulate and innovate mouthfeel experiences — from hyper-crunch snack systems to creamy frozen desserts and multi-layered confectionery. Rather than relying on single ingredient substitutions, these systems combine hydrocolloids, fibres, and stabilisers in intelligent ways that help replicate desirable textures while supporting clean label positioning.

For companies operating within price-sensitive markets like South Africa, such sensory innovation — when applied judiciously — can help local products compete with global imports on experience, not just price.

Sustainability & upcycling: Closing the loop in ingredients

At recent global exhibitions, sustainability was more than a buzzword — it was embodied in product innovation and supply chain action. Natural colour systems derived from plant materials, for example, were showcased as alternatives to synthetic dyes

— offering vibrant visual appeal while aligning with consumer demand for transparency and clean ingredients.

The global EXBERRY® range of plant-based colours from GNT illustrates this trend. At SupplySide Global, EXBERRY was showcased as a clean colouring solution capable of replacing artificial alternatives across snacks, beverages, bakery and nutraceutical formats, highlighting both sensory impact and label clarity.

"Upcycling — turning by-products into valuable functional ingredients — is another innovation force gaining momentum. While not yet widespread in mainstream ingredient portfolios, companies are increasingly showcasing prototype concepts that valorise food industry side streams"

Beyond colours, verbalisation of sustainability commitments through ingredient data — such as verified CO_2 footprints for natural solutions — featured at newly developed exhibition platforms emphasising environmental performance and ethical sourcing. Upcycling — turning by-products into valuable functional ingredients — is another innovation force gaining momentum. While not yet widespread in mainstream ingredient portfolios, companies are increasingly showcasing prototype concepts that valorise food industry side streams (e.g., fruit pomace for fibre or botanical extracts), advancing circularity and reducing waste.

In the South African context, upcycling offers a compelling route to local resilience. With abundant agricultural by-products available from fruit, vegetable and grain processing, the ability to integrate upcycled ingredients could reduce input costs and deepen sustainability credentials — an emerging competitive advantage in export markets.

Protein innovation: Beyond the buzzword

Protein remains a headline driver in new product development — but the narrative is evolving from "high protein" as a label claim to protein that performs nutritionally and sensorially.

At global ingredient showcases, plant proteins with improved taste and functional properties were a core theme. Advances showcased included pea, sunflower and fava bean protein isolates developed for superior purity, taste and colour — a response to perennial challenges in plant-based formulations. These developments point toward a future where plant proteins can be adopted more broadly without the sensory trade-offs that once limited their utility.

For South African manufacturers working with both staple foods and premium segments, this advancement matters. Proteins that integrate cleanly into porridges, snacks, ready meals and beverages can help broaden nutrient profiles without relying solely on imported or commodity animal proteins.

Integrated formulation systems: Where health meets experience

Perhaps the most striking outcome of these trade events is how ingredient innovation is becoming integrated, holistic and system-based. Ingredients are no longer single additives; they are formulation enablers that link taste, texture, nutrition and sustainability.

Interactive showcases — such as texture labs or health-driven flavour activations — reinforce the idea that the best innovations are those that solve multiple challenges simultaneously: reducing sugar without compromising taste, increasing fibre without impacting mouthfeel, or enhancing protein levels without adding cost or complexity.

For manufacturers, adopting these integrated systems often requires rethinking development pipelines — involving ingredient partners earlier in the innovation process to co-develop prototypes that deliver on multiple fronts.

Opportunities and strategic takeaways for South African Innovators

South African food manufacturers stand at a unique inflection point. The global ingredient landscape is rich with technologies that address macro-trends such as health, sustainability and sensory excellence — but real value lies in how these technologies are integrated into local production realities.

Key priorities include:

- Active collaboration with ingredient developers early in the R&D cycle, rather than retrofitting solutions during reformulation.
- Experimentation with upcycled and locally sourced botanical raw materials to build circularity into product portfolios.
- Embracing sensory and texture platforms to ensure that healthier or plant-forward products still deliver on experience.
- Leveraging nutrition innovation that aligns with local health priorities — from protein quality to metabolic wellness, rather than simple nutrient tallies.

As the latest global shows have demonstrated, ingredient innovation is now about solving complex consumer problems with elegant, multifunctional solutions. South African food manufacturers who can interpret these global cues while empowering local production will be well-positioned to lead in both domestic and international markets.

Rethinking food waste: From household habit to industry imperative

An estimated 10 million tons of food is wasted annually in South Africa, while food security is a challenge yet to be overcome. This signals a need to address consumer and industry behaviour to adopt sustainable habits and practices that reduce waste, as the environmental impact is significant.

The case for the consumer – a reminder during the indulgence season

This time of year, offers the perfect opportunity to address this, during a season where many throw caution to the wind. During the holiday season, many gather with their loved ones to celebrate the year that was and food is often an integral part of this. As a byproduct of this time of year, overindulgence has become a synonymous behaviour – with over catering as a symptom during gatherings, resulting in food waste.

Currently, a third of our food in South Africa ultimately ends up being disposed of to landfills, where South Africa has a food waste per capita production rate of 210kgs per year. This is food that is produced, but never consumed, and ends up in landfills, including fruits, vegetables and cereals which alone account for 70% of this waste. While this may not seem like a lot, it's important to consider that this is effectively 210kgs of food waste per person, per year. In a country where almost, a quarter of the population is affected by hunger and malnutrition, this level is far too high.

Therefore, we encourage consumers to reduce their food waste by separating their waste by type at home, supporting businesses that compost, and donate leftover food to charities and food distribution programmes. Alternatively, upcycling leftovers into new meals is another method for consumers to play a role in waste reduction.

Confronting food waste is on the national agenda

The South African Government has made a global commitment to halve food waste in the country by 2030. In support of this, new laws have been legislated and regulations are being rolled out, all aimed at cleaning-up South Africa and reducing the negative environmental and health impacts caused by waste.

However, these commitments cannot be reached without innovation in the waste management and food production industries. If companies themselves are not examining ways in which to set a benchmark for deriving better and more sustainable waste management solutions – solutions that focus beyond the landfill model – alternatives will not make the impact that is needed.

Companies in the waste management sector, for example, must examine ways to reduce waste by providing alternative and sustainable solutions to recover or reuse food waste and solutions around composting, anaerobic digestion and bioremediation – can, and should be undertaken. Through anaerobic digestion, food waste can form a fundamental part of the fuel value chain, reduce reliance on coal-powered electricity for smaller entities and ensure a more sustainable model for electricity supply.

However, encouragingly, businesses in retailing and manufacturing, for instance, have launched programmes which assist consumers in becoming more informed about the importance of preserving products and preventing food which is still edible from ending up in landfills. Additionally, several retailers have programmes in place where they donate unbought food before it reaches the expiry date – all worthwhile initiatives and a great starting point. However, understandability, liabilities and limitations are still attached to this approach, as they are only aimed at protecting the end users/consumers – which is why some retailers are still cautious about such programmes.

Food waste no longer fit for human consumption as a circular resource

While we have thoroughly stated the case of food waste, we are yet to explore the avenue of how food waste not suitable for human consumption fits into a broader circular ecosystem. This is a concept Interwaste understands well, providing an integrated, secure, and sustainable processing pathway for food waste and perishable goods that are no longer fit for human consumption and giving them a valuable secondary purpose. This combined solution supports South Africa's food-waste reduction goals (Sustainable Development Goal 12.3) by ensuring that organic material is responsibly diverted from landfill and channelled into beneficial downstream uses.

- **Secure de-packaging of FMCG & consumer goods:** Interwaste manages near-expiry, expired, or unsellable food and beverage products through a controlled de-packaging process that ensures full compliance and brand protection.

- **Alternative, beneficial end uses:** Once the waste is separated, the organic contents are directed to approved agricultural applications, such as animal feed additives, nutrient blends, or other responsible reuse pathways. Additional material streams may also support bioremediation and energy recovery, depending on product type and suitability.
  - **Agricultural applications (Animal feed):** Certain liquid and soft food waste streams are repurposed into approved animal feed additives and agricultural nutrient blends. These can support livestock nutrition, hydration, and energy supplementation — reducing reliance on virgin feedstocks and supporting farming operations.
  - **Anaerobic digestion (Energy & fertiliser recovery):** Suitable organic waste streams are diverted to anaerobic digestion, where they are converted into biogas (renewable energy) and digestate, a nutrient-rich fertiliser that supports soil health and agricultural productivity.

- **Packaging recovery:** All associated packaging – plastics, metals, glass, and cardboard – is sorted and sent for recycling, maximising resource recovery and reducing landfill pressure.

- **Regulatory compliance & traceability:** A full chain-of-custody model ensures products do not re-enter the market, protecting brands while meeting all regulatory and environmental requirements.

- **Contribution to circularity:** By turning unusable food and beverage material into agricultural or recovery inputs, Interwaste helps close the loop on organic waste, supporting national sustainability targets and reducing greenhouse gas emissions linked to landfill disposal.

The fight against food waste requires all hands-on deck, through collaboration from individuals, businesses and policymakers and a shared understanding that everyone plays a role. It is only through consideration that we, as the people in our country (and of the world), will develop a shared interest and a role to play in managing food waste appropriately, from households to industries with circularity in mind and respect food – and only then will then see tangible and sustainable outcomes.

www.interwaste.co.za

Author
Justin Botts, CEO at Interwaste

Siemens brings industrial metaverse to life with Digital Twin Composer

Siemens has announced Digital Twin Composer, a new software solution that builds Industrial Metaverse environments at scale, empowering organisations to apply industrial AI, simulation and real-time physical data to make decisions virtually, at speed and at scale

Siemens has announced Digital Twin Composer, a new software solution that builds Industrial Metaverse environments at scale, empowering organisations to apply industrial AI, simulation and real-time physical data to make decisions virtually, at speed and at scale.

Digital Twin Composer enables industrial companies to combine 2D and 3D digital twin data from Siemens' comprehensive digital twin with physical real-time information in a managed, secure real-time photorealistic visual scene, built using NVIDIA Omniverse libraries. With Digital Twin Composer, companies can rapidly build and maintain this global environment, containing all aspects of their product or production data (both virtual and physical) in a secure, managed high-fidelity 3D experience, throughout the lifecycle of the product, process or facility.

Digital Twin Composer provides contextualised, real-time insights and intelligence enabling companies to visualise, interact with and iterate on any product, process or factory in its real-world context before physical design or construction – whether it's a new smartphone, a tanker in a shipyard, an autonomous electric vehicle, or a new AI factory on a greenfield or brownfield site.

PepsiCo and Siemens are digitally transforming select U.S. manufacturing and warehouse facilities by converting them into high-fidelity 3D digital twins that simulate plant operations and the end-to-end supply chain to establish a performance baseline. Within weeks, teams optimised and validated new configurations to boost capacity and throughput, giving PepsiCo a unified, real-time view of operations with flexibility to integrate AI-driven capabilities over time.

Leveraging Siemens' Digital Twin Composer, NVIDIA Omniverse and computer vision, PepsiCo can now recreate every machine, conveyor, pallet route and operator path with physics-level accuracy, enabling AI agents to simulate, test and refine system changes - identifying up to 90 percent of potential issues before any physical modifications occur. This approach has already delivered a 20% increase in throughput on initial deployment and is driving faster design cycles, nearly 100 percent design validation and 10 to 15% reductions in capital expenditure (Capex) by uncovering hidden capacity and validating investments in a virtual environment.

Many design, engineering and production teams still work independently, each relying on different tools and disconnected data systems. Digital Twin Composer reduces these barriers by unifying design, simulation and operations into one living and contextualised model that empowers engineers to test products, processes and facilities in minutes, validate automation long before hardware exists and operate the real product or facility from one digital twin.

"The new Digital Twin Composer delivers on our vision for the industrial metaverse. It helps manufacturers to overcome the unprecedented challenges of mastering complexity, accelerating production, reducing costs and increasing profitability," said Joe Bohman, executive vice president, PLM Products, Siemens Digital Industries Software. "Siemens and NVIDIA are partnering to help manufacturers bring the most complex products, processes and factories online faster, boost resiliency and sustainability, and continuously optimise performance."

"In an era where every physical object and process will have a digital twin, Siemens' Digital Twin Composer establishes a digital thread that connects the silos of design, engineering, and operations across the Siemens Xcelerator ecosystem," said Rev Lebaredian, vice president of Omniverse and Simulation Technology, NVIDIA. "By integrating NVIDIA Omniverse libraries into Digital Twin Composer, enterprises can take advantage of physically accurate simulation across their workflows to validate their entire lifecycle - from product design to factory logistics - in the virtual world before committing a single atom to the real one."

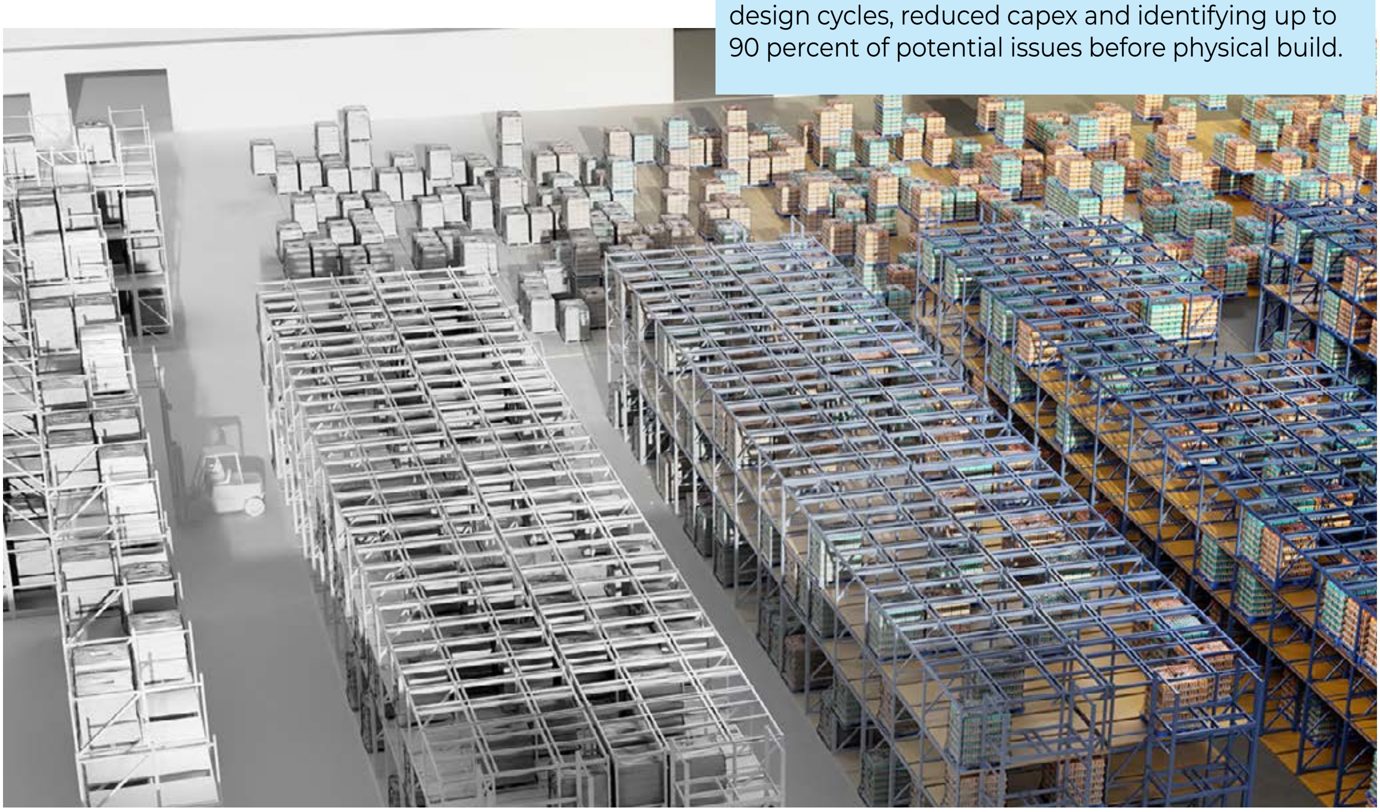
Digital Twin Composer is part of Siemens Xcelerator, an industry proven portfolio of software used by companies worldwide to develop digital twins that empower them to design, simulate and prepare their products, process and factories at speed and scale. Digital Twin Composer is used to connect the high performance, photorealistic and physically accurate 3D digital twin created using Siemens Xcelerator to real-world physical data sources as such manufacturing execution software (MES), quality management systems (QMS), programmable logic controller (PLC) code from a machine or factory asset or industrial internet of things (IIoT) data – from across an open ecosystem of engineering data. Further insights can be realised through integration with Siemens' industry-leading data science and AI software, Rapidminer and other AI solutions to deliver virtual world intelligence and real time insights to make decisions in confidence.

Launched at CES 2026, Siemens' Digital Twin Composer is currently in early access with select customers.

www.siemens.com

Siemens unveils breakthrough industrial metaverse technology, delivering true industrial intelligence, by bringing together physical AI with the power of the most comprehensive digital twin

PepsiCo is digitally transforming select US manufacturing and warehouse facilities with the help of Digital Twin Composer, achieving faster design cycles, reduced capex and identifying up to 90 percent of potential issues before physical build.



GEA builds new large-scale mixing plant for flavor production at Symrise

GEA is constructing a large-scale mixing plant for flavour production for Symrise AG at its main site in Holzminden, Lower Saxony, Germany. Symrise is one of the world's leading suppliers of fragrances and flavours. With GEA's turnkey process technology, the company is increasing its production capacity, enhancing flexibility and meeting the highest requirements for hygiene and material quality. Installation of the plant has been underway since summer 2025, with commissioning planned for spring 2026.

"The production of liquid flavours is one of Symrise's core competencies. The new plant increases our capacity by up to 50% and significantly shortens our delivery times," says Karsten Zota, Factory Manager Liquid Compounding at Symrise. "This makes us more flexible and enables us to better serve growing customer demand."

"The flavours produced – including vanilla extracts, citrus oils, meat flavours, and menthol-based essences – are used both for internal processing and as ingredients supplied to the food and beverage industry"

They appear in a wide range of end products, from yogurt and confectionery to savoury ready meals and beverages.

Challenge: Complex raw materials with specific requirements

Symrise processes a wide variety of raw materials at its Holzminden site – from alcohol-based solutions to viscous syrups. This places high demands on technology and safety. Ethanol-containing products require explosion-proof design (ATEX), while powders pose additional dust explosion risks. Substances such as citrus oils are aggressive to certain materials and require special seals. The viscosity range, from water-like liquids to syrupy consistencies, and temperatures between –20 °C and +80 °C demand precise process control. In addition, strong-smelling menthol blends, kosher recipes, and sweet flavours must remain completely separated. The new plant meets these diverse requirements within a fully integrated concept.

Expanded capacity for flavour production

At the heart of the new building is a spacious mixing area where raw materials from the adjacent tank farm or from containers are transferred to the mixing tanks via vacuum conveying. Powders are added through a dedicated filling nozzle. The homogeneous mixtures are then transferred to cooling tanks for maturation or directly to the filling line. The plant is connected to a cleaning and steaming system.

Energy efficiency and sustainability in process technology

The plant features a heat recovery system for CIP return flows, which reuses part of the process energy and reduces energy consumption per batch. Additional measures, such as water-saving CIP cleaning and optimised insulation, further cut water and energy use. Heat recovery not only improves efficiency but also helps meet environmental regulations, as wastewater is cooled to below 30 °C.

Customised design for complex liquid food processing

The diversity of the flavours processed places equally high demands on process control, material selection, and complete product emptying to minimise losses. GEA developed customised solutions, leveraging the flexibility of its components – such as hygienic seat valves with bellows and sampling valves designed to remove even the last product residues. These solutions were designed in close cooperation with the customer and refined through precise 3D planning to integrate seamlessly into the plant's confined space.

"The viscosity range, from water-like liquids to syrupy consistencies, and temperatures between –20 °C and +80 °C demand precise process control. In addition, strong-smelling menthol blends, kosher recipes, and sweet flavours must remain completely separated"

Technology strengthening market positions

"This project demonstrates how vital customised solutions are for demanding applications," emphasises Dr. Lukas Schnöing, Liquid Food expert and Project Manager at GEA. "Our experience in processing complex liquid products, combined with precise project management and the ability to engineer tailored solutions, made this plant possible."

Thanks to its flexible design, both existing and new formulations can be implemented quickly and efficiently – a decisive advantage when responding to market trends such as natural flavors and clean-label products. The investment marks a strategic step in strengthening Symrise's leading role in the global flavor market.

www.gea.com
www.symrise.com

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Four-year project to deliver food-safe rHDPE for future EU compliancel

ALPLA, the international packaging and recycling specialist, has launched a four-year innovation project with the Netherlands-based technological institute NTCP to develop a scalable solution for food-safe recycled HDPE. The project, based at a pilot plant in Heerenveen, is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Climate Policy and Green Growth and is aligned with the EU's Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) requirements coming into force in 2030.

Using a patented solvent-based recycling process, the collaboration aims to produce food-grade recycled HDPE (rHDPE) at industrial scale for the first time. Following successful laboratory trials, the pilot phase will focus on intensive testing of each process step to support future commercialisation and regulatory approval.

For South African food and beverage manufacturers supplying EU markets, the development is highly relevant. From 2030, EU packaging must include a minimum percentage of recycled content, increasing demand for compliant, food-safe recycled plastics. A reliable supply of EFSA-approved rHDPE could support exporters in meeting sustainability and regulatory requirements without compromising food safety.

The project's objective is to secure European Food Safety Authority approval and scale the technology for industrial use. ALPLA has established a dedicated recycling company in the Netherlands to support this initiative.

www.alpla.com

Propak Cape 2026

The Western Cape Government is advancing an export-led growth strategy focused on job creation, competitiveness and access to global markets. Exports from the province play a central role in economic development, with key destinations including the Netherlands, the United States, the United Kingdom, France and Italy. Agricultural, agro-processing and food and beverage exports underpin this strategy, led by citrus, wine, vegetables, flowers and deciduous fruits.

To support the goal of tripling the value of Western Cape exports by 2035, the province is implementing catalytic initiatives that strengthen supply chains, stimulate innovation and improve market access. Trade exhibitions form part of this approach by connecting producers, processors and technology providers across the South African food and beverage B2B market.

Propak Cape 2026 will support these objectives by bringing together decision-makers from export-focused sectors. The trade exhibition offers suppliers of food processing equipment, packaging machinery, plastics, print, labelling and related technologies direct access to buyers operating in agriculture, agro-processing and food and beverage manufacturing.

Propak Cape 2026 will take place at the Cape Town International Conference Centre from 27 to 29 October 2026, incorporating Pro-Plas Expo, Print Expo, Pro-Label Expo, FoodPro Expo, and the Wine & Olive Oil Production Expo. The event provides a platform for collaboration aligned with Western Cape export-led growth priorities.

www.propakcape.co.za

Expanding Woodlands Dairy High Protein range

Tetra Pak has partnered with Woodlands Dairy to expand the First Choice High Protein range, responding to rising demand in South Africa's protein beverage market. The collaboration brings together Tetra Pak's processing, packaging and market insight expertise with Woodlands Dairy's local manufacturing capability to support category growth in high protein dairy beverages.

The project was initiated through a strategic engagement at Tetra Pak's Customer Innovation Centre in Monte Mor, Brazil. The programme focused on consumer insight development, global protein beverage trends and category analysis, enabling Woodlands Dairy to refine its product positioning and reduce time to market. Brazil was selected due to its maturity as a high protein beverage market, providing relevant benchmarks for South African consumers.

The expanded First Choice High Protein range is packaged in the Tetra Brik® Aseptic 250 ml Edge format and includes High Protein Recovery with 21 g protein and High Protein Max with 27 g protein, both now available through national retailers, First Choice Dairy Shops and Takealot. A third variant, High Protein Balance with 15 g protein, is scheduled for release in February 2026. All products contain no added sugar or preservatives.

With 37% of South African shoppers actively prioritising high protein content, the launch highlights how data-led innovation and aseptic packaging solutions can unlock growth opportunities in the local food and beverage B2B market.

www.tetrapak.com

Surpassing one million bottles sold in South Africa

Robertson Winery has confirmed that more than one million bottles of Robertson Winery Mimosa Sparkling Spritzer have been sold in South Africa during 2025, marking a significant commercial milestone for the local wine-based beverages category.

Launched in November 2024, Robertson Winery Mimosa has gained traction across the South African food and beverage market, particularly within retail, hospitality and on-consumption channels. The product responds to sustained demand for ready-to-drink sparkling wine spritzers that align with changing consumer preferences for convenience, moderated alcohol formats and versatile serving occasions.

According to Ankia Niemann, head of marketing and sales at Robertson Winery, the milestone reflects strong domestic uptake and ongoing confidence in locally produced wine-based innovations. The Mimosa range is positioned for brunch, casual social occasions and informal celebrations, supporting its relevance across multiple sales environments.

Produced using quality wine and fruit flavour profiles, Robertson Winery Mimosa is designed to be served chilled and integrated easily into foodservice and retail offerings. The Robertson Winery Mimosa Orange variant features a ZORK closure, a resealable and recyclable sparkling wine closure that supports freshness retention and operational efficiency.

For distributors, retailers and hospitality operators, the performance of Robertson Winery Mimosa highlights continued growth opportunities within the South African sparkling spritzer and ready-to-drink beverage segment.

www.robertsonwinery.co.za

Trends shaping South Africa's food and beverage industry in 2026

As consumer expectations evolve and food safety remains a pressing issue affecting public health, food security and economic stability, the South African food and beverage (F&B) industry is entering a period of structural change. Manufacturers, processors and brand owners are reassessing how food is produced, packaged and distributed, with resilience, transparency and compliance now central to long-term competitiveness in the local B2B market.

According to the latest Innova Market Insights report, South African consumers are prioritising natural and safe food choices, while also demanding value, sustainability and transparency across the supply chain. These expectations are accelerating investment in advanced food processing technologies, sustainable food packaging and digital food safety systems.

"Food safety is not negotiable," says Wael Khoury, Managing Director of Tetra Pak Southern Africa. "As an industry, we have a duty to protect consumers by investing in systems that are traceable, compliant and sustainable. Packaging and processing are not just about convenience; they are central to delivering safe, high-quality, and responsibly produced food."

Khoury identifies five key trends expected to shape South Africa's food and beverage sector in 2026.

1. Clean-label packaging and transparent processing

Clean-label food trends are gaining momentum in South Africa, driven by growing consumer awareness around ingredients, sourcing and production methods. Manufacturers are responding with transparent processing practices and clean-label packaging that clearly communicates product composition and origin.

Minimalist packaging designs, fewer additives and clear nutritional information are becoming essential for brands seeking to build trust. For food processors, this places greater emphasis on traceability, compliant packaging materials and processing systems that support ingredient integrity from farm to shelf.

2. Functional and plant-based growth requires flexible packaging formats

Demand for plant-based foods, protein-enriched products and functional beverages continues to rise in the South African market. Dairy alternatives, meat substitutes and fortified drinks require processing and packaging solutions that protect texture, flavour and nutritional value while ensuring food safety.

Liquid Board Packaging (LBP) formats provide hygienic, flexible solutions for ready-to-drink beverages, protein shakes and plant-based milks. Innovations such as Tetra Recart, produced from certified paperboard, offer a renewable and recyclable alternative to traditional cans, jars and pouches for shelf-stable foods, supporting both sustainability goals and operational efficiency.

3. Sustainability and convenience are converging

Sustainable food packaging is no longer a differentiator but a baseline expectation. South African consumers increasingly expect packaging that reduces environmental impact without compromising convenience or safety.

Carton packaging is gaining traction due to its renewable material base, lightweight structure and suitability for efficient transport. For manufacturers, cartons support lower carbon footprints while maintaining high food safety standards, making them a practical solution for a market balancing environmental responsibility with cost pressures.

4. ESL and aseptic processing address freshness and energy challenges

Freshness has become a key indicator of quality, closely linked to perceptions of safety and nutrition. In South Africa, where load shedding and infrastructure constraints continue to disrupt cold chains, Extended Shelf Life (ESL) and aseptic processing technologies are becoming critical.

These processing methods protect food from oxygen, light and microorganisms, enabling products to remain safe and nutrient-rich without continuous refrigeration. Aseptic food processing not only improves shelf stability but also strengthens food security by reducing spoilage and reliance on energy-intensive cold storage

5. Digitalisation strengthens food safety and system resilience

Digital transformation is reshaping food manufacturing across South Africa. Automation, real-time sensors and predictive analytics are increasingly used to monitor temperature control, contamination risks and packaging integrity.

Digital food processing systems allow manufacturers to identify deviations early, improve consistency and respond rapidly to potential food safety incidents. This is particularly important in an operating environment prone to supply chain disruptions, where data-driven decision-making enhances resilience and regulatory compliance.

"The packaging and processing innovations shaping 2026 all point to a more resilient and transparent food system," Khoury concludes. "As consumers continue to demand products that are clean, safe and responsibly made, collaboration across the food and beverage value chain will be essential."

www.tetrapak.com

Rethinking sustainable food packaging for freshness, impact and less waste

The Holy Grail of packaging design is to go beyond simply carrying goods – it should solve real-world problems. For fresh produce, this means rethinking everything: from ventilation and stacking strength to recyclability and shelf appeal.

Here we explore the latest innovations in sustainable food packaging, and how corrugated and solid board solutions are helping reduce food waste while meeting retail demands.

Handle with care: why fresh produce demands smarter, more sustainable packaging

Few products are as sensitive and time-critical as fresh produce. From the moment it's harvested, the clock starts ticking. Temperature, humidity, airflow, pressure points – get any of them wrong, and you're looking at spoilage, waste and lost revenue.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation, around 14% of food is lost between harvest and retail globally, much of it due to damage or decay. In the case of fruit and vegetables, that figure climbs even higher – estimated at up to 30% across some categories.

These losses are not just expensive, they're environmentally costly. The UNEP Food Waste Index reports that food loss and waste contribute 7% of global greenhouse gas emissions, while gobbling up 30% of the world's agricultural land and 6% of its freshwater resources.

Put simply: every squashed tomato is more than just a mess, it's a missed opportunity to reduce environmental impact.

What consumers want (and what keeps them up at night)

Consumers today want the complete package: recyclable, compostable, good-looking, easy to carry and 'just enough packaging'. However, according to McKinsey's 2025 consumer survey, the top priorities remain price and quality, no surprises there. When it comes to fresh produce, sustainability suddenly jumps up the list.

Shoppers see fruit and veg as 'natural' products and want packaging that reflects that. In countries like Germany, France and Sweden, consumers place a particularly high emphasis on recyclability and renewable materials. In fact, recyclability ranked #1 across all countries in McKinsey's study when consumers were asked what makes packaging sustainable.

That said, function still trumps form. Food safety, shelf life and product protection remain non-negotiable. In other words, packaging must be both sustainable and high-performing. That's where things get complicated, and where corrugated packaging and solid board start to shine.

Why corrugated and solid board are ideal for fresh produce packaging

Let's be honest, containerboard grades and corrugated board don't usually get everyone's heart racing. But for fresh produce, corrugated and solid board packaging is quietly doing the heavy lifting behind the scenes.

It's strong, lightweight, customisable, and, crucially, made primarily from renewable, recyclable fibre. According to the Journal of Food Engineering, over 90% of exported produce is shipped in corrugated containers, and for good reason.

Here's why these materials are especially well-suited to the fruit and vegetable sector:

1. They let produce breathe

Unlike vacuum-packed bacon or foil-sealed granola, fruit and vegetables are still alive after harvest. They respire, releasing moisture and gases like ethylene, which accelerate ripening. Without proper ventilation, produce sweats, spoils and ends up looking like a long-lost relic from the back of your fridge.

Corrugated and solid board boxes can be engineered with airflow holes to allow:

- Rapid post-harvest cooling
- Consistent airflow during transport
- Ethylene gas circulation or release, depending on ripening needs

Take bananas, for instance. Their boxes are specially designed with vents and hand holes to control ripening and reduce mould. The same applies to berries, which benefit from breathable formats that preserve firmness without sacrificing hygiene.

2. They stack like champions

Ever wondered how peaches arrive intact despite being stacked pallet-high in transit? That's where structural strength comes in. Corrugated board is engineered with crush-resistant flutes and can be reinforced with double-wall flutes or corner supports to absorb shocks and resist compression from the weight above. Like a well-built athlete, strong packaging helps to absorb impacts and protect under pressure.

Take Mondi's TowerTray, for example: its reinforced corners are designed to handle vertical pressure and reduce shifting during transport. This makes it ideal for delicate fruits like peaches, ensuring they're protected even at the bottom of a load. The stackable design also means better use of pallet space, lower transport costs and fewer losses – which we all care about.

Standardised footprints like 600x400 or 400x300 mm ensure compatibility and efficient palletisation across growers, packers and retailers. Stack it high, stack it smart.

3. They look good on the shelf

Packaging isn't just about transport, it's about selling. And visual appeal at the point of sale (POS) is crucial to consumer choice. Corrugated trays and solid board containers can be printed directly with branding, product info or origin stories for added shelf-appeal. They go straight from truck to shelf, reducing restocking time and keeping displays looking tidy.

For consumers, that means fewer plastic bags, less fiddling and a cleaner conscience. For retailers, it means efficiency, visibility and a more premium feel – especially important when positioning seasonal or high-value items. And for producers, it means stronger shelf presence and brand recognition right through to the customer.

Sustainable by design

Packaging often gets blamed in sustainability debates, but the right packaging can actually reduce environmental impact by preventing food waste.

- Corrugated solutions (at least those made by Mondi) are 100% recyclable.
- Over 80% of corrugated materials are being recycled across Europe.
- Water-based inks and repulpable coatings ensure recyclability, even for moisture-resistant packaging.
- Semi-chemical flutings deliver high strength, dimensional stability and humidity resistance – ideal for protecting fresh food during long-distance shipping and in challenging conditions.
- The production process naturally sanitises corrugated material due to high temperatures,

providing a hygiene advantage over reusable plastic crates.

And consumers are noticing. In McKinsey's study, paper-based solutions enjoy a far more favourable perception, particularly in Germany, the UK and Sweden.

How co-creation is driving innovation in food packaging

Here's the thing about good packaging: it doesn't come from guesswork. It comes from collaboration. Increasingly, food producers and retailers are working closely with packaging experts to develop custom solutions – ones that reflect not just technical specs, but real-world constraints and opportunities. That might mean adjusting ventilation for a particular apple variety, refining stacking tolerances or trialling new coatings that can handle condensation without compromising recyclability.

To support this, some manufacturers offer dedicated innovation platforms; places where teams can explore design ideas, run shelf-life simulations and prototype new formats. At Mondi, this co-creation process is structured through a ThinkBox approach: a space, physical or virtual, where ideas are stress-tested and refined with input from across the supply chain. Good packaging starts with smart thinking – and ends with better design.

Wrapping it up (sustainably, of course)

The packaging landscape for fresh produce is evolving fast towards more sustainable alternatives. The shift towards mono-material, recyclable solutions reflects a broader push for materials that can keep up with both environmental standards and supermarket logistics. Paper-based trays and corrugated alternatives are recyclable, plus legislation such as the EU Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) or European Union Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) is giving brands little choice in the matter.

Meanwhile, shelf-life extension is no longer just a nice-to-have. With global supply chains as unpredictable as a ripe avocado, packaging is stepping up to preserve freshness from field to consumer. Smart airflow designs and humidity-controlling papers are showing that sometimes, good structure beats cling film. Lastly, functionality and labelling are getting smarter. Whether it's QR codes linking to a product's backstory or minimalist designs that whisper "natural" rather than shout "sustainable!", packaging is doing more with less – and communicating more while saying less. In short, tomorrow's fruit and veg packs need to work harder, last longer and explain themselves better. All without falling apart under pressure.

Packaging that does it all?

There's no silver bullet in produce packaging. Every fruit and vegetable brings its own quirks and demands. But what is becoming increasingly clear is that corrugated and solid board packaging tick more boxes than most.

They protect. They ventilate. They stack. They display. They recycle. And they do all this while aligning with both food producers' and retailers' expectations and regulatory pressures around sustainability. For food producers and retailers navigating this complex landscape, the opportunity is not just to choose better packaging, but to co-create solutions that rethink packaging as a strategic enabler of both product success and environmental responsibility.

Because in the end, keeping a strawberry intact might just be the most delicious way to cut carbon emissions in the fresh produce supply chain. And if you ever find yourself stuck between shelf life and carbon footprint, know this: you don't have to go it alone.

Your challenge is our challenge.

www.mondigroup.com

Creating chaos with packaging

On a crowded supermarket shelf, a little touch of chaos can make your brand stand out. The secret is getting the balance right.

I'm paraphrasing, but I've always enjoyed Seth Godin's definition of remarkable: "The word 'remarkable' literally means something worth making a remark about. Something worth noticing. Worth sharing. New. Interesting. It's a Purple Cow. You're either remarkable or invisible."

Godin – author, speaker, Marketing Hall-of-Famer, and business strategist extraordinaire – has always proclaimed that remarkable things have a built-in "free prize" that makes people want to tell others about their experience.

In an era when consumer attention is fleeting, the packaging industry is undergoing a "remarkable" transformation. Brands are increasingly embracing unconventional packaging designs, formats, and materials to captivate consumers in the quest to stand out on crowded shelves. A great example is Flo, a menstrual health company that packages tampons in ice-cream tubs, tapping into the common craving for sweets during menstruation and extending the product's visibility beyond the typical brief glance.

Rise of Chaos Packaging

This new-ish (and growing) trend is called "Chaos Packaging". In my humble opinion, the name is literary perfection. Because tampons in an ice cream carton does feel a bit chaotic, doesn't it?

Seth Godin

And I say "new-ish" because if you think about it, Pringles Crisps – which are sold in a tube that is completely unlike any other packaging found in the snack aisle – has embraced the idea of chaos packaging since 1966. This early example set the stage for what chaos packaging aims to achieve today: disruption, memorability, and emotional engagement.

Importantly, Pringles understood that the key to success lies in strategic intent. While chaos packaging breaks norms and ensures noticeability, it should nevertheless still align with brand values and resonate with target audiences. The unique packaging design of the Pringles can isn't just a novelty. Rather, it serves a real purpose that makes the product better and helps the brand live up to its promise that they

could deliver something that competitors couldn't – completely uniform and unbroken crisps.

How to leverage chaos packaging

The OCD me likes to make lists to understand the whys and the hows. So, why is chaos packaging so powerful and how can we leverage it to stand out?

1. It grabs attention on the shelf

In a crowded market, looking different is your best weapon. Unusual packaging instantly stands out and makes people curious enough to take a closer look. Blending in is no longer an option.

2. It makes your brand memorable

People remember the odd one out – "the coffee in a tube" or "the water in a beer can". Unique packaging helps your product stick in their minds, so that graphic design and copywriting don't have to do ALL of the heavy lifting. When every brand looks the same, a surprising format does a lot of the talking for you.

3. It shows you care about innovation

Choosing an unconventional package tells customers your brand thinks differently. It says you've considered function, design, and sustainability – not just tradition. Graza is a great example of chaos packaging done well. Its olive oil, housed in squeezable plastic containers, mimics condiment packaging rather than the traditional glass bottles of its competitors. This practical yet playful design makes Graza distinctive on supermarket shelves and easier to use in the kitchen. Not to mention that the plastic bottles are more recyclable, lighter to ship, and ultimately kinder to the planet than the heavier glass bottles.

4. It's made for social media

Have you ever been drawn to a product because its packaging was so unexpected, bordering on mischievous, that it made you smile? Packaging that disrupts the predictable – engaging consumers with designs that evoke curiosity, nostalgia, or humour – is naturally shareable. It's the kind of fun twist that makes people stop scrolling and can quickly go viral – organic marketing that can amplify a brand's reach.

I've written about the phenomenon of online unboxing before. Chaos packaging can take unboxing out of the luxury category and into the everyday mainstream. It doesn't have to be expensive or fancy packaging to be "TikTok-worthy", it just needs to pique curiosity.

5. It's budget-friendly

You don't always need custom designs to stand out. Repurposing existing packaging from other industries can be an affordable way to achieve a bold, unique look without breaking the bank.

6. It builds emotional connections with consumers

Liquid Death water (currently valued at $1.4 billion) is sold in cans usually associated more with beer than the natural, healthier alternative product. These edgy designs not only command attention but also reinforce the brands' rebellious spirit, highlighting how chaos packaging, when aligned with brand values, can amplify messaging and resonate with target audiences.

Why add chaos to your packaging?

Chaos packaging commands attention – but attention isn't the strategy. The real power lies in pairing disruption with intent.

The smartest brands don't chase chaos for novelty's sake. They use it to tell stories, build emotion, and challenge category conventions with purpose. True innovation is about rethinking the rules to better serve the product, the consumer, and the planet.

Used strategically, chaos packaging becomes a lever for differentiation. It starts by asking the right questions: What truly serves this product? How can we simplify, repurpose, and design sustainably?

The challenge is knowing when cleverness crosses the line. Consumers appreciate wit and originality, but they also depend on packaging for clarity and trust.

Ultimately, the brands that win will be those that balance creativity with intention – using chaos not as noise, but as a signal of purpose. Now, that's remarkable.

Author
Brandon Head, Creative Director at The Hardy Boys, a VML company

Semi-automatic bucket line demonstrates versatility and efficiency

Autopack, an independent integrator of packaging lines, has introduced a semi-automatic bucket line designed to improve efficiency while maintaining flexibility for manufacturers across the South African food and beverage sector and wider B2B market. The solution is aimed at processors seeking to reduce manual handling and control costs without committing to fully automated systems.

The semi-automatic bucket line has been developed for use across food, household, pet food, chemical, pharmaceutical and personal care applications. It addresses a common challenge in bucket filling operations: the manual separation and orientation of empty buckets from stacks. By automating this process, the system helps to improve line consistency and reduce operator fatigue, while offering a lower initial investment than a fully automated bucket line.

Modular design

A key advantage of the system is its modular design. Customers can specify a bucket line tailored to their operational requirements, selecting from a bucket de-nester, filling system, bucket sealer, lid de-nester and lid pressure roller. Additional modules can be integrated at a later stage, allowing businesses to scale automation in line with production growth or budget availability. This approach is particularly relevant for South African food and beverage manufacturers managing fluctuating volumes and cost pressures.

The line is typically built around the filling system of choice, including liquid dosing systems, powder fillers or a range of weighing solutions. Semi-automatic operation is based on manual infeed and outfeed of containers, offering a balance between automation and operator control.

Semi-automatic

According to Autopack Managing Director Wayne Kedward, semi-automatic solutions often represent a practical entry point to automation. “There are numerous advantages to automate but not every business has the same needs, so the semi-automatic route is often a good starting point,” he said. “Our semi-automatic bucket line is well placed to help businesses take their first step on the road to automation; an affordable, bespoke and modular solution.”

One of the most specified components is the lid pressure roller, suitable for round, square, oval and rectangular buckets up to 400mm in diameter. The driven pressure drum can be adjusted in height from 40mm to 400mm using a handwheel with a height indicator, supporting quick changeovers between different bucket formats. Input guide plates and rear rollers stabilise containers during sealing, reducing the risk of tipping.

Durability

The conveyor system features a 1,000mm belt with blue plastic modular links driven by a drum motor, supporting hygiene and reliability in food processing environments. Integrated weigh cells with advanced software manage product delivery into each bucket, supporting speed and accuracy. Filling can be controlled manually or via an autoFill function that initiates dosing when the correct container is detected.

Constructed from stainless steel 304, the weighing platform is designed for durability, cleanability and intensive industrial use. Optional features include drain holes for liquid spills or recovery trays for powders and solids.

Autopack UK Sales Director Jonathon Stewart noted that modular automation can help manufacturers respond to ongoing cost challenges. “Solutions that reduce wastage and improve efficiency can make a measurable difference,” he said.

www.autopack.co.uk

Neuromarketing insights for spirits packaging

A new neuromarketing study by UPM Adhesive Materials, KURZ and Eurostampa is reframing how the food and beverage industry understands label design, positioning the label as a strategic brand asset rather than a technical afterthought. For spirits producers and packaging stakeholders in South Africa's competitive B2B food and beverage market, the findings offer data-driven guidance on how packaging decisions influence consumer perception, brand value and purchase behaviour.

Conducted by SenseCatch in collaboration with the three partners, the study focuses on tequila packaging and explores how label materials, finishes and embellishments shape consumer response. While tequila was the category under examination, the implications extend across premium spirits, craft beverages and export-focused brands operating in South Africa and beyond.

To ensure authentic behavioural insights, the research was carried out in Texas, one of the world's largest tequila consumption regions. Using a fictional tequila brand and 27 unique label and packaging designs, the study replicated real retail conditions. Advanced neuromarketing techniques measured visual attention, emotional engagement and implicit perception, providing objective insight into how consumers respond at shelf level.

Label material

The research confirms that label material selection plays a critical role in perceived quality and brand credibility. Substrate weight, texture and finish directly influenced how consumers assessed authenticity, value and desirability. Metallic effects, tactile finishes and premium embellishments consistently generated stronger emotional engagement and longer visual attention, key factors in driving purchase intent in crowded retail environments.

For South African spirits producers, particularly those targeting premium, export or tourism-driven markets, the study reinforces the commercial importance of packaging strategy. Labels are not only a compliance requirement but a core component of brand storytelling and shelf differentiation. In an environment where consumers often make rapid decisions, the label functions as the primary point of sensory and emotional connection.

Elevate label materials

Florencia Daroni, Packaging Solutions Manager at UPM Adhesive Materials, notes that the findings elevate label materials from a cost-driven decision to a strategic one. She highlights that texture and finish materially affect how consumers assign value to tequila brands, offering spirits producers practical insight into how packaging choices can strengthen shelf presence and long-term brand loyalty.

Eurostampa Marketing Manager Priscilla Montilla adds that neuromarketing data validates the idea of the label as a brand's first interaction with the consumer. According to the study, material and embellishment choices directly influence emotion and perception, turning packaging into a decisive factor in the final purchase decision.

Sensory impact

From KURZ's perspective, Head of Marketing Allan Quimby emphasises the sensory impact of print effects, metallics and haptic finishes. The study shows that engaging both sight and touch enhances perceptions of quality and authenticity, transforming packaging into a complete sensory brand experience.

For the South African food and beverage B2B sector, this research delivers actionable insight into spirits packaging design, premium label materials and consumer behaviour. As brands seek differentiation in both local and international markets, the emotional power of labels is emerging as a measurable driver of commercial success.

www.upm.com/adhesive-materials

Amcor collaborates with Danish food packaging recycling project

Amcor has announced its participation in a three-year Danish food packaging recycling initiative that has relevance for global and South African food and beverage manufacturers navigating increasing regulatory and sustainability requirements. The Circular Recycling Innovation for Sustainable Packaging (CRISP) project is led by the Danish Technological Institute and aims to establish full-scale circular recycling of polyethylene (PE) and polypropylene (PP) rigid food packaging from household waste streams.

The project brings together food producers, packaging manufacturers and waste management specialists to deliver food-grade recycled plastics suitable for direct food contact. Amcor will contribute technical and recycling expertise from its CleanStream® recycling facility in the UK and its packaging production site in Randers, Denmark. CleanStream® technology enables the mechanical recycling of post-consumer household waste into high-purity recycled materials that can integrate into existing waste management infrastructure.

For South African food and beverage businesses, the project highlights practical approaches to circular economy packaging, food packaging recyclability and traceability of recycled food contact materials. With the EU targeting a 55% plastic recycling rate by 2030 under the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation, initiatives such as CRISP provide insights into future compliance models that may influence global supply chains.

The partnership also aligns with Extended Producer Responsibility frameworks, reinforcing the business case for recyclable food packaging design using rHDPE and rPP.

www.amcor.com

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