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FOOD EXPORT ASSOCIATION OF THE MIDWEST USA AND FOOD EXPORT USA – NORTHEAST

U.S. Foodlink

Connecting Midwest and Northeast U.S. Food Suppliers with Worldwide Buyers

Includes Featured U.S. Suppliers and Products Ready for Export

How U.S. Store Brands Became Innovation Leaders

Once viewed primarily as lower-cost alternatives to national brands, private label products have become one of the fastest-growing sources of innovation in the U.S. food industry. Across nearly every grocery category—from premium snacks and specialty beverages to organic frozen meals and artisan sauces—retailer-owned brands are redefining consumer expectations for quality, value, and innovation.

For international buyers, this shift represents more than a retail trend. It creates new opportunities to partner with U.S. manufacturers capable of producing premium-quality products under retailer-owned brands while delivering the innovation, flexibility, and speed that today's consumers expect.

A New Era of Private Label

Inflation and changing consumer spending habits accelerated acceptance of private label products. As more households tried store brands for the first time, many discovered products that rivaled—or even exceeded—the quality of national brands.

Food Export Midwest USA™ | Food Export USA Northeast™

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Rather than simply replicating national brands, today's private label products increasingly compete on premium ingredients, unique flavor profiles, cleaner labels, sustainability initiatives, and health-focused formulations.

Rather than simply replicating national brands, today's private label products increasingly compete on premium ingredients, unique flavor profiles, cleaner labels, sustainability initiatives, and health-focused formulations. Retailers have recognized that exclusive products help differentiate their stores while building customer loyalty allowing for significant investment in product development.

The result is a marketplace where private label is no longer positioned as "good enough." Increasingly, it represents "something you can't buy anywhere else."

Premium Quality Drives Growth

Today's private label programs increasingly compete on quality rather than price. Retailers now seek products that tell compelling stories through sourcing, craftsmanship, regional authenticity, and ingredient transparency.

Categories seeing particularly strong premium private label growth include:

- Specialty cheeses
- Premium coffee
- Frozen meals
- Organic and natural foods
- Snack foods
- Sauces and condiments
- Bakery
- Ready-to-cook meal solutions
- Better-for-you beverages

Consumers increasingly associate premium with more than price. For suppliers, this means innovation often matters more than simply offering the lowest production cost.

Health and Transparency Drive Development

Today's private label strategies closely mirror the broader shifts occurring throughout the U.S. food industry. Retailers are expanding offerings that focus on clean-label, reduced sugar, high protein, organic certifications, functional ingredients, and transparent supply chains.

Private label products are increasingly expected to meet the same consumer expectations as premium national brands while offering retailers greater flexibility to respond quickly to emerging food trends.

Innovation Happens Faster

Another advantage of private label is speed. Retailers are eager to launch seasonal flavors, limited-time offerings, regionally inspired products, and emerging wellness concepts under their own brands. This agility allows stores to capitalize on trends before they become mainstream.

Whether introducing globally inspired sauces, protein-rich snacks, functional beverages, or premium frozen entrees, private label programs often serve as innovation platforms that help retailers distinguish themselves in increasingly competitive markets.

For manufacturers, this creates opportunities to collaborate closely with retailers on product development rather than simply supplying finished goods.

Opportunities for Export-Ready U.S. Suppliers

Many U.S. manufacturers already possess the production capabilities, food safety systems, quality certifications, and export experience needed to support private label programs around the world.

In addition to manufacturing expertise, U.S. suppliers often offer:

- Flexible production runs
- Product customization
- Strong regulatory compliance
- Innovative R&D capabilities
- Premium ingredients
- Reliable supply chains
- Experience serving large retail organizations

For international retailers seeking to expand their own brands, partnering with experienced U.S. manufacturers provides access to products developed within one of the world's most innovative food markets.

What International Buyers Should Look For

As private label programs become increasingly sophisticated, buyers evaluating potential U.S. partners should consider more than manufacturing capacity.

When evaluating potential partners, buyers should look for suppliers that offer:

- Product development expertise
- Ability to customize formulations
- Packaging innovation
- Export experience
- Food safety certifications
- Category insights
- Consumer trend awareness
- Long-term production scalability

For international retailers seeking to expand their own brands, partnering with experienced U.S. manufacturers provides access to products developed within one of the world's most innovative food markets.

Manufacturers capable of acting as innovation partners, not simply contract producers, will likely become the preferred suppliers for tomorrow's private label programs.

Looking Ahead

Private label has entered a new phase of growth. What began as a value proposition has become a platform for premium quality, innovation, and consumer differentiation. As retailers continue investing in exclusive brands, opportunities will expand for U.S. manufacturers that combine product development expertise with world-class production capabilities.

For international buyers, private label is no longer simply another sourcing option. It offers a powerful way to deliver distinctive products, strengthen customer loyalty, and capitalize on the trends shaping the future of food.

Featured U.S. Midwest & Northeast State Profiles

Iowa

3.2 mil
POPULATION

86,911
FARMS

30 mil
ACRES

Ranked #2
AMONG 50 U.S. STATES
IN AG EXPORTS

Soybeans · Pork · Corn

Vermont

644,663
POPULATION

6,537
FARMS

1.2 mil
ACRES

Ranked #45
AMONG 50 U.S. STATES
IN AG EXPORTS

Other Plant Products · Dairy · Beef and Veal

Michigan

10.1 mil
POPULATION

45,581
FARMS

9.5 mil
ACRES

Ranked #17
AMONG 50 U.S. STATES
IN AG EXPORTS

Other Plant Products · Soybeans · Dairy

Pennsylvania

13.1 mil
POPULATION

49,053
FARMS

7.1 mil
ACRES

Ranked #24
AMONG 50 U.S. STATES
IN AG EXPORTS

Other Plant Products · Dairy · Other Livestock Products

Beverage Evolution: From Functional to Fun
Top Trends Reshaping the Beverage Market

The U.S. beverage industry is undergoing one of its most significant transformations in decades. Once dominated by traditional soft drinks and bottled water, today's U.S. beverage market has become one of the food industry's most innovative sectors, driven by changing consumer priorities around health, functionality, premium experiences, and personalization.

While consumers continue to seek beverages that support wellness, they also want products that deliver enjoyment, discovery, and lifestyle appeal. This convergence of function and flavor is creating entirely new beverage categories; from botanical waters and nootropic drinks to alcohol alternatives and mood-enhancing refreshers.

For international buyers, these evolving preferences present an opportunity to source distinctive U.S. beverages that reflect where global consumer demand is heading.

Wellness Becomes Everyday Hydration

Consumers increasingly expect beverages to do more than quench thirst.

Beverages fortified with electrolytes, vitamins, probiotics, prebiotics, adaptogens, collagen, fiber, and plant-based extracts have moved well beyond specialty retailers and into mainstream grocery shelves. Rather than relying solely on dietary supplements, many consumers now view beverages as an easy way to support everyday wellness.

This shift has fueled rapid growth in sparkling functional waters, enhanced teas, protein beverages, and naturally flavored drinks positioned around immunity, digestion, hydration, recovery, and overall well-being.

For beverage manufacturers, functionality has become an expectation rather than a niche.

Botanicals Bring Premium Appeal

Botanical ingredients are redefining how consumers think about refreshment. Rather than relying solely on traditional fruit flavors, beverage developers are incorporating herbs, flowers, spices, and plant extracts to create more sophisticated flavor profiles. Lavender, rosemary, hibiscus, elderflower, chamomile, mint, basil, yuzu, ginger, and citrus botanicals are increasingly appearing in sparkling waters, ready-to-drink teas, mixers, and premium soft drinks.

These beverages deliver an elevated drinking experience while reinforcing perceptions of freshness, natural ingredients, and premium quality. For retailers, botanical beverages also provide opportunities for premium merchandising that appeals to health-conscious shoppers seeking alternatives to sugary soft drinks.

Nootropics Enter the Mainstream

Another rapidly growing segment is beverages formulated to support mental performance. Often referred to as nootropic beverages, these products feature ingredients such as L-theanine, lion's mane mushrooms, green tea extracts, ginseng, B vitamins, and adaptogenic botanicals that consumers associate with focus, mental clarity, and reduced stress.

Unlike traditional energy drinks that rely heavily on caffeine and sugar, many newer formulations emphasize balanced, sustained energy with cleaner ingredient lists and lower sugar content.

As hybrid work, digital lifestyles, and mental wellness continue influencing purchasing decisions, demand for beverages supporting productivity and cognitive performance is expected to continue growing.

A New Generation of Social Beverages

Perhaps no category has evolved more dramatically than low- and no-alcohol beverages.

Driven by younger consumers, the "sober curious" movement has expanded the market well beyond traditional alcohol-free beer. Today's offerings include sophisticated sparkling aperitifs, botanical cocktails, alcohol-free wines, premium mocktails, hop waters, and functional beverages designed to replicate the social experience of drinking without alcohol.

Many consumers now alternate between alcoholic and alcohol-free beverages depending on the occasion, making moderation one of today's defining beverage trends. This shift has encouraged manufacturers to focus on premium ingredients, complex flavor development, and elegant packaging that delivers the same elevated experience as traditional alcoholic beverages.

Flavor Meets Experience

Today's consumers increasingly purchase beverages for the experience as much as the refreshment.

Limited-edition flavors, globally inspired ingredients, vibrant colors, layered textures, and visually appealing packaging all contribute to product discovery, particularly among younger shoppers influenced by social media. For beverage companies, innovation has become as much about storytelling as formulation.

Opportunities for International Buyers

The rapid evolution of the U.S. beverage market is creating export opportunities across multiple categories.

International buyers can benefit by sourcing products that combine premium ingredients with wellness-focused positioning, distinctive flavors, and convenient ready-to-drink formats. Categories with strong international potential include:

- Functional sparkling waters
- Botanical beverages
- Nootropic drinks
- Functional teas and coffees
- Low- and no-alcohol beverages
- Premium mixers
- Protein and recovery beverages
- Better-for-you soft drinks

Many export-ready U.S. beverage manufacturers also offer flexible formulations, private label capabilities, and packaging formats that can be customized for international markets.

Looking Ahead

As consumer expectations continue to evolve, the distinction between traditional beverage categories will become increasingly blurred.

For international buyers, the U.S. beverage market offers a glimpse into the future of beverage innovation.

Manufacturers that successfully balance wellness with enjoyment are creating products that not only meet today's consumer expectations but also help shape tomorrow's global beverage landscape.

Adore Pet

SPRING PARK, MINNESOTA

ADORE Pet is a family-owned and operated Minnesota company creating natural wellness solutions for dogs and cats. Our family originally founded PetzLife Oral Care in 2003, and today we continue that legacy through ADORE Pet.

Our flagship Oral Care Sprays and Gels offer an easy, no-brush way to help reduce plaque and tartar, freshen breath, and support healthy gums. Available in peppermint, salmon, and feline formulas, ADORE Pet Oral Care is designed for convenient use at home and is trusted by pet owners, groomers, retailers, veterinary professionals, and anesthesia-free dental providers.

Our expanding product line also includes Herbal Defense for flea and tick support, Waterless Shampoo + Conditioner, Wound Care Oil, and Calming Support Gel for dogs and cats.

ADORE Pet products are proudly made in the USA with carefully selected ingredients and backed by more than 20 years of pet wellness experience. Visit us at SuperZoo 2026 in Las Vegas at Booth #4503. https://www.adorepet.com

The Alden Group Inc.

FARMINGTON, MICHIGAN

Alden Oils is a trusted supplier of high-quality, food-grade oils, delivering custom oil solutions for restaurants, foodservice operators, and CPG manufacturers. Our portfolio includes a wide range of conventional, non-GMO, and organic oils, such as soybean, canola, sunflower, and avocado, designed to meet the performance demands of professional kitchens. We package our oils in 35 lb. JIB formats for efficiency. They're engineered for high-heat stability, consistent results, and versatile use across frying, sautéing, baking, and food production.

With a commitment to clean ingredients, reliable sourcing, and scalable supply, Alden Oils partners with businesses to optimize quality, cost, and kitchen performance. Whether you need bulk ingredients, private-label solutions, or dependable everyday cooking oils, we provide the consistency you can trust because great food starts with great oil.

For more information about these or other Featured Products please email: FoodLink@foodexport.org.

Edenesque Inc.

BUFFALO, NEW YORK

Edenesque is a chef-crafted, premium plant-based beverage company founded on the belief that food has the power to nourish people, strengthen communities, and care for our planet. Created by Le Cordon Bleu-trained chef and holistic nutritionist Leslie Woodward, Edenesque produces clean-label oat and pistachio barista blends made without gums, preservatives, or artificial ingredients. More than a beverage company, Edenesque is driven by a simple philosophy: Be the Love.™ Every carton reflects our commitment to nourishing good by nourishing people—creating products that bring together exceptional taste, wholesome nutrition, and sustainability. We believe every choice we make has the power to create a ripple effect, from supporting farmers and local communities to helping families enjoy delicious, nourishing food. As we continue to grow, our mission remains the same: to inspire kindness, cultivate wellbeing, and prove that business can be a powerful force for good—one cup at a time.

Faaji LLC

PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY

ZZAI — Premium West African Sparkling Beverages: ZZAI brings West Africa's most beloved flavors to global retail; four sparkling beverages rooted in centuries of tradition, each one a taste experience that does not exist elsewhere on shelf.

Chapman — bright spiced citrus with cooling cucumber, born at the Ikoyi Club in Lagos. Zobo — tart hibiscus with real ginger heat and a warming depth of clove, known worldwide as Bissap, Sobolo, and Sorrel. TamTam — sweet mango first, then tart tamarind, finished with a sharpening hint of lemon. Obì — bold kola and layered bitters cut through with blood orange, made for the amaro and Campari drinker.

Each 12 fl. oz can is made in the USA with real cane sugar — no artificial sweeteners, colors, or preservatives — shelf stable with a 24-month shelf life, and export-ready.

Ideal for premium grocery, specialty retail, and on-premise programs worldwide.

Contact: wholesale@drinkzzai.com · drinkzzai.com · @drinkzzai

featured **PRODUCTS**

Farmers' Market Foods, LLC

LAKE ZURICH, ILLINOIS

Farmers Market Foods is a third-generation American food company based in Lake Zurich, Illinois, celebrating 90 years of crafting real food the right way. The company specializes in all-natural sausage and salami, premium Wisconsin cheese, and Apex Wild Game snack sticks — all made with clean-label ingredients free from synthetic nitrates, nitrites, and MSG.

Every product reflects a commitment to traditional methods: meats are fermented using live cultures, cured with natural celery powder and whole spices, and slow-smoked over hardwoods like hickory and applewood for 16 or more hours. Proteins are sourced from responsibly raised, antibiotic-free animals including 100% grass-fed beef, venison, elk, and bison.

The product line — which includes curated charcuterie gift sets, artisan Wisconsin cheese blocks, and shelf-stable snack sticks — is export-ready and available for wholesale, retail distribution, and private label partnerships worldwide. https://getfarmersmarket.com/

Feel, LLC

LIVONIA, MICHIGAN

Feel Rooted manufactures world class and functional plant-based protein snacks. We are rooted in nature and prioritize quality of ingredients above everything. All our products are functionally enhanced with adaptogens, super herbs and whole food ingredients that support mind and body wellness. We prioritize clean and quality ingredients that have been around since the beginning of time because you deserve to feel the difference! www.thefeelbar.com

For more information about these or other Featured Products please email: FoodLink@foodexport.org.

Folkland Foods

WATERFORD, PENNSYLVANIA

Folkland Foods is a fast-growing brand that specializes in making frozen organic potato products. Launching in June 2025, Folkland has already released its products in over 1,600 stores nationwide and is rapidly increasing each month. Being organic is one thing, but being transparent with your ingredients and practices is what makes Folkland THE frozen organic potato brand. Folkland uses regenerative farming practices in combination with a super-slim, clean ingredient list containing nothing you can't find in your own home kitchen. The mission is simple: "Ignite passion in organic, regenerative farming and unite urban and rural communities with what we all deserve – real food." The way Folkland achieves that is through complete transparency. REAL transparency. No hidden "fine print" ingredients, no exceptions. What you see on the bag is what you get! Making good food doesn't have to require unhealthy ingredients or practices. All it takes is some farmers willing to grow and make food the better way. The right way. And that's what Folkland is all about.

Green Mountain Peanut Butter

HARDWICK, VERMONT

Green Mountain Peanut Butter was founded by Adriana Munch, when she was 9 years old, with a mission to create the peanut butter people deserve. Inspired by her childhood love of peanut butter and her father's concern about unhealthy ingredients in store-bought brands, Adriana developed her own simple, nutritious recipes using only high-quality ingredients.

After settling in Vermont and falling in love with the Green Mountains, Adriana turned her passion into a business dedicated to quality, sustainability, and community impact. Green Mountain Peanut Butter is a woman-owned company that produces small-batch, all-natural peanut butter in Northern Vermont with no added oils, preservatives, or sugars and only high-quality ingredients. Every jar is made in the USA and designed to fuel outdoor adventures, active lifestyles, and healthy families.

Committed to supporting local farmers and giving back to the community, Green Mountain Peanut Butter reflects Adriana's belief that healthy, sustainable food should create a positive impact while delivering exceptional taste in every jar.

featured **PRODUCTS**

Panos Brands LLC

ROCHELLE PARK, NEW JERSEY

PANOS Brands is a leading consumer packaged goods company with a portfolio of trusted specialty food brands spanning multiple categories, including dressings, sauces, baking products, syrups, cheese, and international foods. Among its brands are Walden Farms, known for better-for-you condiments, and KAME, a trusted Asian foods brand offering authentic pantry staples and convenient meal solutions.

KAME continues to expand its portfolio with new products, including bold spicy sauces and chili crisp, bringing exciting Asian-inspired flavors to consumers seeking convenient ways to elevate meals at home. Building on its commitment to better-for-you food, PANOS Brands recently relaunched the Walden Farms Salad Dressing line with a refreshed recipe made with real ingredients, including olive oil, while maintaining zero sugar and low-calorie benefits. The new dressings feature improved taste and modern packaging designed to appeal to today's health-conscious consumers, reinforcing PANOS Brands' focus on delivering high-quality, differentiated products that meet evolving consumer needs.

Pemmican Patty Food Company, Inc.

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

Pemmican Patty: Where Cultural Tradition Meets Healthy Living

Pemmican Patty Food Company blends cultural heritage with modern nutrition by carrying forward a traditional food that has sustained people for generations. Inspired by the original pemmican created by the Métis people of the Northern Plains in the early 1800s, the company was founded by Patricia "Patty" Mabin, a sixth-generation descendant of "The Great Chief," Old Wild Rice of the Pembina/Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. Through its products, the company honors Indigenous food traditions while meeting the needs of today's health-conscious consumers.

Its signature "Bisonberry Blends" protein bars are handcrafted from a proprietary family recipe using a simple mix of bison, beef, berries, and spices. These wholesome ingredients provide high-quality protein, natural energy, and nutrient-rich benefits without artificial additives or unnecessary processing. Inspired by traditional Native American diets that supported strong, healthy communities for centuries, the bars offer a nutritious alternative to highly processed foods. Pemmican Patty is committed to promoting wellness, preserving cultural foodways, and sharing the enduring value of ancestral nutrition with modern lifestyles.

Pine River Pre-Pack, Inc.

NEWTON, WISCONSIN

Pine River Pre Pack has been crafting award-winning Wisconsin cheese spreads for generations, bringing together authentic flavors and time-honored cheesemaking traditions. Every spread begins with premium Wisconsin cheese, delivering the rich, creamy texture and exceptional taste that have made Pine River a trusted name among cheese lovers. From timeless favorites like Sharp Cheddar and Port Wine to innovative flavors like Kickin' Dill Pickle and Maple Bacon, our products showcase the quality and versatility of Wisconsin dairy.

We are proud to source our cheese from Wisconsin, the nation's premier cheesemaking state, and create products that celebrate the craftsmanship of local dairy producers. Our commitment to quality is evident in every batch, with carefully selected ingredients, consistent flavor, and attention to detail throughout the production process. Whether enjoyed as a snack, shared on a charcuterie board, or incorporated into recipes, Pine River cheese spreads deliver an authentic Wisconsin cheese experience that brings people together one delicious bite at a time.

Quality Roasting Inc.

VALDERS, WISCONSIN

Great Lakes Gold 35# 100% All-Natural Expeller Pressed Vegetable oil made by Quality Roasting, Inc. in Valders, Wisconsin delivers a high smoke point, clean performance, and zero flavor transfer—making it a reliable choice for frying, baking, sautéing, and sauces across any kitchen. http://www.qualityroasting.com

For more information about these or other Featured Products please email: FoodLink@foodexport.org.

featured **PRODUCTS**

Sarah Reade Cookies and Snacks LLC

MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

Best Tasting Cookie! From 1629 to Today – A Cookie Worth Passing Down

What started with a cherished 17th-century recipe has become a new standard in snacking. Each cookie is handcrafted using pure butter and time-honored techniques, then brought to life in a variety of irresistible, distinctive flavors. The result? A delicate, buttery texture and unforgettable taste that customers call the best they've ever had. It's a tradition you can taste and quality you can trust.

Mouth-Watering Flavors – Here's just a taste of what we offer: Buttery Almond - Rich, classic, and perfectly balanced; Cinnamon Bun - Warm, comforting spice with a sweet finish; Lemon Tea - Bright citrus with a subtle, elegant twist; Spicy Brownie Bites - Deep chocolate with a hint of heat; Tropical Key Lime - Refreshing, tangy, and smooch

Enjoy the tradition! Handcrafted with Love. Sarah Reade Cookies and Snacks www.sarahreadecookiesandsnacks.com – Made in U.S.A.

Viroqua Aronia Co.

VIROQUA, WISCONSIN

Viroqua Aronia is the story of local Wisconsin partners — including a farmer and an emergency physician — working together to bring one of North America's most impactful (and flavorful!) native superfruits to a wider market. Grown in the Driftless region of Wisconsin, our aronia berries are cold-pressed into premium, deeply purple juice, with a distinctive, bold tart flavor and strong functional-food positioning. Aronia is recognized for its naturally high antioxidant content and its fit with growing global demand for clean-label wellness beverages, superfruits, and functional ingredients. Our product line includes bottled aronia juice jugs, aronia powder, and an export-forward 3 L bag-in-box format using nitrogen-purge technology to help protect product quality while offering an efficient, foodservice-friendly, lower-breakage packaging solution. Rooted in regional agriculture and practical wellness, Viroqua Aronia combines authentic farm-origin production, physician-informed purpose, and value-added processing to create a differentiated U.S.-grown aronia platform for retail, foodservice, and ingredient markets.

For more information about these or other Featured Products please email: FoodLink@foodexport.org.

W D Hoard & Sons

FORT ATKINSON, WISCONSIN

Hoard's Dairyman Farm Creamery - Belaire is an exquisite, mild, and classic cheese that's easy to eat and will quickly become one of your favorites. Its creamy, subtle flavor and soft texture make it an ideal cheese for formal occasions or a relaxing afternoon picnic.

Belaire cheese is named in honor of Captain Belaire, the first to bring Guernsey cattle to the United States. Great cheese comes from great milk, and great milk comes from Guernsey cows that are fed well, receive outstanding care, and live in a stress-free environment. Guernsey milk is naturally higher in butter fat, this property is maintained in the cheese, but more importantly, the high butterfat content of the milk creates a rich and creamy flavor and gives the cheeses a luxurious, silky texture.

Belaire's welcoming pale yellow interior is highlighted with a distinctive bright orange rind. Slice and enjoy on its own with crackers and fruit. Pair Belaire cheese with Beaujolais Nouveau wine for an extraordinary experience!

Your Grandpa's Old Fashioned

KOKOMO, INDIANA

Your Grandpa's Old Fashioned Cocktail Cubes make it easy to craft a bar-quality Old Fashioned anywhere—no measuring, mixing expertise, or refrigeration required. Made in small batches in the Midwest, each cube combines real cane sugar, orange, and premium bitters for a perfectly balanced cocktail every time. Simply muddle a cube, add bourbon, whiskey, or rye, stir, and serve over ice.

Created from a family tradition that began with "Old Fashioned Fridays," Your Grandpa's Old Fashioned brings generations of flavor and hospitality into a convenient, shelf-stable format. The cubes are ideal for home bars, gifting, travel, hotels, liquor stores, specialty retailers, and anyone who wants a great cocktail without the fuss.

The featured 5-ounce tin contains 15 convenient, individually portioned cocktail cubes. With nostalgic packaging, simple preparation, and authentic ingredients, Your Grandpa's Old Fashioned Cocktail Cubes turn a classic cocktail into an easy, memorable experience—just add your favorite spirit and enjoy. www.yourgrandpasoldfashioned.com

5 U.S. Private Label Categories to Watch in 2027

As private label continues to evolve from a value-focused alternative to an innovation-driven strategy, these five categories are expected to offer significant growth opportunities for retailers and international buyers.

Consumers continue to seek snacks that deliver more than convenience. Products featuring higher protein, added fiber, whole grains, functional ingredients, and clean-label formulations are driving growth. Freeze-dried fruits, seed crackers, popcorn, nuts, and protein-rich snack mixes are especially well positioned for premium private label programs.

American consumers are embracing bold international flavors, fueling demand for sauces inspired by Korean, Mexican, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, and Southeast Asian cuisines. Retailers are increasingly using private label to introduce globally inspired flavor experiences while offering exclusive products that differentiate their brands.

Convenience remains a priority, but consumers increasingly expect restaurant-quality meals made with recognizable ingredients and elevated flavors. Premium frozen entrees, grain bowls, breakfast items, and heat-and-eat meals continue to gain momentum as retailers expand their premium private label offerings.

The functional beverage category continues to evolve beyond hydration, with products that support energy, gut health, recovery, immunity, and overall wellness. Consumers are increasingly drawn to beverages featuring protein, probiotics, botanicals, adaptogens, and reduced sugar.

Pet owners increasingly shop for their animals the same way they shop for themselves—prioritizing quality ingredients, transparency, nutrition, and sustainability. As a result, premium pet food and treats remain among the fastest-growing private label categories in North America.

news briefs

Functional Beverages Continue to Evolve: Consumers increasingly expect beverages to deliver tangible health benefits beyond hydration. Beverage developers are responding with products featuring fiber, prebiotics, adaptogens, electrolytes, and protein while balancing indulgence with wellness. Functional beverages remain one of the fastest-growing areas of product innovation, with the global market projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 18%.

Protein Remains Food's Biggest Opportunity: Protein continues to rank among consumers' top purchase drivers worldwide with nearly 60% of global consumers saying they are actively increasing their protein intake. New product launches increasingly emphasize complete protein, muscle recovery, satiety, and nutrition tailored to GLP-1 users, expanding opportunities far beyond traditional sports nutrition.

Gut Health Moves Mainstream: Digestive wellness is becoming a primary purchasing consideration across food and beverage categories with 59% of global consumers saying gut health is important to their overall well-being. Brands are responding with products featuring probiotics, prebiotics, fiber, and ingredient education as consumers increasingly connect gut health with immunity, energy, and overall wellness.

Private Label Continues Premium Push: Twenty-five percent of consumers report purchasing more private label products than they did a year ago. This adoption is pushing retailers to invest in premium ingredients, innovative flavors, and elevated packaging. Rather than competing solely on price, today's private label products increasingly emphasize quality, health, sustainability, and unique consumer experiences.

Mental Wellness Shapes Product Innovation: Food and beverage manufacturers are increasingly developing products that support focus, mood, and stress management. Adaptogens, botanicals, mushrooms, and other nootropic ingredients are moving into mainstream beverages as consumers seek everyday products that promote mental well-being.

Consumers Want Products Worth the Price: 60% of consumers enjoy discovering new indulgent food experiences, but affordability remains important as shoppers increasingly expect products to justify their premium price through quality ingredients, functionality, convenience, or sustainability. Increasingly, consumers define value by benefits—not price.

Texture Becomes a Competitive Advantage: Texture continues to influence purchase decisions across snacks, beverages, and desserts as 75% of Gen Z and Millennials say texture is just as important as taste. Brands are experimenting with layered textures, crunchy inclusions, freeze-dried ingredients, and creamy formats that create memorable eating experiences that go beyond flavor alone.

Global Flavors Continue to Inspire Innovation: Consumers continue to seek authentic international flavors with 46% of consumers looking for flavors they've never tried before. Ingredients from the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, Asia, and Latin America are increasingly appearing in beverages, sauces, snacks, and desserts as brands expand globally inspired product lines.

Sustainability Influences Purchasing Decisions: Consumers increasingly evaluate food products based on environmental impact alongside taste and nutrition. Companies are responding with recyclable packaging, responsible sourcing, and more transparent supply chains that build consumer trust while supporting long-term sustainability goals.

Discovery Drives Consumer Engagement: Shoppers continue seeking products that offer something unexpected, from limited-time flavors to unique regional ingredients and emerging brands. Artificial intelligence is also emerging as a product discovery tool, with nearly 30% of consumers saying they are comfortable allowing AI shopping agents to complete purchases on their behalf. Manufacturers that combine authentic storytelling with innovative products and technology are finding new opportunities to stand out in crowded retail environments.

U.S.Foodlink

FOOD EXPORT-MIDWEST & FOOD EXPORT-NORTHEAST STAFF

Brendan Wilson
Chief Executive Officer/Executive Director

Michelle Rogowski
Chief Operating Officer

Teresa Miller
Chief Program & Partnership Officer

Trish James
Chief Growth Officer

Food Export Association of the Midwest (Food Export-Midwest)
29 North Wacker Drive, Suite 1000
Chicago, IL 60606
312.334.9200

Food Export USA-Northeast (Food Export-Northeast)
One Penn Center, 1617 JFK Blvd. , Suite 420
Philadelphia, PA 19103 USA
215.829.9111

www.foodexport.org
Comments, Questions,
email: info@foodexport.org

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