

# Q&A Almonds

Featuring  
**LU ANN WILLIAMS**

*Director of Innovation,  
Innova Market Insights*

## Almond milk on the rise

A plethora of plant-based, non-dairy milks has taken root even in mainstream supermarkets, and one standout among the options is almond milk. **Lu Ann Williams**, director of innovation, Innova Market Insights, has certainly noticed almond milk's rise, noting "it just never stops" when it comes to innovation in the space. We sat down to talk the future of almond milk with Williams, and learned that this is one product category that is just getting started.

Q

Almond milk may seem like it's everywhere these days, but does the data back up its success?

**WILLIAMS**

What we're really seeing now is that the value of the almond milk category has grown faster than the volume. So when you look at the almond milk beverages in stores, you realize that these are not boring products that you just pour on your cereal or in your smoothie. We are seeing new and interesting flavors and textures and that's why value is growing faster than volume. It's a premiumization story.

And in global terms, almond milk is growing fastest in terms of launch activity—in other words, its share of “new” products are growing significantly faster than the dairy alternative category as a whole. So we see a category average growth rate of 22 percent for all dairy alternative beverage launches from 2012 to 2016, while almond milk is growing at 36.5 percent in terms of launches.

Q

This isn't just about vegans and vegetarians, is it?

**WILLIAMS**

No. This is about people looking for options. Fifty-three percent of people in the UK and 38 percent of Americans told us they eat a meatless meal once a week or more - that's 200 million people. I think there's a much bigger market to focus not on vegan or vegetarian, but on plant-based foods more generally and giving consumers options.

**Q**

Impressive. What makes almond milk such an incubator for innovation?

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**Q**

Of course, we think almond milk's perfect on its own, but what other pairings are offering opportunities for formulators?

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**Q**

So, what's the next stage of the almond milk evolution?

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#### **WILLIAMS**

Almonds are hero ingredients - everybody understands them. They taste good, and they're a neutral canvas for other flavors. You can make them sweet, you can make them savory—they're very versatile. By contrast, some of the other non-dairy milks on their own can be very polarizing, which translates to a bigger risk for manufacturers.

#### **WILLIAMS**

Coconut's an obvious blending partner for almond milk. And now you're starting to see pea proteins going into non-dairy beverages to boost protein content. If I were formulating a blended dairy-alternative beverage, I would simply look for other hero ingredients. Oats would probably be my number-one choice, Matcha would also be another good addition—and avocado. When you combine hero ingredients together, you have a superhero product.

#### **WILLIAMS**

There's so much more opportunity - think about cheesecake, chilled and frozen desserts like almond milk ice cream, for which we've seen really successful launches. I can imagine we may even see almond milk in hummus. It can be used in almost anything: salad dressings, sauces; there's even a pumpkin-spice almond milk coffee creamer. Another new product that I think is super-interesting is probiotic almond milk drinkable yogurt. So in terms of new development, ask yourself, "What else could I do with an almond?"