

STICK OR SANDWICH? WHAT WILL YOUR ICE CREAM LOOK LIKE THIS YEAR...

Crazy or conservative? The jury may still be out, deliberating over what unusual ingredients will be a hit with Australian ice cream consumers, but inclusions specialist Pecan Deluxe Candy is ready to make its own predictions on the trends for 2019

The company's R&D Director Liz Jones is backing hand held products, in particular cookie sandwiches. Liz explains: "The Australian ice cream market has for the last few years seen a fairly even split between artisan ice cream, impulse buys and take-home tubs and cakes. The market is growing by a steady 2 to 3 per cent every year and in 2019 we reckon much of that growth will be down to hand held ice creams, especially those featuring premium ingredients such as alcohol- and fruit-based variants targeted primarily at adults."

Pecan Deluxe's confidence in its projections follows the company's participation in and sponsorship of this year's International Ice Cream Consortium (IICC) Annual Conference which was hosted by Bulla in Melbourne. The event gathered together CEOs and senior operations & commercial executives of market leading companies, who took part in tastings and a prestigious award ceremony, as well as sharing best practice and examining the latest developments in manufacturing and marketing.

Several of the largest home-based brands have recently launched successful premium ice cream sandwich lines and Pecan Deluxe expects this trend to continue. Despite the introduction of innovative flavours reflecting local and Asian influences – think matcha, magnolia, hibiscus, ginger, nutmeg and cinnamon - the most popular flavour combinations produced by the ingredients specialist for the Australian market still revolve around more traditional inclusions such as chocolate brownies, caramel sauce, cookie dough & praline nuts. The more left-field ingredients may star on social media but the paying consumer knows what they really want, day by day.

That said, the company acknowledges a strong move towards more guilt-free treats: consumers love the premium experience but will compromise with a smaller serving – or with a sugar-free or vegan alternative. Vegan ice cream in particular appears to be undergoing double digit growth in Australia: it's an area seeing lots of innovation with leading brands introducing new variants into emerging markets to meet demand.

In the US consumers are leaning towards nostalgia for their ice cream fix – and we know how quickly US trends migrate to Australian shores. So it's no surprise that stick ice creams, invented in Ohio in the 1920s, and sandwiches – the modern version of which premiered in New York at the end of the 2nd World War – are making a serious comeback.

Liz concludes: "Premium ingredients may be driving growth in the ice cream market but so is clean label and traceability, used to reinforce consumer trust. In Australia the laws on dairy product labelling are quite strict and consumers have now got on board with traceability and provenance. We're completely confident in our offering, that is premium and indulgent ingredients produced using traditional artisan production methods, backed with full product traceability. Whether you buy a stick or tub next year, if it contains Pecan Deluxe inclusions you know you're getting a premium experience and you also know exactly where those ingredients come from."

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