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## Free From Functional Food & Health Ingredients Expo celebrates vibrant free from industry as it marks its 9<sup>th</sup> successful edition in Barcelona

[Free From Functional Food & Health Ingredients Expo](#), Europe's leading innovation platform for the free from, organic, vegan, functional and ingredient food industries, returned to Barcelona in June welcoming thousands of key decision makers from some of the world's leading retailers and food manufacturers.

With the functional food industry continuing to experience rapid growth – the global market was valued at USD\$180,843.73 in 2021 and is projected to register a CAGR of 2.71% during the forecast period (2022-2027)<sup>1</sup> – the FIRA Barcelona welcomed a lively wave of traffic as visitors and exhibitors reconnected in the cosmopolitan capital of Spain's Catalonia region for the ninth edition of the show and the first since the pandemic.

Opening the show, Mr Dirk J. L. Kremer, the Honorary Consul for the Netherlands in Barcelona, welcomed thousands of key decision makers including representatives from Auchan, Mercadona, El Cortes Ingles, Coop Italy, Sonae, Jumbo Portugal and Carrefour France. Joining them, more than 3,900 visitors from more than 60 countries passed through the doors throughout the two-day event, looking to meet with almost 300 suppliers, learn about the very latest product innovations and discover the future trends that will dictate the course of the industry in the coming years.

While the focus was firmly on the future, it was hard not to notice the effect the pandemic has had on the sector. While many industries have been struggling to rebuild following the devastation ravaged by COVID-19, the functional food and health ingredients sectors have gone from strength to strength, as consumers veer towards diets which deliver wellbeing benefits. Throughout the event, exhibitors and visitors alike commented on the visible excitement among the crowds and their pleasure at finally being

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mordorintelligence.com/industry-reports/global-functional-food-market>



back exchanging ideas, networking with colleagues and working together to advance the industry even further.

### **Innovative insights**

Delegates attending this year's show were invited to attend conference sessions examining the key topics dominating the industry agenda. Curated around three trends-based streams – **Free-From Retail, Vegan and Plant-Based** and **Supplier and Insights** – and delivered by more than 65 expert speakers including ProVeg International, IRI Worldwide, Innova Market Insight, and ADILAC – the sessions provided insights into the latest industry research, analysis and key trends shaping the sector. These were supported by extensive networking opportunities and the latest product developments from key exhibitors.

Reflecting the popularity and growth in the category, some of the most popular sessions were in the free-from retail stream. Gluten-free presentations by **Cristóbal Pérez from the Asociación Celíacs de Catalunya** and **Joel Huguet from the University of Barcelona** dealt with the subject knowledgeably, looking at the benefits and advantages of licensing gluten-free products and the issues surrounding gluten-free accreditations when eating-out in restaurants. Both sessions drew crowds from the show floor, highlighting the growing interest in this area. Oriol Sans, President of **Adilac, the Lactose Intolerance Spanish Association** also chaired a panel discussion on the free-from sector, with contributions of officials and specialists from Mercadona, Pascual, Fresh DSM, Lozano and Monells, and focusing specifically on non-dairy, with a debate on Lactose free products; 'A need or a choice'?

Equally, presentations in the vegan and plant-based stream proved to be popular, with **Stephanie Jaczniakowska from leading international food awareness organization, ProVeg**, discussing the rise of the flexitarian diet - a style of eating that encourages eating mostly plant-based foods while allowing meat and other animal products in moderation.

Always interesting for visitors, the supplier insights presentations provided an opportunity for companies to share their insights, equipping attendees with the very latest industry intelligence to help them steer the direction of their business. Presentations from leading exhibitors at the event – including Noweat, R Biopharm, Groots, IRTA and IBS Food Solutions – were popular as always, and included in-



depth examinations of a broad range of topics from reusable packaging in food and retail, how to do business in Catalunya, tackling food tech research programmes, free-from additives and clean labels and many more.

Meanwhile, a session led by the Dutch Embassy explored its role in strengthening the global protein ecosystem. It highlighted how a group of Dutch entrepreneurs based in Spain are bringing innovations to market to realise the protein transition. The session referenced the likes of Fabulous Farm and Food Valley Wageningen, who are working to shorten the time to market for competitive, locally produced and consumed plant-based proteins; increase the viability and appeal of healthy food options for all stakeholders in the food chain; while stimulating large-scale waste stream valorisation to proliferate circular agrifood business models.

### **Awarding success**

Celebrating the very best of the industry, this year's Awards were a hotbed of excitement, with organisations celebrated in four key categories. Brand of the Year was awarded to Spanish vegan start-up Grin Grin foods. The company, which was set up in 2020, offers a plant-based home delivery service of its meat-alternative and dairy-free products, desserts, sauces, ready meals and snacks. Runner-up for Brand of the Year went to gluten-free pasta brand, Pangea Pasta.

It was a tough contest in the Product of the Year category, but the deserving first prize went to Finnish gluten-free manufacturer Virtasalmen, for its brand new spoonable snack – Apple & Cinnamon Spoothie. Runners up included Ketonico's Bone Broth Gel, an easy-to-use organic bone broth gel from grass-fed cows, which can be used in multiple recipes and enables consumers to enjoy all the benefits of the bio-available collagen plus multiple minerals and amino acids. Finally, UK-based Westmill was recognised for its Beetroot noodles.

The Newcomer of the Year award was handed to probiotic and health supplement manufacturer Progurt. The company's mission is to provide the highest quality, most advanced probiotic and health supplements with absolutely no compromise on innovation, ingredients, quality, delivery speed and functionality. At FFFHI, Progurt exhibited the most advanced probiotic available featuring 1,000 billion CFU.



Visionary plant-based compostable food packaging brand Vegware took home the Packaging of the Year Award for its revolutionary approach to packaging. The company's products are made from plants, packaging and delivering both hot and cold food products to consumers in 70 countries around the world. Finally, the Lifetime Achievement Award was given to the Association of European Coeliac Societies (AOECS) together with Associació de Celíacs de Catalunya. The organisation has been uniting and empowering coeliac societies in Europe and beyond for many years and has been an event partner for over 10 years.

Commenting on the success of the exhibition this year, Free From Functional Food & Health Ingredients event director Ronald Holman said: "We have been completely blown away by the response to the exhibition this year. Not only did it surpass all our expectations in terms of visitor and exhibitor figures but most importantly, the atmosphere among attendees was extremely positive. Visitors were able to identify new and exciting products from exhibitors, suppliers did business with the retail and manufacturing contacts they wanted to meet, delegates spoke extremely positively of the education opportunities at the conference and overall the industry seemed to be buzzing with life after a difficult few years. I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the winners of our awards – who have all worked so hard to get to where they are today.

"We now move on to planning our next event – Free From Functional Food & Health Ingredients in Amsterdam, which is already 65% re-booked following our successful Barcelona edition. It will take place on 22-23 November 2022 and we very much look forward to welcoming the industry to the RAI in a few months' time."

For more information on the Free From Functional & Health Ingredients Expo, which returns to the RAI Amsterdam from 22-23 November 2022, visit <https://amsterdam.freefromfoodexpo.com/>.

**Ends**