

High-Protein Meat Snacks Are Shaping Food Trends



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In 2024, U.S. consumers are snacking more than ever, with per-capita spending on snacks surpassing \$130 annually and a market growth rate exceeding 4% CAGR. Driving much of this surge is the demand for high-protein options—products that deliver nutrition, portability, and convenience. Within this expanding sector, meat-based snacks such as jerky, meat sticks, and cheese-and-meat kits are capturing significant consumer attention and reshaping the snacking landscape.

Snackification and the Protein Priority

Today's American consumer is more health-conscious and time-strapped than ever. Snackification—the replacement of traditional meals with several snacks throughout the day—has become a daily behavior for nearly 17% of adults. Among these consumers, protein now stands at the center of purchase decisions. Recent surveys show protein is the most important nutrient influencing snack choices, outranking considerations like sugar, fiber, and fat content.

As a result, high-protein meat snacks have moved from niche products favored by athletes to everyday staples across a broad demographic spectrum. Consumers want products that keep them full, fit into on-the-go lifestyles, and align with their health goals—and meat snacks are meeting that need.

Meat Snacks: Versatility Meets Demand

Meat snacks are uniquely positioned to satisfy the demand for high-protein, low-sugar, and minimally processed foods. Beef jerky, turkey sticks, and other shelf-stable proteins have gained favor among both health-conscious snackers and convenience-driven buyers.

Brands like Jack Link's, Chomps, and Tillamook Country Smoker are leading innovation, offering clean-label, grass-fed, and no-sugar-added varieties. Interest in alternative proteins such as venison, bison, and elk is also growing, fueled by adventurous consumers seeking leaner or novel options.



Source: Chomps

Meanwhile, meat-and-cheese snack kits are experiencing rapid growth. Products from Hillshire Snacking and Sargento Balanced Breaks combine protein, fats, and carbohydrates in a balanced, portion-controlled format—appealing to consumers seeking convenience without compromising nutrition.

Packaging Innovation: Where Convenience Meets Sustainability

As the popularity of high-protein meat snacks increases, packaging innovation continues to evolve. Convenience is still paramount: single-serve pouches, multi-compartment trays, and resealable bags enhance on-the-go usability. Packaging that emphasizes easy opening, product visibility, and freshness protection wins at retail.

At the same time, sustainability is becoming a crucial differentiator. Over 70% of U.S. consumers say they are willing to alter their buying habits to reduce environmental impact. Meat snack brands are responding with recyclable films, compostable materials, and bio-based plastics—solutions that maintain product quality while minimizing ecological footprints.

Advanced packaging technologies are also streamlining production. Horizontal flow-wrappers and thermoforming machines enable efficient, hygienic packaging of jerky strips, meat sticks, and snack kits, while integrated metal detection and X-ray inspection ensure product safety. Some brands are also exploring smart packaging, such as QR codes for sourcing transparency or freshness indicators.

MULTIVAC's L300 snack stick labeler is an attractive solution for smaller meat processors who want to get into snack sticks or make their existing hand labeling process much more efficient. Additionally, MULTIVAC's MCF centrifuge system lines up bulk snack sticks and arranges them such that they can be automatically loaded into the packaging machine, streamlining the packaging process significantly.



Source: ©RVLSOFT - STOCK.ADOBE.COM

Future Outlook: Clean Labels and New Formats

Looking ahead, the high-protein meat snack category is poised for sustained growth through 2030 and beyond. Clean-label formulations—with minimal ingredients, no artificial preservatives, and transparent sourcing—will become even more important.

The next frontier may be refrigerated, fresh meat snack options. Products like premium turkey-and-cheese snack packs and charcuterie-style trays offer a fresh, upscale alternative to traditional shelf-stable jerky, appealing to consumers seeking minimally processed, high-quality proteins.

Meanwhile, while plant-based protein snacks are growing, meat-based products continue to dominate the high-protein segment for U.S. consumers. Traditional animal-based protein sources are still viewed as the gold standard for satiety, taste, and complete nutrition.

Conclusion

In 2024, high-protein meat snacks are not just a trend—they are a cornerstone of the evolving American diet. As consumer expectations shift toward health, convenience, and environmental responsibility, brands that prioritize clean ingredients, innovative packaging, and responsible sourcing will be best positioned to lead in this dynamic and growing market.

With protein positioned firmly at the center of daily eating habits, the future of meat snacks looks strong—and essential.

