

CASE STUDY

Helping food businesses

REFORMUL
for a healthier future



PEACOCK SALT

“The FDF Reformulation team were really helpful from the very beginning. As well as a grant, they’ve helped us with advice and putting us in contact with key people. Every time we asked them something, they really engaged with us.”

“We feel so positive about our new blends. We’re not just selling more salt, we’re selling something different, and meeting a key need for a lot of customers. And the market for it will grow as people become more and more health-conscious.”

Greg Waters, Sales and Marketing Director Peacock Salt



How we launched a lower-sodium salt

Who we are

Peacock Salt is the largest distributor of salt products in the UK and also the oldest. We supply salt for a vast range of purposes, from food production and fish processing to water treatment and road de-icing. Headquartered in Ayr, we celebrated our 140-year anniversary in 2014.

<https://www.peacocksalt.com>

Why lower-sodium salt?

Our customers in the food industry are looking to reduce the sodium content of their products, both to meet demand from their own customers and to

prepare for new government guidelines on sodium, to be achieved by 2024.

In response, we decided to develop a lower-sodium salt blend. Our aim: to help the food industry reduce their sodium content while keeping the great taste, feel and look of their products.

What we did

We started the project in late 2019, taking on a staff member with a technical background to manage it. Working with University College Dublin, we developed different blends, tailoring the sodium levels to various categories in the 2024 Public Health England guidelines.



Food and Drink Federation Scotland's Reformulation for Health programme offers support to small to medium-sized companies, both FDF members and non-members. For more details, contact reformulation@fdfscotland.org.uk or visit www.fdfscotland.org.uk.

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To do this, we trialled numerous sodium alternatives, including potassium, magnesium, seaweed, malt extract and others, looking for a blend that would satisfy our criteria on, for example, **cost, stability, taste and texture**:

- We settled on a **blend of sodium, potassium and magnesium**.
- Learning along the way included the **need to source the alternatives in the same grain size as the sodium chloride**. Without this, the mix would separate out.
- Next stage of the journey was **sensory testing**, made possible by a grant from the Reformul8 project.

Meeting customer demand: sensory testing

Using a £5,000 award from the Reformul8 Challenge Fund in 2021, we carried out detailed sensory testing with Queen Margaret University (QMU) in Edinburgh. They panel-tested two new reduced-sodium formulations, using them in some of Scotland's best-loved foods – **oatcakes, soup and pastry** – and looking at elements like texture, mouth-feel, appearance and taste.

We also then 'road-tested' our new proposed blends with customers, offering them samples to use for a wide range of foods, such as sausages, bacon, smoked salmon, cheese and much more.

The findings

- **Reaction to the different blends has been highly positive. Businesses with a popular product are always nervous about changing the ingredients, but they are telling us they'd be very happy to use these reduced-sodium blends.**
- **A smoked salmon producer doing its own reformulation project and sensory tests found that salmon cured with our reduced-sodium blend scored much more highly than salmon using its standard salt mix.**
- **We originally expected to develop a single low-sodium blend, but we realised early on there's no one-size-fits-all product: sodium reduction is industry-dependant and product-dependant.**
- **To cater for this, we decided to offer three 'off-the-shelf' blends, providing a 20%, 30% and 40% reduction in sodium.**
- **We will also be able to produce custom-made blends to suit different customer specifications, and will be ready to support customers with samples and sensory testing.**



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The benefits and learning points

Based on these findings and outcomes, we see two main areas of benefits from introducing these blends, opening up opportunities with both existing and new customers:

- businesses that want to adapt existing products to fit the 2024 sodium guidelines.
- businesses that want to launch 'healthier options' products.

With both types of business, our reduced-sodium blends are opening new doors for us – in many cases with big players. For that reason alone, we would certainly recommend other companies to look at their own reformulation journeys, whatever their sector or reformulation goal. Some of our own learning points could help with that:

Do the research. We could have gone out and replicated the solutions already in the market, but we wanted to do something different. Getting technical, science support in-house and from the

two universities gave us the confidence and focus to complete this project – even when the pandemic introduced numerous practical complications.

Be open. Talk to your customers and see what they want. Let the results guide what you do, and don't limit yourself by pre-deciding anything. As you go along with the project, you will discover things you didn't expect at the start, and your failures can be as useful as your successes in this.

Keep on learning. Though we have brought new products to market, this journey is far from over. Over the next couple of years, we expect to gather more experience and feedback about which blends work best in different products. New alternative ingredients may also come onto the market. If we see something that offers even more benefits, we'll investigate and talk to customers about it.

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