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How Sector Leaders are Reading 2026

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By **Mansi Jamsudkar** | December 3, 2025



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As the Indian food and nutrition sector enters a defining year, one thing is clear — the rules of growth are changing. Clean labels, traceability, stronger regulation, purposeful nutrition, export competitiveness and data-driven factories are quickly becoming non-negotiables. Innovation is shifting from complexity to credibility, from additives to soil health, from pilot digitisation to enterprise-wide transformation.
So what will truly shape 2026 for food and beverage in India? Let's see what the leaders across sectors are saying — from spices, dairy, automation and tea to functional foods, nutrition and agri-exports.

Spices

Ramkumar Menon, Chairman, World Spice Organisation

"The next 18–24 months will be a defining phase for the Indian spice sector as global markets tighten residue and food-safety norms. Our immediate priority is to align fully with these requirements through a stronger regulatory framework especially the expanded MRL list being finalised by FSSAI which will significantly reduce the risk of export rejections. At the same time, industry must accelerate adoption of digital traceability across major spice clusters so buyers have complete visibility from farm to container. Upgrading processing and sterilisation infrastructure will also be critical as superior microbial control becomes a competitive differentiator. Climate resilience will need sustained attention, particularly in crops like pepper, cumin, cardamom and chilli that are already experiencing erratic weather effects. Finally, the sector must deepen its focus on value addition; although India has made progress, we need greater investment in oleoresins, extracts, seasoning blends and natural flavour solutions if we are to meet our long-term export targets and maintain leadership in a rapidly evolving global market."

Automation

Sachin Salunkhe, Automation and Digital Business Development Manager, Tetra Pak India

Over the next 12–24 months, India's food and beverage industry will strengthen its resolve to move from digital experimentation to digital industrialization, as the value of data-driven operations becomes undeniable. We expect to see a decisive shift from isolated pilots to enterprise-wide transformation, particularly among mid-sized producers seeking scale, efficiency, and resilience. The food and beverage industry will continue to face pressure to produce more with less, meet sustainability targets, and adapt to shifting consumer expectations. It will be the producers that connect systems, empower people, and turn data into actionable insights who will solve these challenges and shape the sustainable, intelligent factories of the future. Together, these capabilities will empower Indian manufacturers to capture growth, strengthen competitiveness, and lead the next chapter of sustainable industrial progress.

Dairy

Srideep Kesavan, CEO of Heritage Foods Ltd.

"*In 2026, food innovation will mean choosing clean nutrition over complexity. There is a clear trend towards foods being fortified with micro and macro nutrients. Heritage Foods has pioneered this with Vitamin D and B12 added to every milk packet, addressing Indian deficiencies tied to vegetarian diets. We see continuing momentum in fortifying dairy products with high protein and calcium.*

Among dairy exports, Indian companies primarily target ghee and SMP to the diaspora. To compete globally in butter and cheese, we must simultaneously improve product quality, cost, and branding against entrenched players.

The alt protein revolution has faded—a casualty of ultra-processing that compromises its nutritional proposition. FSSAI has been instrumental in driving food safety and clean labeling standards, continuously improving compliance across categories for better public health outcomes."

Nutrition

Dr Jalachari Ella, Managing Director, Ella Foods

“In 2026 and beyond, the nutrition narrative will move toward improving the quality of what we eat. Quality considerations will trigger a shift toward clean and safe pantry staples, low residue fruit and vegetables, high-quality animal proteins, fermented foods as primary pillars of nutrition.

Fibre also is a top priority nutrient, recognised not just for satiety but for its role in managing blood sugar spikes and supporting gut regularity. Consumers should be urged increasingly to look for functional yet safe and clean everyday foods, not only pills and powders, to improve long-term metabolic and immune health.

This movement will drive a deeper realisation: innovation must start at the source, soil, seed, and water, rather than in factories. Overreliance on constant supplementation and man-made additives will be increasingly viewed as unsustainable and comparable to the West’s trajectory of processed-food dependency, rising sensitivities, and lifestyle disorders.

The next big leap in nutrition will not be in smarter formulations, but in smarter farming, better soil maintenance, safer pest-control practices, reduced chemical fertilisers, and tissue-culture adoption for high-yield instead of hybrid crops. Asia will leverage its greatest advantage, fresh ingredients and lower dependence on processed foods, to remain a global benchmark for preventive health.”

Regulation

Sanjay Sharma, CEO, Coldman logistics

“The upcoming FSSAI Food & Beverage and nutraceutical standardizations, along with front-of-pack labeling and clean-claims enforcement, represent a crucial shift in India’s food regulation landscape. Currently, one of the biggest challenges is the weak implementation of food quality standards and compliance mechanisms, which often allows companies to evade accountability. Strengthening these policies will compel brands to demonstrate the efficacy, safety, and transparency of their products. This regulatory push will not only ensure that consumers receive high-quality and truthful products but also drive efficiency and integrity across the entire value chain. As compliance becomes more stringent, it will promote innovation, build consumer trust, and align India’s food industry with global best practices. Ultimately, this health policy reform

will shape a more responsible and health-conscious marketplace."

Tea

Sanjay Singal, CEO of Wagh Bakri Tea Group

"In 2026, food innovation for the tea industry will mean blending heritage with modern science. As customers become more discerning, the focus will shift towards creating experiences that not only delight the senses but also promote wellbeing. With the rapid growth of food delivery and on-the-go consumption, the focus will be on ensuring consistent quality and freshness in the offerings."

Agri-Export

Vikram Marwaha, Joint Managing Director, DRRK Foods

"In 2026, the Indian food and agri sector will solely depend on export competitiveness as the biggest factor that drives product quality and brand differentiation. DRRK Foods, an exporter of premium Basmati rice, is a leading player in this evolution that is already changing our perception of quality, consistency, and innovation. As the markets around the world become more picky, the success of Indian brands will be determined by their ability to meet the highest international standards in purity, aroma, grain length, or sustainability credentials.

We further anticipate that markets such as the Middle East, Europe, and North America will become increasingly healthy and sustainable-conscious, and the premium Basmati segment will witness a consumer shift towards products that possess the traits of both traditional authenticity and modern expectations, non-GMO assurance, minimal chemical use, and eco-friendly sourcing.

Export competitiveness in 2026 and the following years will drive Indian Basmati brands to innovate within the realm of tradition, allowing every grain to tell a tale of quality and trust. For DRRK Foods, this implies further investment in sophisticated processing, precision sorting, and packaging, as well as reinforcing connections with our worldwide partners."

Functional Foods

Sparsh Sachar, Director and Business Head, FMCG, Nutrica, BN Group

“In 2026, food innovation will move from healthy choices to purposeful living. People will want to know where their food comes from, how it is made, and whether it truly supports their wellness and modern lifestyle. This shift will see health and fitness enthusiasts seeking products that represent a holistic approach, blending wellness, lifestyle, and fitness to support both physical and mental wellbeing. At Nutrica, these three pillars form the foundation of everything we do. Through them, we aim to make health simpler, enjoyable, and accessible, offering food that not only nourishes but also brings genuine delight and purpose to everyday living.”

Dairy Traceability

Ranjith Mukundan, CEO and Co-Founder, Stellapps Technologies

“As we look ahead to 2026, food innovation will centre around trust and responsibility. Consumers will choose brands that are transparent, sustainable, and truly committed to their wellbeing and that of the planet. Technology will quietly power this shift by helping us understand where our food comes from, how it was produced and its true nutritional value.

For dairy, this will be defined by traceable freshness where every glass of milk or spoon of ghee carries a real story of well-cared-for cattle, verified nutrition and farmers who are fairly rewarded. At Stellapps, we see innovation as rebuilding trust by bringing technology and nutrition together to improve productivity, quality and traceability so that every product on the shelf not only nourishes families but also strengthens the communities behind it”.

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