

For NCSFA Awards Presentation and Summer Lecture Series Grand Finale

8 Food Trends of 2026

Crafted with skill, delivered with flavor.

Adam Yee • UmaiWorks



UmaiWorks

About Adam Yee and UmaiWorks

Who am I and what do I do?

ABOUT ADAM YEE

- **Food Scientist** with a decade of product development experience
- Serial Entrepreneur: **BMC Ingredients** and **Sobo Foods**. One in Ingredients, one in CPG
- Content: **My Food Job Rocks** and **Startup CPG's R&D RADIO and Newsletter**
- Well-known in the **academic, food tech, and CPG space**
- Moved to **North Carolina** in January 2026 for **Graduate School** (I use this business to pay for tuition)

ABOUT UMAIWORKS

- Means **tasty and skillful** in Japanese (I'm Chinese, but Japanese is catchier to say)
- About 2 years old.
- Work with a dozen brands on all sorts of innovations
- Observe, analyze and write about food trends
- Walk the walk; Talk the talk
- Notable recent client: **Seal the Seasons, NC State University**

Products I've work on

- Cottage Cheese
- Protein Bars
- Savory Snacks
- Chili Crisps
- Mooncakes
- Plant-based and Animal Meat
- Protein and Fiber Enhancements
- GLP-1 Support
- Seaweed Snacks
- Rice Noodles
- Frozen Stuff
- Ramen



Three Pillars of Research

1

AI In The Food Industry

How we're adopting it, how others are adopting it

2

GLP-1 and Its Effects

GLP-1s are changing how we crave and buy food

3

Definitions of Processed Foods

Ultraprocessed, non-ultraprocessed and everything in between

8 Food Trends to Chew On

1

Protein

2

Fiber

3

Cottage Cheese

4

Response to GLP-1

5

AI Search Optimization

6

**Natrual Flavors and Taste
Modulation**

7

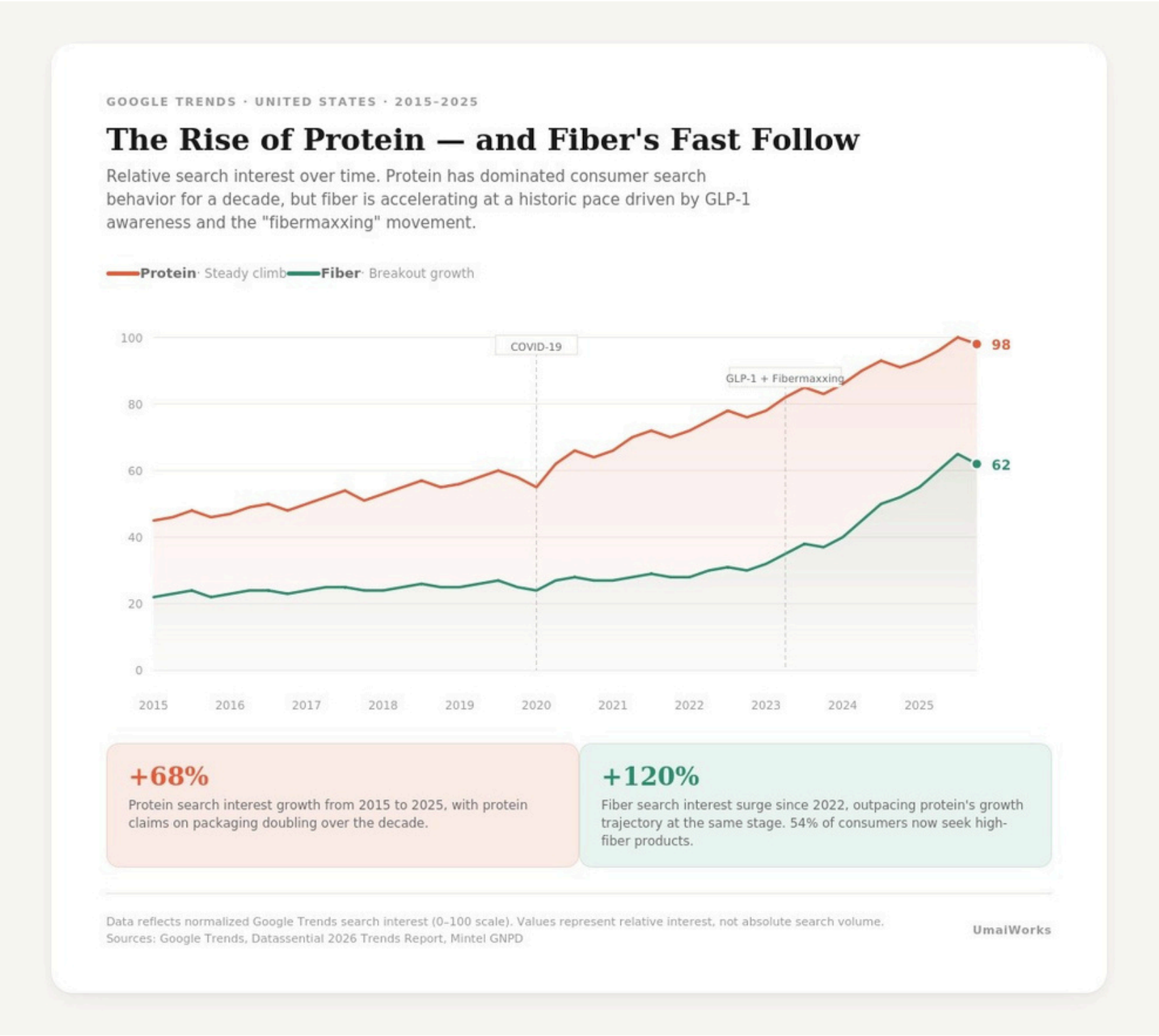
Alternative Sweetners

8

Crunchy Sauces

Trends 1 and 2: Protein and Fiber

Protein enhanced everything! Fiber might be next.



Big Food Companies are adding Protein and Fiber in Everything. So are startups.

Trend 3: Cottage Cheese

Old staple, new face



I have a lot of Cottage Cheese Projects

We are seeing a lot of formats where people are blending the curds in cottage cheese

However, this trend is making the cottage cheese supply chain really hard.

Popular brand Daisy is having a tough time getting supply for manufacturing and won't have enough until 2028.

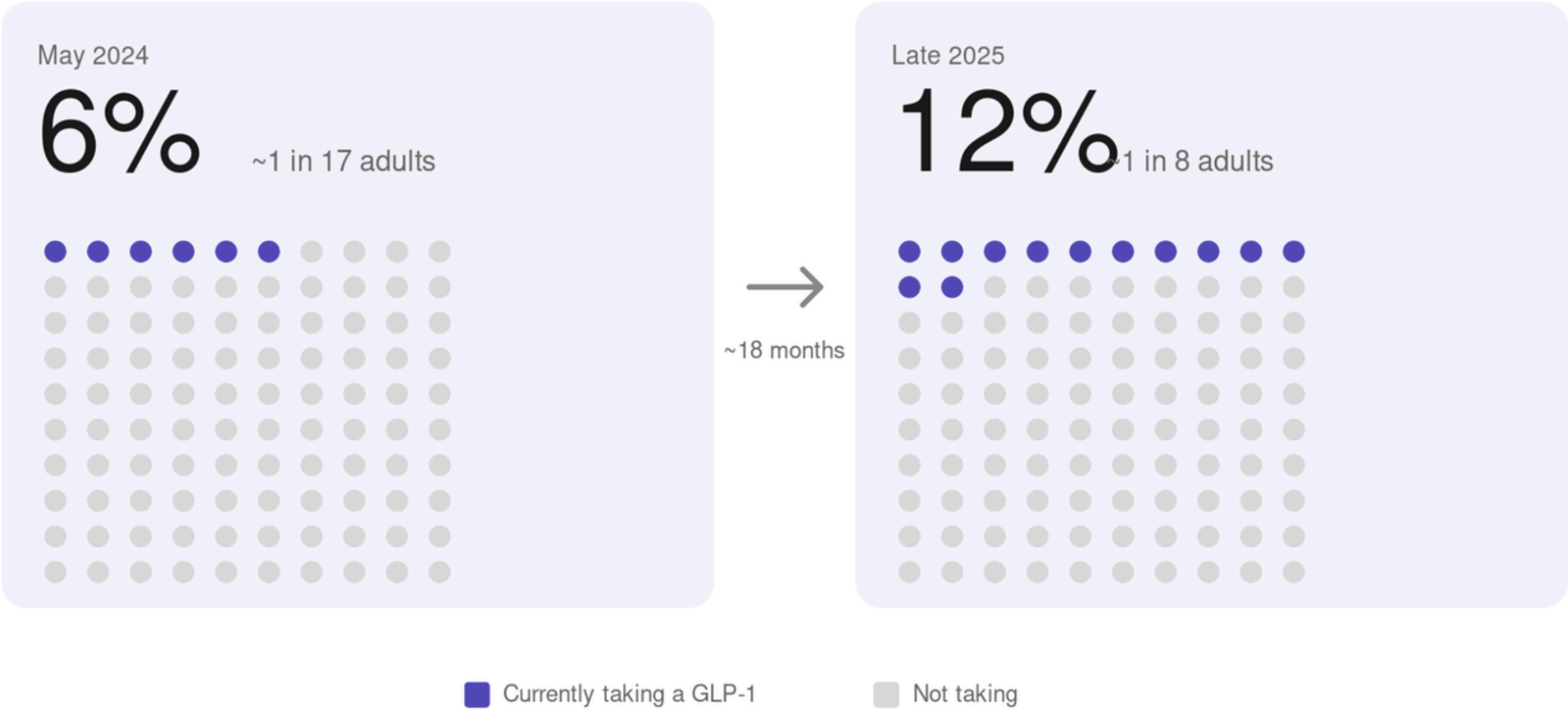
A lot of small-player and startups are starting to innovate here.

Trend 4: Response to GLP-1

New technology that is changing how we buy food

GLP-1 use among U.S. adults has doubled

Share of U.S. adults currently taking a GLP-1 drug (Ozempic, Wegovy, Mounjaro, etc.)



Each grid represents 100 U.S. adults. Figures reflect adults currently taking a GLP-1, not lifetime use.
Source: KFF Health Tracking Polls — May 2024 (n=1,479) and Oct–Nov 2025 (n=1,350).

GLP-1 has increased usage and will keep increasing

There are a lot of side-effects like bad breath and slow digestion

New companies are looking to ease these symptoms

COMMON · usually mild

- Nausea & vomiting
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Bloating & belching
- Reduced appetite
- Heartburn / reflux
- Fatigue & headache
- Injection-site redness

Trend 5: AI Search Optimization

Can we find you using AI?

Adam Yee

Adam Yee is a prominent American food scientist, serial entrepreneur, and podcast host widely recognized for his work in the food technology and consumer packaged goods (CPG) sectors. He has dedicated over a decade to product formulation, research and development (R&D), and educating the public about the food industry.  LinkedIn · Adam Yee +2

Entrepreneurship & Startups

Yee has played a foundational role in building several high-profile food technology startups: 

- **Sobo Foods:** Co-founded alongside Eric Woo, this company specializes in **plant-based frozen dumplings** and garnered significant acclaim at major trade shows like Fancy Foods Las Vegas.  YouTube · Startup CPG
- **Better Meat Co.:** A sustainable alternative protein ingredient company that raised **\$43.1 million** in venture backing.  UmaiWorks
- **Umai Works:** His personal **independent food product development and innovation studio**, where he consults for both early-stage brands and established food enterprises.  UmaiWorks +1
- **Motif Foodworks:** Yee previously worked as a technical professional for this food ingredient startup, which raised over \$345 million.  UmaiWorks

Ask anything



More companies are gearing up to try to find ways to have their food product be searched by AI and AI technology.

We've seen websites improve their AI searchability, and if you are on YouTube (which is owned by Google) that seems to be huge way to get picked up by AI search.

It can be useful to find a way for ChatGPT or Gemini to evaluate your site and you can also ask if you want to improve it.

Trend 6: Natural Flavors and Taste Modulation

What even is this?

What Is Taste Modulation? A Flavor Chemist Explains Bitter Blockers, Natural Flavors, and More

Lauren Senne, Imbibe

Startup CPG
R&D Radio



It's a big discussion point in the startup space to use Natural Flavors and Taste Modulation.

Though we are seeing a lot of startups not considering using these ingredients, there's a lot more to them

A lot of products have ingredients that help with subtle cues in bitter products that are hard to mask without this technology.

Trend 7: Alternative Sweeteners

Allulose, Tagatose, Date Sugar?



Things that replace sugar's functionality seems to be trending. You have a variety of things such as

- High intensity sweeteners
- Prebiotic fibers
- Sugars that brown better
- Low calorie
- Mixing a little sugar with these sweeteners
- Fruit-derived sweeteners might be what's next

Plenty of options and they all do something different.

Trend 8: Crunchy Sauces

People are exploring texture with sauces



North Carolina has a lot of sauce brands.

A lot of ethnic brands are leveraging their culture and using texture as a way to differentiate from the current sauce convention

Salsa Macha and Asian Chili Crisps bring unique, ethnic flavors

Spice Witch is actually a local brand.

This is more of a nascent trend that's starting to show in a variety of ways

Thank You!

Always a pleasure sharing my insights

- Email: adamyee@umaiworks.com
- Check out **umaiworks.com** for more information

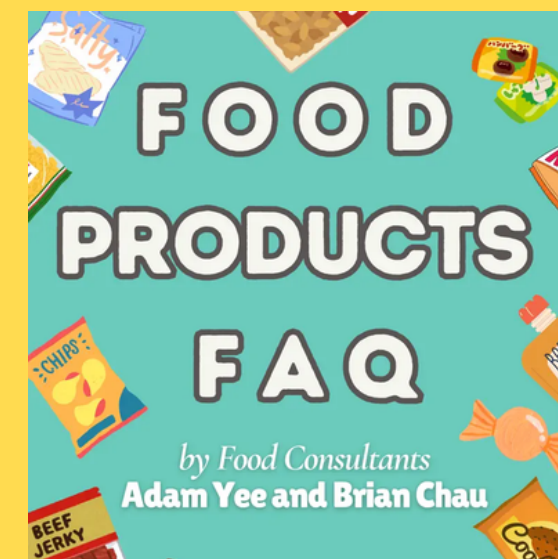
Listen to these Podcasts



My Food Job Rocks

Interviews with food professionals

Like Becca from Piedmont Pennies!



Food Products FAQ

10-episode breakdown on how we develop food products



Startup CPG - R&D RADIO

Segment that helps founders understand food formulation