

# Inside the Mind / Body of the Protein Conscious Consumer

And How Dairy Can Win Them  
Over



QUIRK'S Chicago, 2026



## Today we'll answer:

- Who is the 'Protein Conscious' consumer?
- What's dairy's role in the protein occasion?
- How can we convert interest in protein into growth for dairy?



# What is the Consumer Mindset?

A photograph of a person's hands holding a glass of milk. In the background, a wooden tray holds several small jars of yogurt and two bowls of cereal. The scene is set on a wooden table, and the overall lighting is soft and natural.



Health & Wellness



Enjoyment



Affordability



Convenience



Sustainability




# What do Consumers Need?





# Consumer Perceptions

## Top 10 Attributes of healthy food

 = denotes strength for dairy

Source: 2025 international Food Information G12 Which of the following best define a healthy food to you? Please select up to 5 choices. (n=3,000)

1. Good source of protein 
2. Fresh 
3. Low in sugar 
4. Good source of nutrients 
5. Contains fruits or vegetables
6. Low sodium 
7. Natural 
8. Limited/no artificial ingredients 
9. Minimal/no processing 
10. Good source of fiber

# Consumer interest in protein is higher than ever

**40%** of consumers globally say “protein” is the most important ingredient.<sup>1</sup>

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**3 in 4** U.S. adults say they are seeking to add or increase their protein, up from 59% in 2022.<sup>1</sup>

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**#1** “High protein” is the top eating pattern for 3 years in a row – among 25% of U.S. adults, up from 18% in 2023.<sup>2</sup>

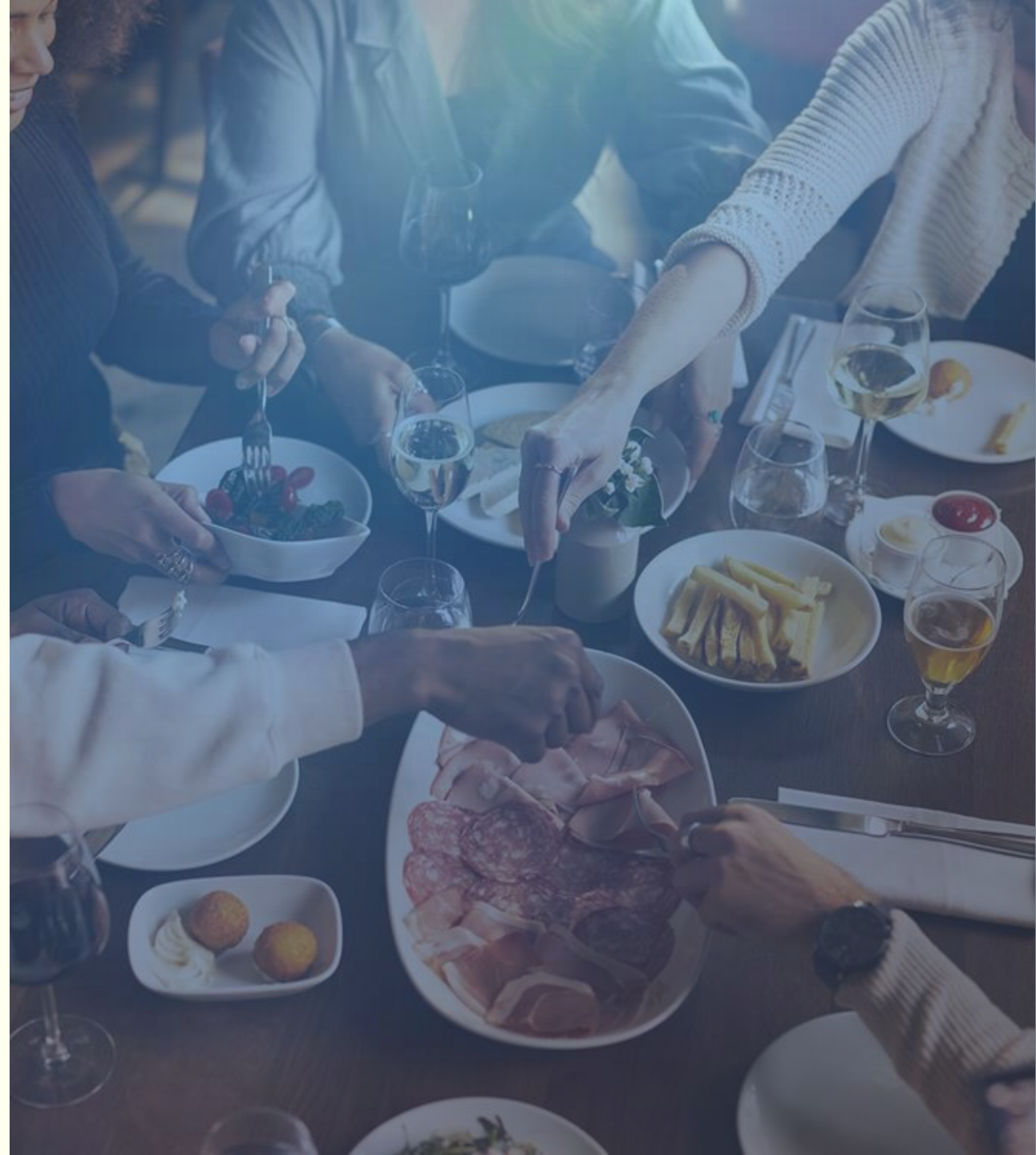
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**41%** of U.S. adults say they consume protein with every meal.<sup>3</sup>

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1-Mintel's 2024 Sustainability in Food & Drink report , 3- Datassential's Food as Medicine report 2025

2- IFIC Food & Health Survey 2025 [TREND 2018-2025] N3 Have you followed any specific eating pattern or diet at any time in the past year? Select all that apply. (n=3000) \*High protein was not assessed from 2019-2022.

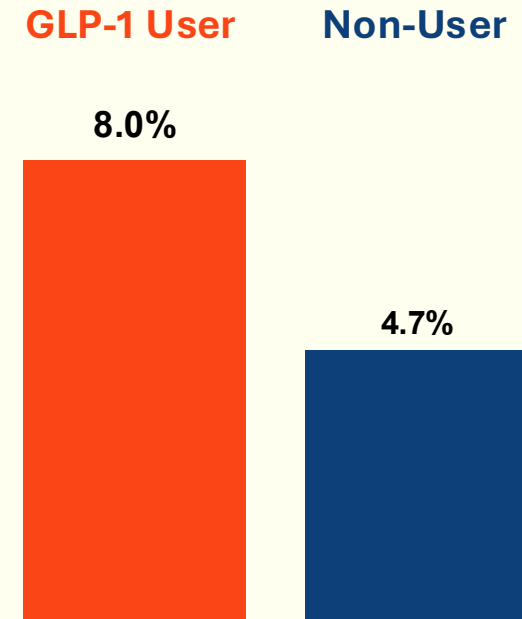


# And weight management is reshaping demand

**15%** Households using GLP-1 in 2025

**Top GLP-1 Motivator:**  
Weight Loss: **78%** of Users up from 37% in 2021.

**HH \$ Sales 2024-25 % Chg. of Products with MORE PROTEIN Claims**



	GLP-User	Non-User
More Fiber	+3.4%	+1.4%
Less Sugar	+24.3%	+14.4%
Fewer Carbs	+19.3%	+1.1%

Source: Circana MULO+ with convenience

Claim definitions: Protein: High/more/source/stated on pkg., Fiber: High/more, Sugar: Low/less/no/unsweetened



**Dairy is  
growing,  
but  
playing  
catch up**

# Winning Over the Protein Conscious Consumer



# We Asked...

**1,520 Real Humans** in the US who are  
'Protein Conscious' Consumers

**Who try to include protein in their diet  
and  
Consume or are 'open' to dairy**

Via a:  
**15-min. online survey**

# About Their...

- Consumption Behaviors and Sources
- Attitudes and Beliefs
- Motivations and Barriers
- Information Resources

**First for General Protein**


**Then for Dairy-Based Foods or  
Beverages**

# Defining Dairy-based Foods and Beverages

- **Cow's Milk** (e.g., 2%, 1%, skim/nonfat, fortified, buttermilk)
- **Cream** (e.g., heavy cream, whipping cream, half-and-half)
- **Yogurt** (e.g., traditional, Greek, skyr, frozen yogurt)
- **Sour Cream** (e.g., cultured, light, nonfat, Crème Fraîche, Mexican crema)
- **Cheese** (e.g., cheddar, parmesan, mozzarella, cream cheese)
- **Ice Cream** (e.g., standard, premium, frozen custard, gelato, soft serve)
- **Cottage Cheese** (e.g., regular, low-fat, nonfat or fat-free)
- **Butter**
- **Fermented dairy drinks** (e.g., Kefir)
- **Dry milk powder / dehydrated milk**
- **Condensed and evaporated milk**
- **Protein powders or bars with whey**



# Who is the 'Protein Conscious' Consumer?

A top-down view of a person sitting at a wooden table in a restaurant. The person is wearing a light-colored t-shirt and has a tattoo on their left forearm. They are holding a sandwich with both hands. On the table, there is a blue plate with a salad, a bowl of french fries, a white napkin, and a fork and knife. The background shows a white plate and a glass.

# Protein Conscious consumers structure their diet around protein intake



Agree Protein is **ESSENTIAL**  
For Overall Health and Wellbeing

91%



Make Sure or Strive to **INCLUDE** Protein  
In All or Most Meals and Snacks

2 in 3



Track **HOW MUCH**  
Protein They're Getting  
In Their Diet

7 in 10



Intend to Consume **MORE** Protein  
In the Next Year

38%

#1 Source: Packaging/Labels

They prioritize protein for strength, resilience, and satiety

| Top 3 Motivations for Protein Consumption |



Builds or maintains **muscle**



Keeps my body **strong** as I age



Helps me feel **satisfied** throughout the day

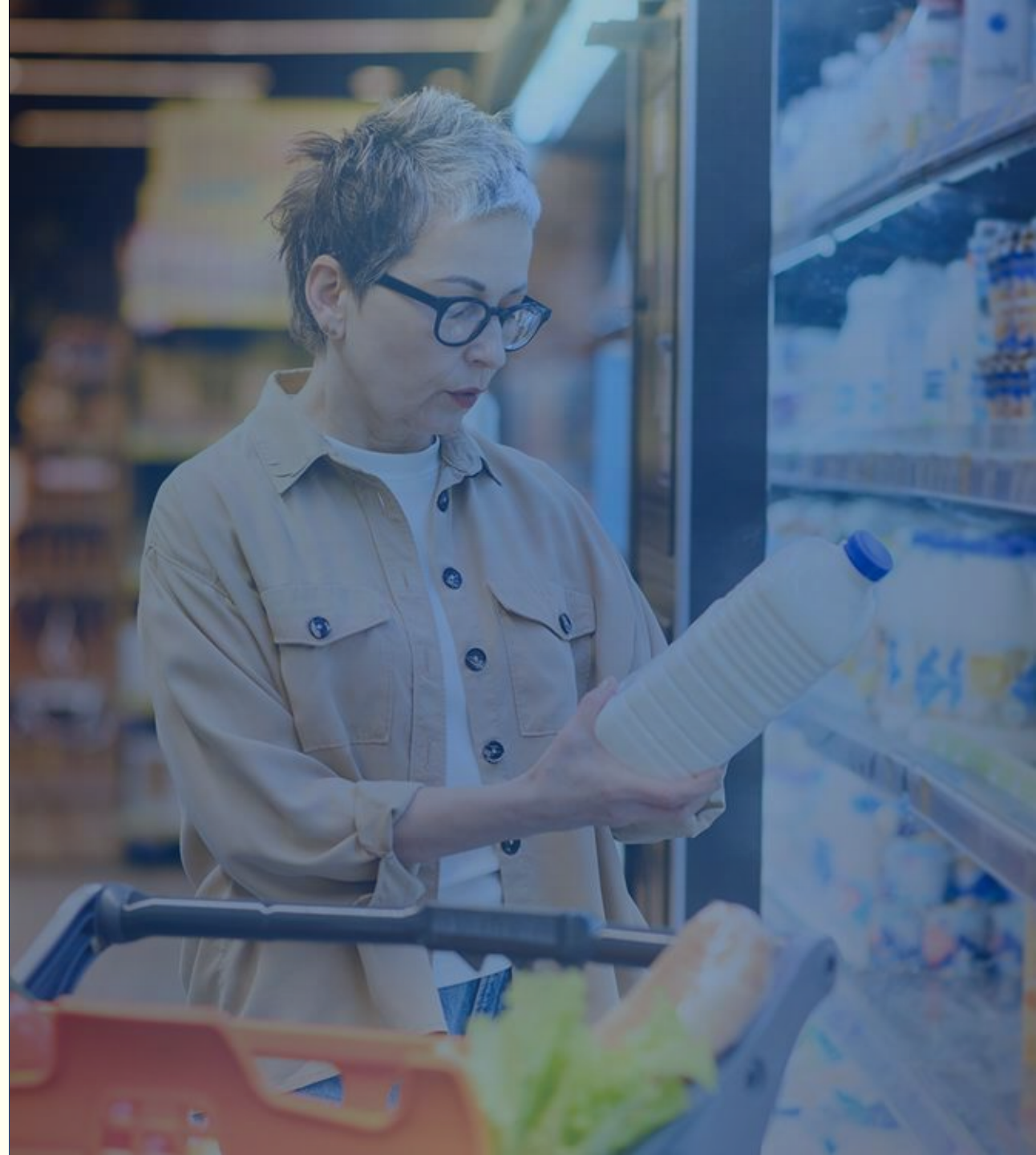
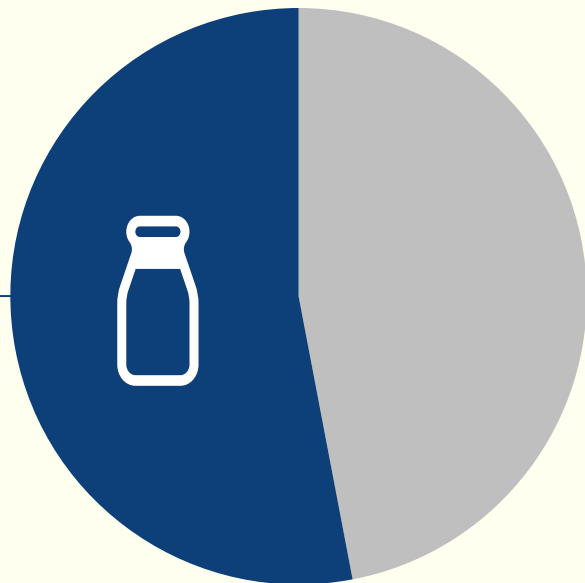
# What is Dairy's Role in the Protein Occasion?

A photograph of two women sitting at a wooden dining table, eating breakfast. The woman on the left has long, wavy brown hair and is wearing a green top. She is holding a spoon and eating from a white bowl. The woman on the right has long, dark, curly hair and is wearing a light-colored, long-sleeved top. She is also eating from a white bowl. On the table, there is a glass of milk, a box of cereal, a plate of croissants, and a plate of fruit including oranges and apricots. The background shows a dining room with chairs and a window.

# Nearly half don't think of dairy as a strong protein source

**53%**

Strongly Consider  
Dairy to be a  
Protein Source

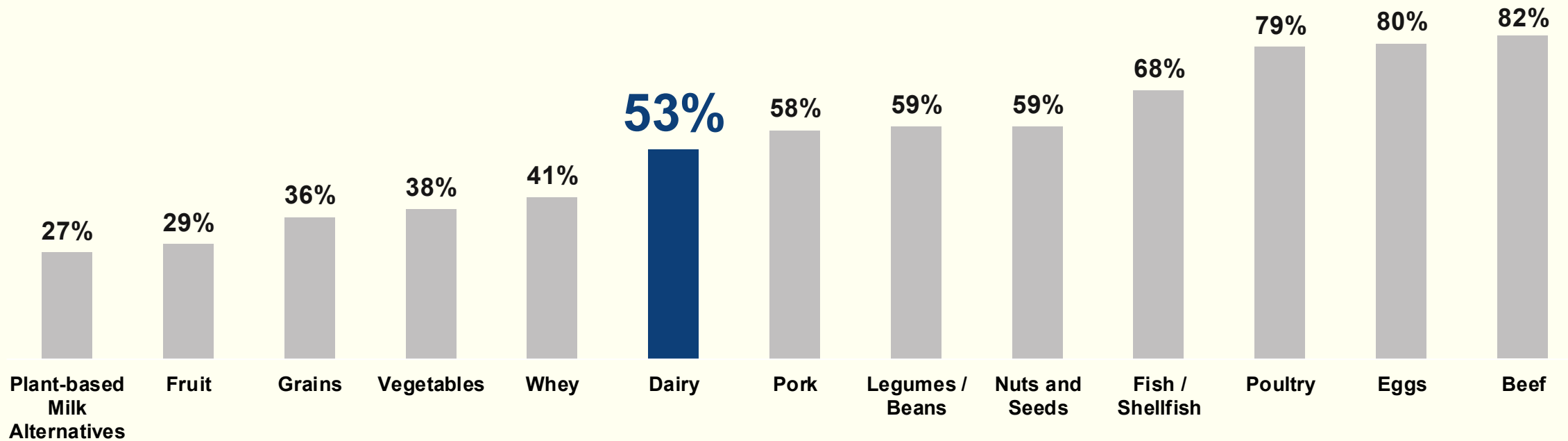
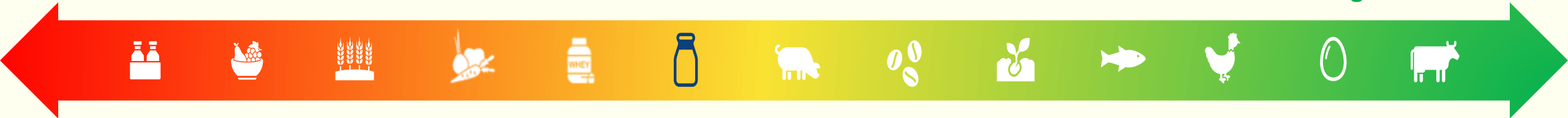


# They consider other foods to be better protein sources

| Strongly Consider to be a Protein Source |

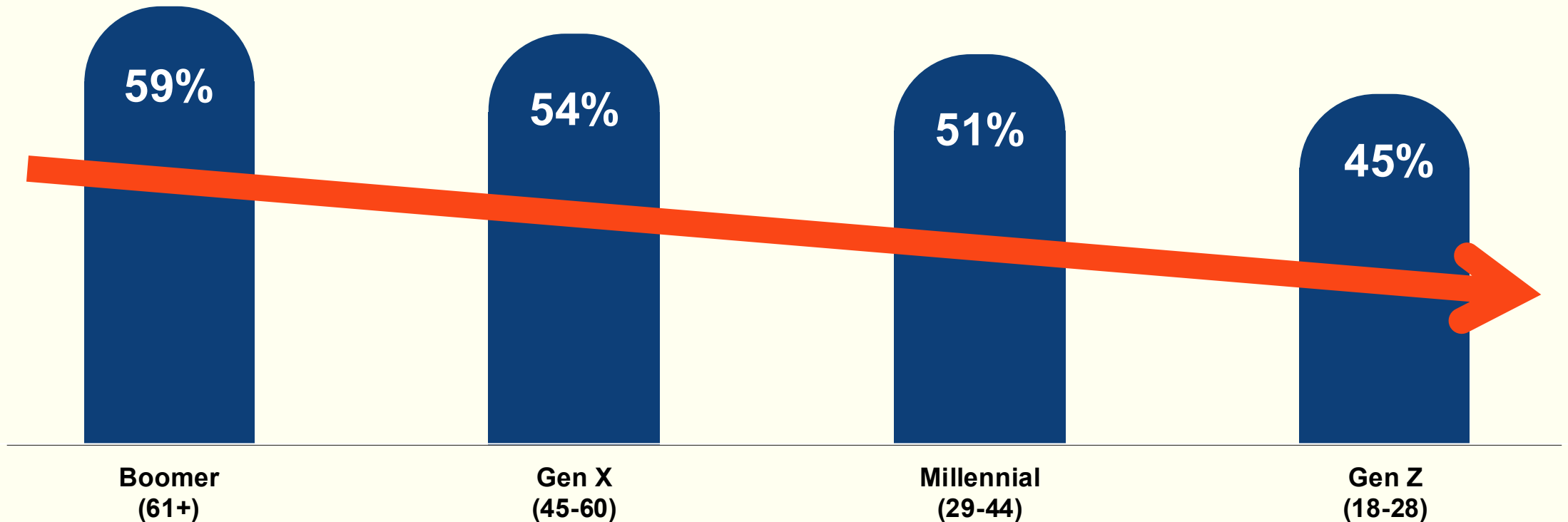
Weaker Source

Stronger Source

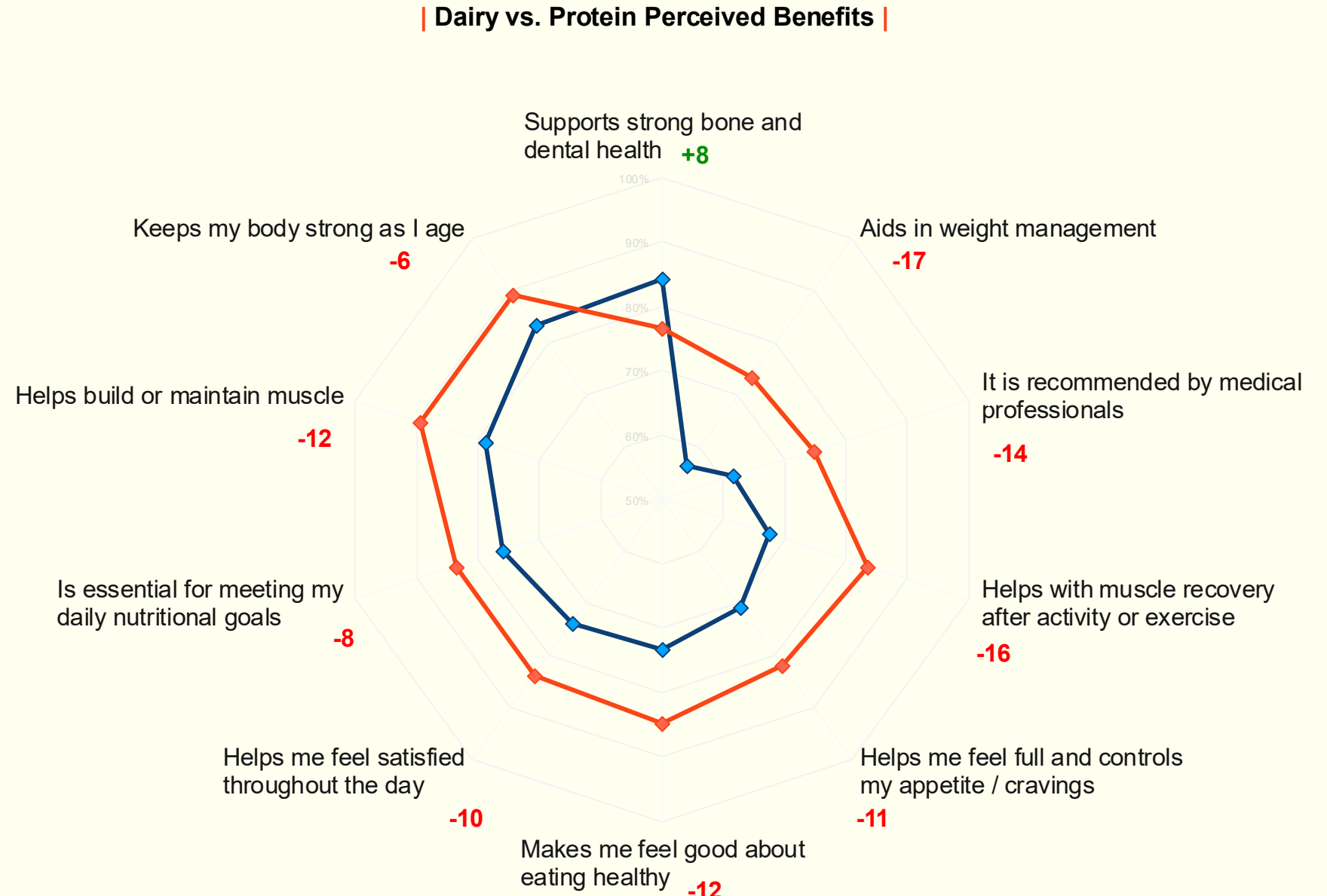


# Younger generations have an even weaker connection to dairy as a protein source

| Strongly Consider Dairy to be a Protein Source |



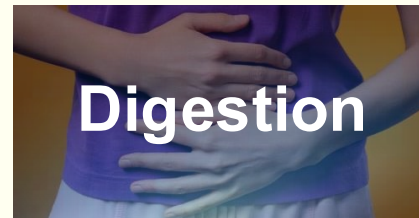
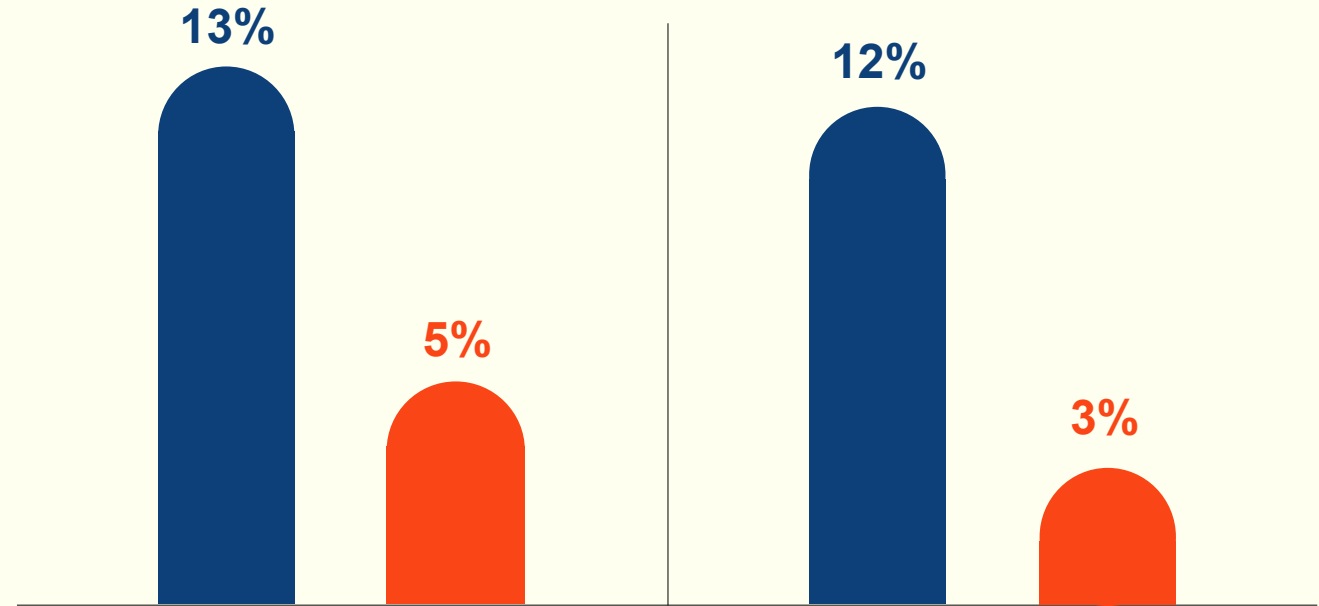
# Dairy falls short of their expectations in delivering on key benefits



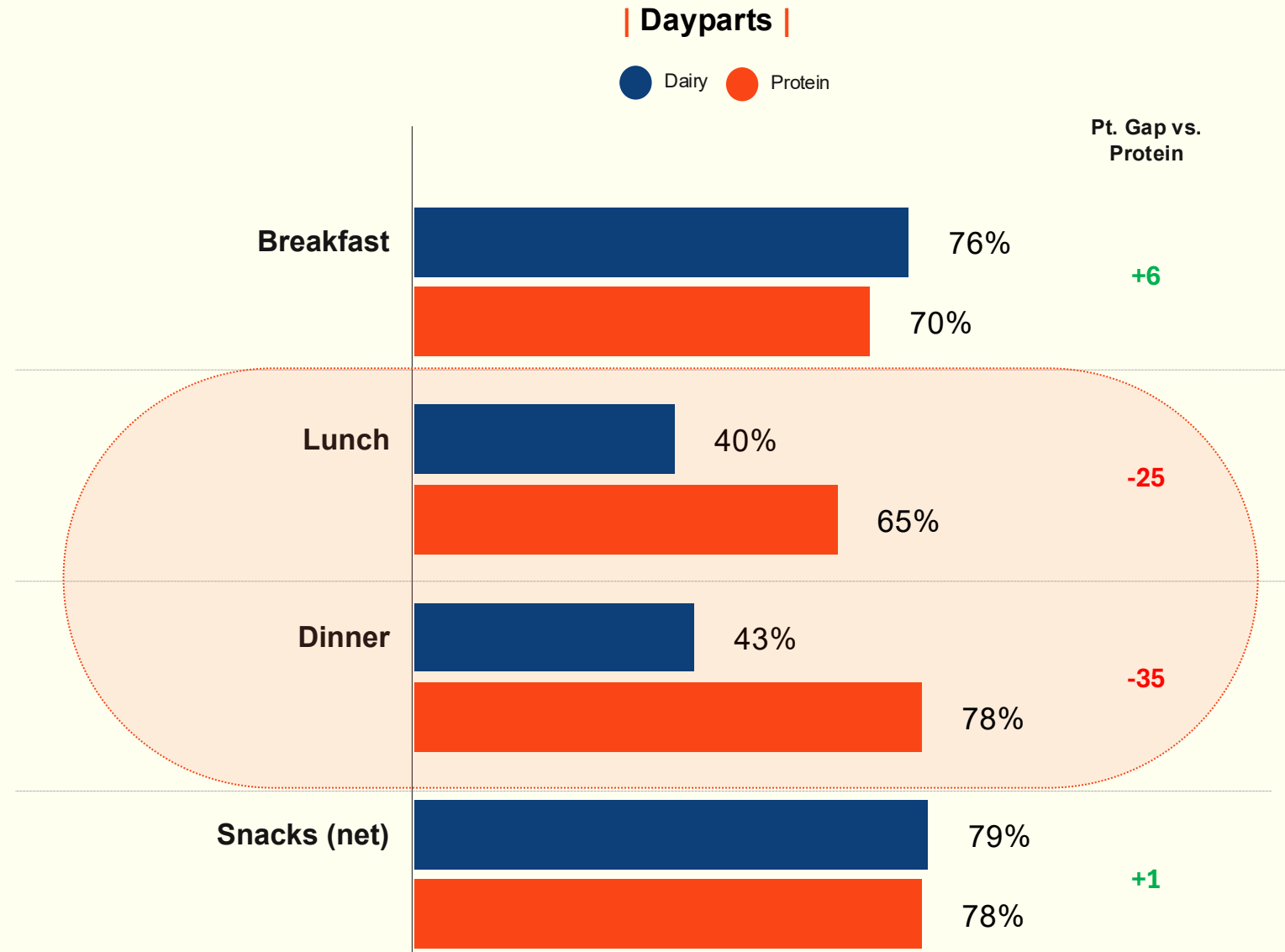
And dairy poses unique lifestyle limitations they don't generally associate with protein

| Primary Barrier to Consumption |

● Dairy ● Protein



Furthermore,  
they don't  
incorporate  
dairy into main  
meal occasions



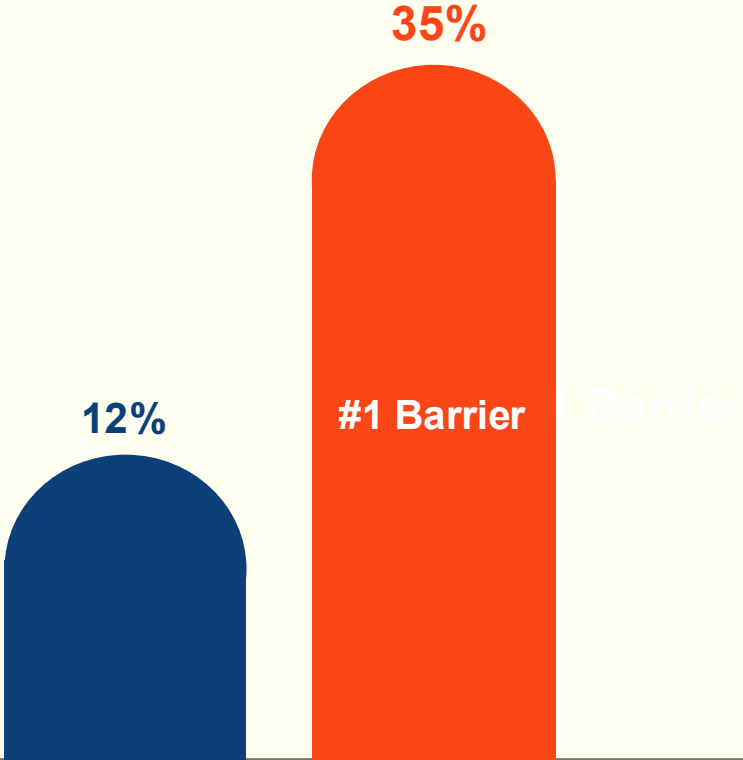
# How Can We Convert Interest in Protein into Growth for Dairy?

A man and a woman are in a kitchen, preparing food. The man is cracking an egg into a bowl, and the woman is standing next to him. The kitchen counter has various items, including a glass of milk, a bowl of eggs, and a jar of yogurt. The background shows a sink and a window. The entire image is overlaid with a blue tint.

Dairy can drive growth as a high-value protein staple

| Primary Barrier to Consumption |

● Dairy ● Protein



# Protein conscious will consume more and pay a premium for dairy products with higher protein content



Likely to  
**CONSUME MORE**  
Dairy-based foods or  
beverages if they  
offered **HIGHER**  
**PROTEIN**  
**CONTENT**

**74%**

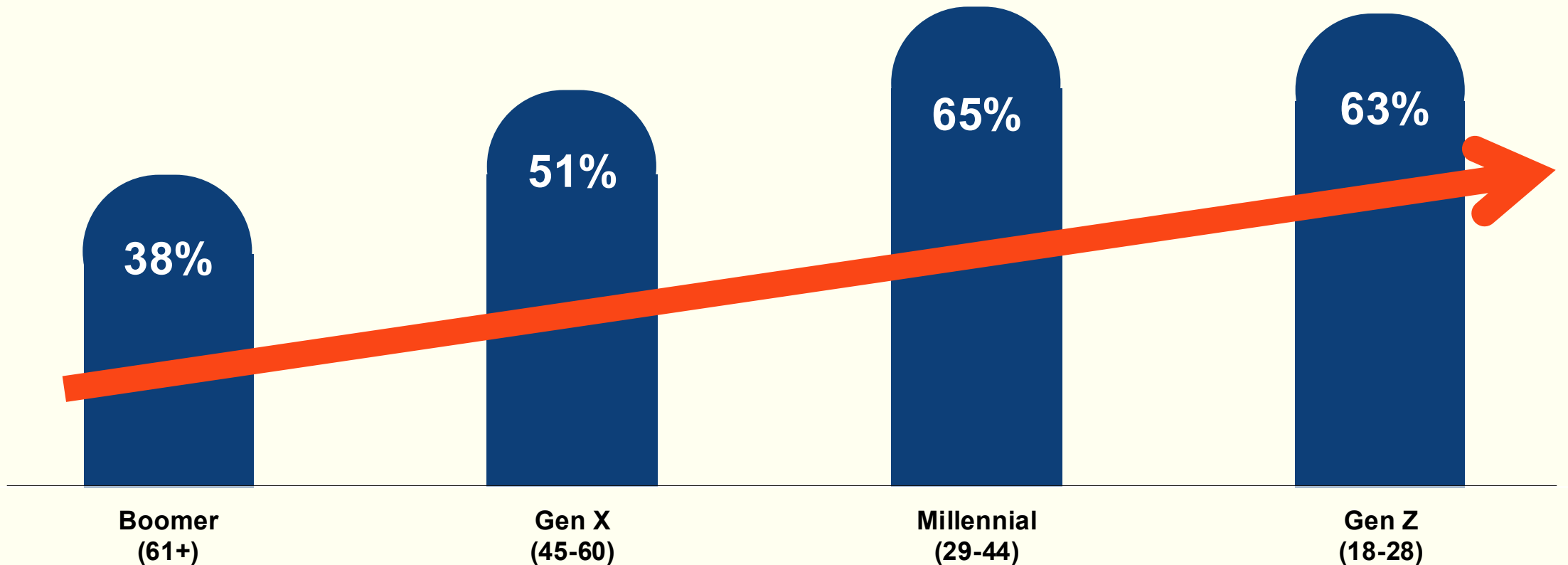


Willing to **PAY A**  
**PREMIUM** for  
Dairy with  
**HIGHER**  
**PROTEIN**  
**CONTENT**

**53%**

# Willingness to pay more for protein-dense dairy rises among younger generations

| Willing to pay a Premium Price for a Dairy Product with Significantly Higher Protein Content |



| What would your ideal dairy food or beverage be like? (Open End) |

A nice vanilla shake that's thick and creamy and didn't bother my stomach.

A tasty, high-protein, ready-to-drink dairy shake that's convenient to take on the go.

It would taste like chocolate milk, but it would have the protein of a steak.

Smooth creamy -consistent without any other texture substance.

It would taste like Dairy Queen ice cream but offers the same results as Ensure.

Cheese cubes and sticks are ideal, and easily portable.

A creamy, lactose free, shelf stable dairy with light sweetness, smooth texture, high protein, easy to carry and perfect for quick snacks.



| What would your ideal dairy food or beverage be like? |



My ideal dairy creation would be a glass of ultra-cold aerated milk infused with a hint of toasted honey and Madagascar vanilla - balancing a velvety, silk-like texture with a crisp, refreshing finish.



# How Can Dairy Win Over the Protein Conscious Consumer?



# Top 5 Takeaways

01



**CLOSE** the  
**KNOWLEDGE**  
**GAP**

02



**AGE UP** from  
**STAPLE** to  
**ESSENTIAL**

03



**POSITION** as  
the **EVERYDAY**  
**PROTEIN**  
**POWERHOUSE**

04



**BREAK** the  
**BREAKFAST**  
**SILO**

05



**MEET** the  
**MODERN PACE**

# QUESTIONS

A glass bottle of milk sits on a desk next to a stack of books and papers. The scene is dimly lit with a blue tint. The word "QUESTIONS" is overlaid in large white letters across the center of the image.

# Thank You

 THE  
SOUND



MIDWEST  
Dairy



## Maureen Windisch

Sr. Manager, Insights & Data Analytics  
mwindisch@midwestdairy.com



## Michelle Castle

VP, Quantitative  
michellecastle@thesoundhq.com



## Daisy Martinez

Senior Manager, Quantitative  
daisy@thesoundhq.com

