

The 10 Most Innovative Companies in Food

BY FastCompany Staff



Image by epsos.de

01 / PepsiCo

For its ambitious nutrition R&D. Does better nutrition require curbing our appetites for Cheetos and Fritos and Mountain Dew (oh, my!)? Not if PepsiCo can help it. The snack-food giant recently opened a clinical research center charged with making its products healthier—slashing fat, sugar, and sodium by as much as 25% in the next 10 years—without changing their taste.

02 / Trader Joes

For vaulting past Whole Foods to become America's favorite specialty grocer. Though Trader Joe's masquerades as a neighborhood store, it boasts \$8 billion in annual revenue. Its stores carry 4,000 different products, compared to typical grocery stores' 50,000. This meticulous stocking helps it sell \$1,750 per square foot—twice as much as Whole Foods.

03 / Madecasse

For building a bean-to-bar chocolate company in one of the poorest countries in the world. Seventy percent of the world's cocoa comes from West Africa, but less than 1% of the world's chocolate is made there. Instead, farmers sell whole cocoa pods to the first of many middlemen who eventually export the cocoa beans to chocolate makers in Belgium or France. Tim McCollum and Brett Beach founded Madécasse in 2008 to keep more economic benefit within the island nation.

04 / Cargill

For charging into the sweetener market with a plant-based product that's aims to be eco-aware and health-friendly. The agricultural giant has perfected a process to grow and refine sweet leaf extracts from stevia, a type of South American plant, allowing it to quickly command a sizable slice of the faux-sweetener market.

05 / FoodHub

For creating an online tool to connect local food producers to food buyers big and small. Think of FoodHub as the Match.com for the locavore movement. Wholesale food buyers log on to access thousands of small and regional producers, as well as info on varieties sold, minimum orders, insurance, and delivery options. Launched by environmental not-for-profit Ecotrust, FoodHub has already signed on hundreds of

Portland restaurants, grocery stores, and businesses and expanded to neighboring states.

06 / Current Energy

For greening restaurants (and saving them money in the process). Fast food eateries such as Jack in the Box and Qdoba are turning to this Dallas-based energy firm's smart sensors to majorly slash their energy use (and costs). For instance, sensors can ping restaurant managers with text messages if a walk-in refrigerator is left ajar for too long, or coordinate pizza-oven temperatures based on real-time sales.

07 / Chipotle

For boldly taking advertising in-house. After burning through four ad agencies in five years, the burrito mecca took on its own advertising, including replacing wacky promotions with on-message marketing. For instance, "Boo-rito" giveaways for Halloween were replaced this year by a campaign to promote how truly scary other fast food is, with sales of discounted meals going to support Jamie Oliver's Food Revolution.

08 / McDonald's

For changing the way we think about the most iconic restaurant in the world. With a \$2.4 billion budget, McDonald's is launching its first total makeover campaign since the Carter administration, redoing at least 400 domestic outposts, refurbishing 1,600 restaurants abroad, and building another 1,000.

09 / Bolthouse Farms

For its ambitions to double the \$1 billion baby-carrot business by using junk food tactics. Jeff Dunn has tapped his past as a Coca-Cola exec to goose baby carrots from a flat industry to a hotly marketed snack food, from adrenaline-fueled ads (think: Mountain Dew) to snazzy grab-and-go bags (think: Doritos).

10 / Max Burger

For being the first carbon-footprint fast-food chain. Calories printed on fast-food menus seems downright quaint compared with Max Burger, which is one of the first burger chains in the world to print the carbon emissions of each sandwich right alongside its cost.