

FOOD & BEVERAGE

M&A INSIGHTS: 2026

April 2026



COOPER PARRY
DEALS



REACH

FOOD & BEVERAGE M&A INSIGHTS

THE KEY SECTOR TRENDS, SUBSECTOR THEMES AND DEAL DRIVERS SHAPING THE MARKET IN 2026 AND BEYOND

As we continue through 2026, the global food and beverage market shows resilient demand, continued category innovation and active strategic dealmaking.

Across the market, growth is being shaped by health-led innovation and product development, functional products, premium-but-value-conscious consumption and increasing digital integration across the value chain.

At Cooper Parry Corporate Finance, our food and beverage M&A experts work together closely across our global network to provide leading sector-specific insights, nurturing close relationships with buyers and sellers across the world.



KEY TRENDS TO WATCH IN 2026

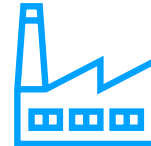
As consumer priorities continue to evolve, the food & beverage market looks set to reward businesses that combine manufacturing efficiency, disciplined innovation and scalability.

OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND TRENDS ACROSS THE MARKET



THERE IS A MARKET FOR VALUE AND PREMIUM PRODUCTS...

Consumers are increasingly making one of two choices: buying value products or paying more for products that offer a clear benefit in quality, health, convenience or brand appeal. With private label now a strong alternative, brands need to stand out for a reason, not just because they are on the shelf.



HEALTH-CONSCIOUS AND FUNCTIONAL PRODUCTS REMAIN POPULAR...

Claims around protein, gut health, energy and overall wellbeing have moved firmly into the mainstream. They are now influencing product development across categories including bakery, beverages, dairy, ingredients, snacks and supplements.



THERE IS AN INCREASING DEMAND FOR QUALITY SNACKING PRODUCTS...

Snacking is still important, but the focus is shifting towards smaller, more purposeful formats. Brands are responding with mini portions, single serve packs and other small format options that fit better with mindful consumption and changing routines.



CONSUMERS SEEK HIGH QUALITY, SIMPLIFIED GOODS AND WILL PAY A PREMIUM FOR IT...

Demand for simpler ingredients, fewer artificial additives and lower sugar is continuing to influence product development, with growing scrutiny of ultra processed foods. Clean eating has moved beyond a niche preference and is now shaping growth across a wide range of food and drink categories.



ETHNIC FLAVOURS AND FOOD EXPERIENCES ARE POPULAR IN AN EVER-INCREASINGLY GLOBAL MARKET

Consumers are still drawn to flavours they know, but there is growing appetite for products that offer a twist. Global tastes, exotic spices, unusual flavour combinations and more noticeable textures are giving brands new ways to stand out and support more premium positioning.



FOOD AND BEVERAGE BUSINESSES WILL NEED TO LEVERAGE USE OF AI TO KEEP UP WITH THE COMPETITION...

AI is moving beyond experimentation and starting to have a clearer commercial role in areas such as marketing, forecasting, product formulation, supply chain visibility and personalisation. Late adopters risk getting left behind.

SUBSECTOR TRENDS DRIVING MOMENTUM

BAKERY

Health is reshaping everyday bakery, with simpler recipes and premium formats increasing in popularity

- Shoppers are pushing brands to simplify ingredients, accelerating the move away from heavily processed products
- Protein is no longer niche in bakery, expanding from breads and bagels into more indulgent products.
- Smaller formats are gaining traction, helping consumers balance treat moments with portion control.
- Texture is becoming a key premium factor, giving brands a more distinctive way to stand out.
- Packaging matters more than ever, as brands respond to rising demand for convenience, takeaway and lower-impact solutions.

M&A INSIGHT: Buyers are likely to favour bakery assets with strong brand identity, clear health relevance and scalable manufacturing capability.

CP

CONDIMENTS, DRESSINGS & SAUCES

Flavour innovation and premium everyday use occasions are helping drive category value.

- Global flavours and layered heat are keeping the category fresh, with some brands using novelty to drive interest.
- Premium quality products remain strong, especially where products feel chef-led, authentic or crafted in smaller batches.
- Health-led reformulation is creating new opportunities, particularly in lower-sugar and lower-sodium products.
- Texture is playing a bigger role, with crunchy, seeded and layered formats making products feel more distinctive and satisfying.
- At-home entertaining and more casual meal occasions are sustaining demand, particularly for versatile sauces and condiments.

M&A INSIGHT: Businesses that combine distinctive flavour systems, wide usage occasions and scalable consumer appeal are likely to attract the strongest interest.

CP

DRINKS

Beverages are being redefined by functionality, moderation and convenience, as consumers look for more from everyday choices.

- Functional drinks continue to gain momentum, especially where they deliver clear benefits around protein, gut health, hydration or sustained energy.
- Alcohol moderation continues across different demographics, driving growth in low- and no-alcohol options.
- Weight management is becoming more visible in beverage innovation, with brands focusing more on better-for-you positioning.
- Convenience is becoming a bigger part of value, with digital ordering and easier access shaping when and how people buy drinks.
- Premium products are becoming more selective, with consumers more willing to trade up when quality, purpose or brand story is compelling.

M&A INSIGHT: Strategic interest remains strongest in beverage brands with differentiated functionality, standout consumer appeal and repeatable multi-channel growth.

CP

SUBSECTOR TRENDS DRIVING MOMENTUM

DAIRY

Protein-rich formats, trusted provenance and added-value innovation are helping dairy regain momentum across everyday occasions

- Protein-rich dairy continues to perform well, especially in yoghurt, snack pots and other convenience-led formats.
- Longer shelf life is becoming more valuable, with aseptic and extended shelf-life formats helping to reduce waste and widen distribution.
- Provenance is becoming a key consideration, as demand grows for regenerative, organic and grass-fed dairy.
- Traditional dairy is regaining confidence, as some consumers return to familiar, less processed options.
- Value creation is shifting beyond commodity milk, with stronger margins coming from added processing and smarter formats.

M&A INSIGHT: Buyers are likely to favour dairy assets with value-added processing, trusted provenance and exposure to protein-led or convenience formats.



INGREDIENTS

Health, reformulation and technical innovation are reshaping ingredient demand, as brands look for simpler, smarter ways to deliver performance.

- Ingredients demand is being driven by health and prevention, with functional solutions an important factor.
- Gut health is moving further into the mainstream, creating more demand for microbiome-focused ingredient systems.
- Sugar reduction remains a major innovation priority, pushing suppliers to develop better sweetening and taste-balancing solutions.
- Regulation is speeding up reformulation, increasing demand for natural colours and simpler ingredient systems.
- AI is becoming more useful in formulation, helping teams move faster on shelf life, performance and product development.

M&A INSIGHT: Buyers are likely to favour ingredient platforms with strong formulation capability, regulatory compliance and those tied to gut health, low sugar or clean-label.



PROTEIN

Protein is moving beyond traditional meat formats, with convenience, value-added processing and cleaner positioning driving the next phase of growth.

- Protein remains one of the clearest growth themes in food, with consumers linking it to energy, fullness, fitness and healthy ageing.
- Growth now goes beyond fresh meat, with ready-to-eat, prepared and snackable formats now key.
- Clean-label protein is gaining popularity as consumer closely consider ingredient lists and product claims.
- Value is shifting towards higher-margin, value-added protein, where branding, convenience and format innovation matter more than volume alone.
- The category is becoming more diverse, with plant, fermentation-led and other specialist proteins growing faster even as animal protein remains the core of the market.

M&A INSIGHT: Buyers are likely to favour protein assets with value-added processing, strong channel reach and exposure to faster-growing such as prepared meals.



SUBSECTOR TRENDS DRIVING MOMENTUM

SNACKING

Snacking is becoming more functional and more intentional, with protein, portion control and stronger sensory appeal driving growth

- Protein-led snacking remains a major growth area, as consumers look for convenient options that feel filling.
- Smarter portioning is gaining ground, with brands designing snacks around moderation and weight-conscious habits.
- Texture is becoming a bigger reason to buy again, especially in layered, crunchy and contrast-led formats.
- Regional / global flavours continue to win attention, particularly with younger consumers looking for more variety.
- Snacking is increasingly replacing lighter meals, while digital-first shopping is changing pack sizes, formats and how brands drive trial.

M&A INSIGHT: Buyers are likely to favour snack brands that combine strong flavour appeal with clear functional benefits, distinctive branding and room to scale across channels.

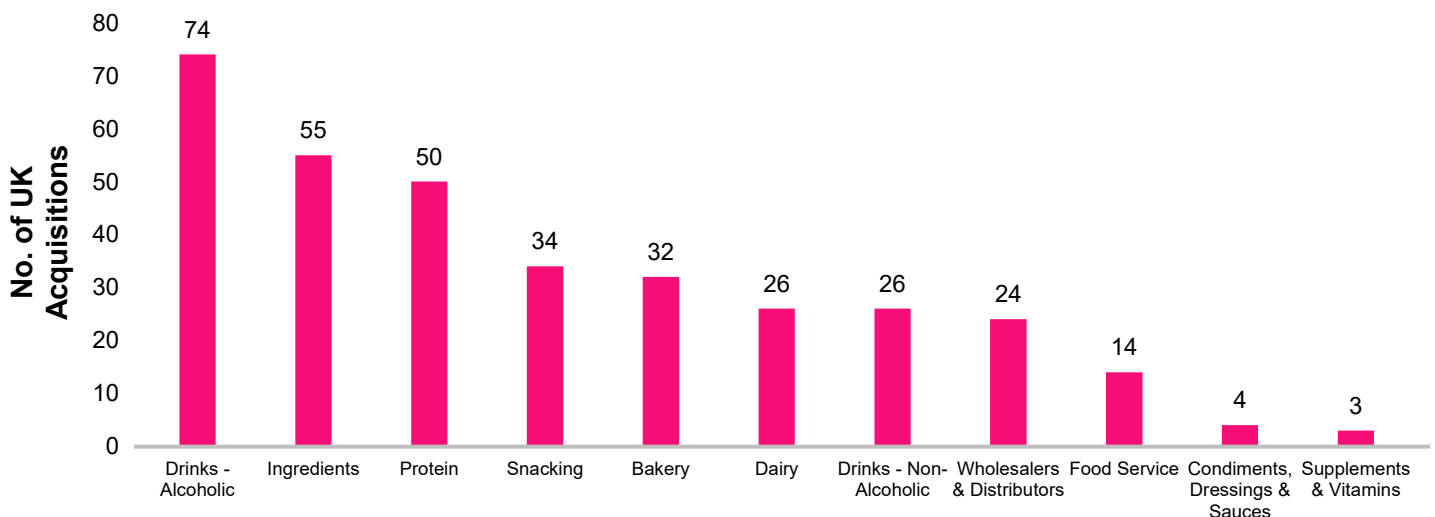


SUPPLEMENTS AND VITAMINS

Supplements are becoming more targeted and easier to use, as consumers look for everyday support across wellness, mood and long-term health

- Preventive health remains the main growth engine, keeping vitamins, minerals and supplements firmly in everyday routines.
- Stress, mood, sleep and focus are becoming bigger priorities, alongside more traditional daily wellness needs.
- Targeted formulations are gaining traction, with products aimed at specific conditions, life stages and clearer outcomes.
- New formats are changing how supplements are consumed, as gummies, powders, chews and shots make the category easier to use.

M&A INSIGHT: Buyers are likely to favour supplement assets with strong consumer trust, clear benefit-led positioning and formats that fit more easily into daily routines.



Source: 1st Jan 2023 – 31st March 2026, MarketIQ, Cooper Parry analysis

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Fraser is an Associate Director in our Manchester team. He has worked on a range of transactions in his career, working closely with clients to deliver maximum value. Fraser qualified as a Chartered Accountant at a Top 10 firm.

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Executing deals can be stressful. We manage processes proactively and diligently to minimize stress on you and your business...



We are passionate about what we do. We thrive on delivering for Shareholders and Management teams!

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