

Automation in Foodie Nation

Organic, vegan, artisanal, craft brewed; these labels are no longer confined to the realm of boutique bistros and specialty grocers. They are instead now part of the mainstream consumer market of America's food and beverage industry.

MCAA's 2016 Market Forecast estimates the food and beverage industry will add approximately \$207 million in market value to Process Instrumentation and Automation (PI&A) over the next five years. This increase is attributed to the shift away from traditional products and towards organic foods, vegetarian/vegan options, craft brewing, and specialty products like lactose free dairy and artisanal baked goods.

Liz Veghte, Global Vertical Marketing Manager for Hach's Beverage Division, is seeing the increase firsthand. "Certainly, we've seen huge growth across the craft beverage industry and there is increased pressure to ensure quality and consistency of their products," she said.

Veghte added, "Process control is critical to ensure these things moving forward. Industry giants like ABInBev drive the need for smaller producers to minimize cost as much as possible, while maintaining quality. Certainly, process equipment is one trigger that can be pulled to maximize both of these things."

"I believe the trend in personalizing food and beverage will persist indefinitely in North America," said Joe Incontri, Director of Marketing for KROHNE, Inc. "The living standards are high, education levels are rising and there is an emphasis on quality of life that will continue to drive demand for innovation and uniqueness. After all, have you seen the proliferation of cooking or food related shows, blogs, articles, books?"

Incontri stated he sees a growth opportunity for process controls as traditional food companies adapt to these new market trends. "Processed foods producers are cleverly adapting by creating stand-alone brands or very niche products," he said. "This is causing some conversions from continuous processes to batch ones, and batch processes, with their myriad variety will require more able sensors, flexible controls and more people to operate them."