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Cargill®

Creating a Signature Scent

Differentiating Premium Horse Feed in the US and Mexico though a Multi-Phase Sensory and Consumer Research Approach

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Background & Objectives

Background

Horse feed is a complicated product with multiple intended benefits:

- It needs to nourish the animal (with corresponding body condition & appearance).
- The owner wants the horse to 'enjoy' their meals, and the owner needs to believe they are providing their horse with the right stuff.

Equine owners have a broad range of feed philosophies, and their horses have a wide range of needs.

- A horse's nutritional needs can be influenced by their age, breed, activity level and environment.

Objectives

- Through collaborative prototyping with horse caregivers and owners, we explored opportunities to increase the appeal of horse feeds and treats among decision makers.
- Provide a clear foundation for designing and guiding product development and go to market strategies.

Methods

In partnership with Curion and an external flavor house, we conducted a three-phase research study in the US and Mexico to develop novel horse feed aromas:

Phase I: Exploration — Focus groups with horse owners and caregivers examined feeding behaviors, category drivers and barriers, and reactions to eight aromas.

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Phase II: Prototyping: — Phase I participants worked with flavorists and a patented aroma technology to design six standout aromas, using tools like emotion cards to inspire emotional connections.

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Phase III Evaluation: — A new group of horse caregivers and owners assessed the final aroma prototypes to identify the most compelling opportunity.

Actionable Insights from Qualitative Research and Sensory Prototyping

Identified Key Sensory Drivers of Owner Satisfaction & Confidence
Visual and olfactory cues—appearance, color, texture, and smell—shape owner trust, quality perception, and value.

Cultural and Market Differences Between U.S. and Mexico
Distinct preferences and expectations across markets inform the need for localized product and messaging strategies.

Receptiveness to Redefining Feed Norms
Owners are open to sensory and functional innovations, signaling room to challenge traditional feed expectations.

Impact of Sensory Experience on Purchase Decisions & Brand Loyalty
Smell and appearance strongly influence both initial purchases and long-term brand loyalty.

Defining the 'Ideal' Feeding Experience
Owners seek a balance of emotional satisfaction, sensory appeal, and functional benefits for themselves and their horses.

Implications for Product & Marketing Strategy
Findings guide R&D and marketing to align with owner preferences and regional market dynamics.

Leveraging Aroma to Drive Connection & Differentiation

Aroma as Strategic Innovation
Not a novelty; delivers functional benefits and owner appeal, differentiating premium feed.

Power of Emotional & Subconscious Influence
Triggers (nostalgia, comfort, happiness) deepen connection and engagement.

Adaptability & Iterative Development
Feedback-driven, multi-phase development that adapts in real time.

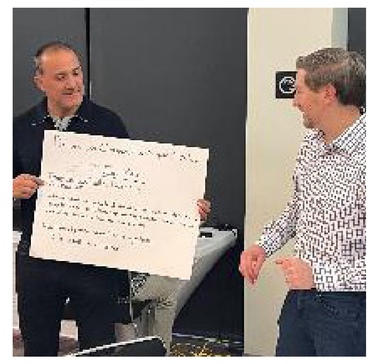
Clarity Through Scent Categorization
Clear categories and cues help consumers compare, choose, and finalize.











Traditional Sensory Method + New Technology - Actionable Insights

- **Drivers of Confidence: Visual + Olfactory Cues** — Position premium lines on aroma/appearance.
- **Ideal Experience: Emotion + Sensory + Functional** — Prototype "calm • clean • effective" cues.
- **Market Differences: U.S. ≠ Mexico** — Localize aroma notes, color, and claims.
- **Purchase & Loyalty: Sensory Wins Repeat** — Own the first-impression moment at shelf.
- **Openness To Change: Norms Are Flexible** — Test bolder aromas/textures with clear benefits.
- **Strategy Impact: Clear Roadmap** — Translate into R&D briefs and regional campaigns.

Smell builds loyalty — deliver satisfaction one feeding at a time.

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Presented at Pangborn 2025

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