



PULSES 101

PEA PROTEIN

ABOUT PULSE CANADA

Pulse Canada is the national, not-for-profit association representing over 25,000 growers and 100 companies involved in the trading and processing of Canadian pulses, including peas, lentils, dry beans, faba beans, and chickpeas.

Our Market Innovation team drives pulse innovation and ingredient adoption by facilitating research and creating conditions to showcase the quality, functionality, nutritional, and sustainability benefits of Canadian pulses.

WHAT IS PULSE CANADA'S ROLE IN ADVANCING PEA PROTEIN USE?

Pulse Canada works directly with ingredient suppliers, food manufacturers and research groups to advance science-based solutions that address challenges and grow demand for pea protein. Examples include:

- Understanding impacts of genetics and growing environment
- Striving towards standardized industry methods of analysis
- Performance optimization based on food product category
- Structure-function studies
- Data on quality, sustainability and nutrition
- Addressing sensory challenges
- Applied research and proof-of-concept trials

OUR EXPERTISE

MARKET INNOVATION AT PULSE CANADA



CANADIAN PULSE QUALITY



PULSE PROCESSING
TECHNOLOGIES



FUNCTIONALITY
& FORMULATION



PULSE CONTAMINANTS
& FOOD SAFETY



METHODS
& STANDARDS



NUTRITION, HEALTH
RESEARCH & REGULATORY
GUIDANCE



REGENERATIVE
AGRICULTURE PRINCIPLES



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
ANALYSES



CONSUMER INSIGHTS,
PRODUCT TRENDS, &
MARKET OPPORTUNITIES



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MARKET & CONSUMER INSIGHTS

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES ARE THERE FOR PEA PROTEIN?

Pea protein is gaining momentum globally, driven by consumer demand for clean-label, allergen-friendly, and sustainable ingredients. From 2020 to 2024, global pea protein consumption grew at a CAGR of 10%, with North America accounting for over 75% of total demand, followed by Western Europe at 19% (Euromonitor 2020–24).

While soy and wheat proteins lead in overall usage, pea protein is now the third most common plant-based protein in new product innovations globally. Top applications include plant-based dairy alternatives, ready meals and pet food, with functional uses also in alt meat, snacks and bakery (Mintel, 2024).

HOW DO CONSUMERS FEEL ABOUT PEA PROTEIN?

A 2024 study conducted by Pulse Canada revealed that pea protein is an emerging ingredient where 49% of U.S. consumers are already familiar with the ingredient and 36% have tried it in one form or another (n=500). While pea protein is still considered an emerging ingredient, it is quickly penetrating the food and pet food markets. Today (July 2025), pea protein appears in 1% of all new global food product launches and 4% of pet food launches, a marked increase from just 0.3 and 2%, respectively, 8 years ago (Mintel, 2024).

Consumer insights show that pea protein is viewed as "modern" and "trendy", making it a unique and appealing ingredient that motivates consumers to include it in their diets. In fact, 70% of protein consumers would consider purchasing products that contain pea protein. Health and nutrition are key sentiments behind consideration and/or using pea protein in their diet.

When asked about current consumption trends for products with pea protein, top categories were protein drinks, pasta and salty snacks which will continue to be purchased, while future trends reside in meat products (burgers, meatballs), breads and flatbreads. **The positive news is that consumers understand pea protein to be plant based, healthy and a high quality protein that's easily digestible and can satisfy hunger.** Further, pea protein has a strong alignment with the traditional pea which provide opportunity for pea protein to halo positive sentiments onto manufactured brands.

As food manufacturers look to diversify protein sources and meet evolving consumer expectations, pea protein presents a valuable opportunity for innovation across both human and pet food categories.



NUTRITION & COMPOSITION

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH & NUTRITIONAL BENEFITS OF PEA PROTEIN?

Pea protein is considered a high-quality, plant-based protein. Although not classified as a complete protein (due to limiting methionine), it provides all nine essential amino acids and can complement cereal and nut proteins to achieve a complete profile. Recent studies have demonstrated the ability of pea protein to stimulate muscle protein synthesis comparably to animal proteins, especially when protein intake is adequately increased (Pinckaers et al, 2024; Babault et al, 2015; Singh et al, 2024). The addition of pea protein to carbohydrate foods can also limit the glycemic effect (Kadam et al, 2025; Johnston et al, 2021).

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TYPES OF PEA PROTEIN AVAILABLE?

Pea protein is produced through dry or wet fractionation processes, each yielding different ingredient profiles and functional properties. Pea protein concentrates typically contain 45–65% protein on a dry matter basis. As they are derived largely through physical means of separation, the proteins retain their native protein structure and functionality, and water-soluble proteins rich in sulfur containing amino acids that are commonly lost during the wet extraction processes are retained. Protein isolates generally contain >80% protein and are priced higher due to their level of purity. Pea protein isolates are partially denatured during the extraction process which significantly alters their functional properties, but also increases protein digestibility. Depending on the applied extraction conditions, protein isolates may also contain lower levels of common antinutritional factors found in the whole pea seed.

RANGE IN NUTRITIONAL CHARACTERISTICS FOR PEA PROTEIN SAMPLES		
Characteristic	Pea Protein Concentrate (n = 5)	Pea Protein Isolate (n = 10)
Moisture (%)	3.7 - 7.2	5.9 - 7.5
Protein (%db)	53.6 - 56.6	83.1 - 92.6
Total Dietary Fibre (%db)	14.6 - 16.7	2.5 - 8.3
Starch (%db)	3.7 - 8.5	0.2 - 2.6
Fat (%db)	2.0 - 2.6	0.2 - 5.0
Ash (%db)	5.0 - 5.7	3.1 - 5.6
Limiting Amino Acid	TRP or SAA	TRP or SAA
Amino Acid Score	0.85 - 0.93	0.55 - 0.90
In-Vitro Protein Digestibility	91 - 93	97 - 99
In-Vitro PDCAAS	77 - 86	53 - 88

Adapted from Carlin et al. (2025)
PDCAAS = Protein digestibility corrected amino acid score

FOOD INDUSTRY APPLICATIONS

HOW CAN PEA PROTEIN BE USED IN FOODS?

While pea protein's role in meat analogues is well established, emerging use cases in bakery, beverages, pasta and meat products highlight broader functional and nutritional potential.

Food Product Category	Applications
Meat Analogs	Primary structuring agent, binder, increase cooking yields
Animal-Based Meats	Binder, increase cooking yield, reduce cooking losses
Beef products	Enhance red colour, retard colour fading, oxidative stability
Deli meats	Alkaline phosphate substitute
Pâté products	Decrease free water, improve water holding capacity, improve texture
Hybrid	Partial replacement of animal protein and/or fat
Plant-Based Beverages	Emulsifier, increase protein content, increase protein quality, fortification aid^a, fat globule mimetic^a
Dairy Analogs	Base ingredient, increase protein content
Cheese analogs	Stabilize emulsion-filled gels, filler in polysaccharide-structured gels
Yogurt analogs	Fermentation-induced gels, control viscosity
Frozen desserts	Lower melting rates, increase viscosity
Whipping cream	Foam stabilizer ^b
Animal-Based Dairy	
Hybrid products	Partial replacement of dairy proteins
Milk	Promote probiotic culture growth
Yogurt	Promote probiotic culture growth, increase water holding capacity, control viscosity, encapsulation agent ^c
Cheese	Fat replacer ^d
Ice cream	Fat replacer ^a
Whipping cream	Fat replacer ^e
Bakery Products	Increase protein content, increase protein quality, fortification aid^f, egg replacement
Frozen dough	Cryoprotectant ^a
Gluten-free	Increase protein content, contribute to dough viscoelasticity, egg replacement, lower water activity



Food Product Category	Applications
Pasta & Noodles	Increase protein content, increase protein quality
Gluten-free	Reduce cooking losses, enhance water uptake
Functional Beverages	Increase protein content, fortification aid^{af}, probiotic encapsulation agent^c
Nut Spreads	Improve spreadability^c, and promote ease of processing via extrusion and pumping^c
Sauces	Control viscosity and moisture content
Tomato Sauce	Egg replacement ^c
Mayonnaise	Increase protein content, increase viscosity
Soup	Increase protein content, increase viscosity

Applications that are denoted with a letter superscript indicate where functionality was observed when pea protein is pre-processed a) into an emulsion, b) via ultrasonication, c) into complexes with polysaccharides, d) into hydrolysates, e) into complexes with flavonoids, f) into complexes with minerals.

MEAT ANALOGS

Pea protein is applied as a **primary structuring agent** or **binder** in meat analogs, providing high water and fat retention with **increased cooking yields** in finished products that are derived from texturized proteins prepared via low and/or high moisture extrusion. Heat-induced gelation, with or without the addition of enzymes (i.e. transglutaminase) and other gelling agents (i.e. polysaccharides/starches) has also been explored to produce analog products within silicon molds that model the desired end-product shapes, (e.g.: scallops) (Baig et al., 2024; Bhuiyan et al., 2025; Dinani et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022). Compared to products derived from soy protein, pulses including pea provide bean-like, salty, sweet, umami and heated-oil sensory notes (Kim et al., 2021).

Influence of Pea Protein Ingredient Variability:	
High Moisture Extrusion	Low Moisture Extrusion
Pea protein legumin (11S) is associated with cross-linked network formation (Osen et al. 2014). 7S/11S ratio and protein dispersion viscosity during heating are useful tools for predicting their processing behaviour (Osen et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2025). Pea protein ingredients with lower solubility have shown greater texturization potential, in contrast to ingredients with high heat-gelation capacity (Plattner et al., 2024).	Pea proteins with high water absorption capacity and cold swelling viscosity show higher porosity, and greater cross-linking potential (Flory et al., 2023; Webb et al., 2023). Concentrates have produced harder, more porous structures with greater odor and taste intensity than isolates (De Angelis et al., 2020). Interactions between ingredients during extrusion processing have a higher impact on texturization and microstructure, more so than variability in raw material (Webb et al., 2022).

Influence of Formulation

High Moisture Extrusion	Low Moisture Extrusion
Increasing pea protein inclusion to 50–60% of formulation increases cross-linking potential, resulting in increased hardness, firmness and overall texturization (Plattner et al., 2024). Blending with other proteins as structuring agents can enhance amino acid profiles (gluten, oat, sunflower), texturization/structure (soymeal, gluten), and sensory attributes (lentil) (Arshard et al., 2022; Dubey et al., 2024; Richter et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024). Zein protein addition only contributed to improved texture and structure of pea protein extrudate when added in combination with rice starch, at which point its performance was comparable to gluten (Rolandelli et al., 2024). Both wet milled oat protein and rice protein have been reported to detract from the processability and overall quality when combined with pea protein, creating more porous and less cross-linked networks (Dubey et al., 2024). Other ingredients offer potential to modify the structure and texture of meat analogs made with pea protein. Transglutaminase promotes crosslinking, thereby increases hardness and fibrous structure formation. Starch ingredients (rice, corn) promote softness (Dahl et al., 2025; Rolandelli et al., 2024.) Hydrocolloids contribute to a stronger, more tensile structure (Moll et al., 2023). Fatty acids can contribute positively or negatively depending on the fatty acid composition, where a higher concentration of unsaturated fatty acids inhibiting legumin aggregation and crosslinking by increasing exposure of hydrophobic protein groups, weakening hydrogen bonding, and coalescing to form aggregated gel structure. This suggests fats higher in saturated fatty acids are more favourable in generating fibrous protein structure (Chen et al., 2023). Blending with other ingredients also introduces new applications for pea protein. Homogenized pea protein and pectin functioned as a glue, binding texturized vegetable protein and fat mimetics together in the development of a bacon-type analog (Moll et al., 2023). The addition of laccase to the pea protein–pectin blends increased binding strength higher than a methylcellulose hydrogel control.	Increasing pea protein content influences extrusion machineability, where 70% protein obtained through blends of concentrates and isolates demonstrated the most promise for meat analog applications (Chan et al., 2024). The addition of legume flours to pea protein created a more layered, dense product (Webb et al., 2022). Fibre and other polysaccharides impact lightness, texture profiles, and cooking yields due to their water holding properties (Han et al., 2023; Penaranda et al., 2023). Overall, the interactions between ingredients in formulation during extrusion processing are reported to have the highest impact on texturization and structure, more so than variability in raw material (Webb et al., 2022).



Influence of Extrusion Processing Parameters Under High Moisture Conditions:

Moisture content has been cited as the most important processing factor influencing textural quality of extrudates, provided temperatures are sufficient to denature proteins and induce fibrous structure formation (>120°C) (Barnes–Calle et al., 2024; Hogg and Rauh, 2023; Zahari et al. 2021; Zhang and Ryu 2023). 55% moisture appears sufficient for most proteins to texturize, however these conditions may produce tough/brittle structures, while higher moisture contents (60–65%) were found more optimal, producing flexible and anisotropic structures (Dhal et al, 2025; Hogg and Rauh, 2023). Screw speed influences microstructure of texturized products (Wu et al., 2023).

ANIMAL MEAT PRODUCTS

Pea protein isolate serves as a **binder** at 2–6% inclusion, increasing the cooking yield and reducing cooking losses, water and fat exudation of beef, mortadella, and lean turkey breast products (Barbut et al., 2023; Pinton et al., 2024; Shen et al, 2022). In turkey breast formulations, pea protein isolates outperformed rice protein, whey protein concentrates and faba bean protein concentrate (Barbut et al., 2023).

Pea protein isolates also contribute to **oxidative stability** of meat products (Sun and Xiong, 2015; Trindade et al., 2023), showing promise as an **alkaline phosphate substitute** in low-sodium, phosphate-free mortadella, particularly if combined synergistically with other natural antioxidants (Pinton et al., 2024). The improved oxidative stability also allows for heme to maintain its reducing status, where pea protein isolates were reported to **enhance red colour and retard colour fading** in cooked, nitrite-cured beef during refrigerated storage (Sun and Xiong, 2015).

In canned pâté products derived from pork, duck or fish, up to 50% pea protein inclusion **decreases free water and improves water holding capacity** of the batters and gels, promoting a network described as a “soft, pleasant texture with good spreadability” (Trindade et al., 2023; Zhu et al., 2022). Replacement of 25% pork meat even resulted in **superior texture and taste** compared to 100% pork pâté controls, although color remained a more sensitive attribute, associated with a yellow hue that was less acceptable (Trindade et al., 2023). Fish gels formulated with 50–80% of protein derived from pea highlighted the opportunity to create a soft texture **suitable for elderly consumers or those with slight-to-serious swallowing difficulties**, where the resulting changes in gel network allowed for **increased amino acid release and protein bioavailability** (En et al., 2025).

Hybrid beef/chicken products containing 4–43% pea protein isolate and texturized pea protein have been formulated to **partially replace animal protein and/or fat**. Most studies on hybrid/extended comminuted meat products were able to successfully reduce fat content while maintaining protein levels, with **minimal differences in product texture and decreased cooking losses** (Chan et al., 2024; Miao et al., 2023; Shoaib et al., 2018).

BEVERAGES

Beverages containing pea protein are typically available as a pre-packaged colloidal, oil-in-water system, or consumer-ready powders to be dispersed in water. Pea protein isolate can function as an **emulsifier** or is leveraged to **increase protein content** and **enhance protein quality** by providing more of the essential amino acids when blended with a nut/cereal base. As a result, pea protein needs to be soluble in formulation and able to adsorb to the surface of the oil and water interface to form a viscoelastic, interfacial layer (McClements et al., 2019; Hadidi et al., 2022).

Other uses:

- Pea protein stabilized nanoemulsions have been leveraged as **fortification aids** for their ability to increase cell uptake, transport efficiency, and delivery of vitamin D when compared to free vitamin D suspensions in formulation (Schoener et al., 2019; Walia & Chen, 2020).
- Emulsions prepared with 0.5–2% pea protein in 10% flaxseed oil solutions demonstrated potential to serve as milk **fat globule mimetics** in plant-based milks, with smaller particle size, more negative surface charge, and no difference in shear viscosity compared to dairy milk fat under the tested conditions (Chen et al., 2024)

Influence of Pea Protein Ingredient Variability

Protein composition and structure play an important role in determining pea protein functionality in beverage applications; where globular, legumin proteins have a rigid, hydrophobic structure compared to the flexible and more soluble nature of pea vicilin and albumin proteins, respectively (Hadidi et al., 2022). As a result, albumins and vicilin proteins move more quickly and preferentially adsorb to the surface of the oil-water interface where legumin proteins will be slower to diffuse. However, once absorbed, legumins confer stronger mechanical stability and are considered better emulsifiers (Hadidi et al., 2022). Sulfur-containing amino acid (and sulfhydryl groups) content is also important as these are involved in covalent bonding to form aggregates or complexes with other ingredients in solution, thereby impacting pea protein's ability to dissolve in beverage applications. Because the composition, conformation, particle size, and denaturation states of pea proteins is highly dependent on the pea variety and extraction conditions used to derive the ingredient, there can be significant performance variability between suppliers. A protein is considered most soluble when the exposure of hydrophobic regions is minimized, as seen when in its globular state (Vogelsand-Odwyer et al., 2022). Other functional properties such as zeta potential and surface activity influence dissolution of pea protein into solutions by affecting attractive/repulsive forces between droplets.





Influence of Formulation

The protein-to-oil ratio plays a key role in emulsion stability. Adequate protein levels are required to fully coat oil droplet surfaces and prevent destabilization. Therefore, increasing the protein content within a certain range improves emulsion stability by minimizing unabsorbed protein in the continuous phase (Gumus et al., 2017). Formulations with protein-to-fat ratios of 1:1 or 2:1 are commonly used to replicate the characteristics of whole or low-fat milk, respectively. In low-fat systems, excess protein may promote flocculation or aggregation due to insufficient oil surface area for adsorption.

Emulsifier type and interactions also affect emulsion performance. Stable systems typically feature thick, hydrophilic interfacial layers that resist environmental stressors. Charged emulsifiers enhance repulsive forces between droplets, maintaining separation and preventing coalescence. Smaller droplet sizes are preferred, as they reduce gravitational separation and improve physical stability. Inclusion of co-emulsifiers has been shown to reduce droplet diameter and enhance overall emulsion stability (Li et al., 2023).

Polysaccharides (e.g.: cellulose, dextrans, xanthan gum, guar gum, gellan gum, gum arabic, pectin, glucomannan, carboxymethylcellulose, etc.) are commonly used alongside pea protein to stabilize emulsions due to their ability to form soluble complexes through electrostatic attractions and hydrogen bonding with pea protein that create protective films at the oil and water interface (Liu et al., 2010; Yin et al., 2015). As polysaccharides increase the viscosity of the system, their addition helps to inhibit gravitational separation and the stronger electrostatic repulsion and steric hindrance conferred further improves stability (Lan et al., 2018; Wei et al., 2020; Wei et al., 2022). As a result, when combined with pea protein, studies have shown increased solubility and performance under higher ionic strength, neutral and acid pH conditions (Guldiken et al., 2023; Lan et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2010; Shen et al., 2022; Wei et al., 2020; Wei et al., 2022; Yin et al., 2015). Calcium ions (i.e calcium chloride) can further assist with enhancing the solubility of pea protein-polysaccharide complexes by promoting cross linking and providing electrostatic shielding (Li et al., 2024).

Other additives which may improve the stability of the system include surfactants (i.e phospholipids) that synergistically absorb to the interface alongside pea protein (Shen et al., 2023). Flavonoid compounds (i.e quercetin, epigallocatechin-3-gallate) have been shown to spontaneously complex with pea protein via hydrogen bonding and Van der Waal forces, resulting in conformational changes that increase the hydrophilicity of pea protein to improve foaming and emulsification properties (Han et al., 2022). Due to their antioxidant properties, flavonoids and other additives such as ascorbic acid or reduced glutathione can also minimize the oxidation of fatty acids in solution, reducing the development of undesirable volatiles (Bi et al., 2022). Another approach to reduce the off notes associated with pea protein is to introduce ingredients with a strong affinity to bind to the compounds responsible. Bi et al. (2022) reported a significant decrease in hexanal and/or hexanol content (associated with raw bean/grassy notes) when an additional 1–5% pea protein was included in pea seed milks alone, or in combination with sodium sulfate or propylene glycol.

Influence of Processing Conditions

High shear mixing (i.e homogenization) plays a critical role in decreasing the overall size of oil droplets suspended in aqueous solutions and disrupting any insoluble pea protein aggregates that are formed during the protein extraction process. High shear mixing generally improves solubility and heat stability by altering protein structure and aggregation tendencies, where changes to the shearing rate, number of homogenization cycles, and/or pressurized conditions introduce opportunities to minimize droplet particle size, as well as improve solubility and emulsion stability (Bogahawaththa et al., 2019; Moll et al., 2021; Oliete et al., 2019; Ong et al., 2022).

High temperature or pressure treatments that are sufficient to inactivate lipoxygenase enzyme inhibit the formation of lipid oxidation products that are commonly associated with off-flavours in pea. As a result, these can be tailored to improve the sensory profile of pea-based beverages (Trikusuma et al., 2020). However, careful consideration of the time, pressure, and temperature must be considered to prevent the formation of insoluble aggregates (Bogahawaththa et al., 2019; Qamar et al., 2019). Optimized heat treatments have even been shown to increase the heat stability of pea protein dispersions through the formation of soluble protein aggregates linked by thiol disulfide bonds (Bogahawaththa et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2020). Fermentation with LAB and yeast has also been applied to alleviate off-flavours, where both introduce the opportunity to generate new desirable flavour descriptors such as yogurt-like, milk-like, beer/yeasty, and umami (Spaccasassi et al., 2024; Youssef et al., 2020).



DAIRY ANALOGS

Pea protein ingredients form gels via heat, enzymatic cross linking (i.e transglutaminase), fermentation-induced acidic conditions, or a combination of these treatments, to **form the base for yogurt, cheese, or frozen dessert-style dairy analogs**. Gel formation is primarily driven by hydrophobic interactions and disulfide bond formation between proteins as they unfold as a result of the treatment conditions (Tang et al., 2024; Rios et al., 2025; Yang et al., 2021). Pea protein's gelling capacity has been correlated to its solubility and concentration of β -sheet structures (Li et al., 2022; Rodriguez and Beyrer, 2023).

Yogurt Analogs

Pea protein dispersions are leveraged as the **base ingredient** to produce yogurt-style products, forming gels as a result of fermentation. In fermented systems, the selection of bacterial strains and/or blends is critical as each uniquely affect product quality, differing in their acidification rates, ability to remove off-flavours, and contribution to gel firmness (Masia et al., 2023). Depending on the starter culture selected, both increases and decreases in bitterness, beany, pea-intensity, or green aromas have been reported (Ben-Harb et al., 2022; Masia et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2021), in addition to the development of new flavour notes such as cheesy, fruity, and dairy-associated compounds (Ben-Harb et al., 2020). Co-application of enzymes (i.e transglutaminase, proteases) can be tailored optimize rheological properties and lubrication behaviour (Lin et al., 2024).

The presence of other ingredients in formulation will alter the rheological properties of pea protein-based products. Increasing the oil and/or fibre content in the formulation led to higher levels of pea protein found in the aqueous phase, accelerating gel structure formation making it stronger and more resistant to stirring (Klost and Drusch 2019). Similarly, inclusion of 3% oat, citrus or pea fibre in pea protein-based yogurts increased gel strength and decreased water holding capacity (WHC) without impact final product flavour (Matysek et al., 2024). Oat β -glucans have also been leveraged to replace fat in formulation (up to 60%), also providing functional benefits by increasing LAB fermentation time, WHC, and providing fruity/sweet/creamy flavours following fermentation (Zhao et al., 2023)

Pea protein may alternatively be added to **increase the protein content** and **control viscosity** of yogurt-analogs derived from other base ingredients. The inclusion of 2% pea protein concentrates in oat-based yogurt allowed for the development of products with intermediate viscosities, where the consistency was otherwise similar to that of a Greek-yogurt style product (Drositi et al., 2026). At this inclusion level, no adverse sensory effects were detected (Demir et al., 2023). In soymilk yogurt formulations, increasing the content of pea protein improved viscosity, flowability and water holding capacity maximized at an optimal concentration of 4% (Shin et al., 2022).

Cheese Analogs

Emulsion-filled gels stabilized by pea protein are commonly used to develop cheese analogs. These products may or may not include a fermentation stage to induce gelation and develop desirable dairy-like flavour profiles (Masia et al., 2023). D'Alessio et al. (2014) produced creamy-viscous characteristics (i.e. spreadable cheese) by high pressure homogenization of 10–20% pea protein concentrate dispersions.

Other mechanisms to create harder textures include polysaccharide-structured gels. These formulations are typically limiting in protein content; therefore, inclusion of pea protein is beneficial from a nutritional perspective. In polysaccharide structured matrices, pea protein does not actively participate in network structure (Silvia et al., 2024). However, Sanders et al. (2024) noted increased melt, decreased oil loss, and increased hardness in starch-structured plant-based cheese products, indicating the potential for pea protein inclusion (3–10%) to enhance the functionality of formulations.

Oil content is a critical variable affecting textural performance. Increasing lipid content leads to softer and weaker gels (Masia et al., 2022). An investigation of different plant oil sources indicated that the protein/polysaccharide network is the dominant factor determining gel firmness, where fat source has a lesser effect on rheological properties (Masia et al., 2023). However, Massign et al. (2023) did note a lower peak gel force and stability for products formulated with sunflower oil versus coconut oil. Optimizing oil ratios (e.g., coconut:sunflower) improved melt, stretch, and oil release properties in formulations containing pea protein isolates (Sanfers et al., 2025).

Functional additives also support quality enhancement. Blending pea protein with zein protein highlighted a synergistic interaction between the two, maximizing the lubrication and melting properties contributed by each of the proteins, respectively (Sutter et al., 2023). Inulin was used to replace up to 15% fat in formulations (Mefleh et al., 2022). The inclusion of potassium ions had a positive effect on end-product stability, decreasing syneresis and water loss, and resulted in a more compact structure (Silva et al., 2024). Natural flavourings such as dried oregano and rosemary may successfully mask undesirable legume-notes (Mefleh et al., 2022).



Frozen Desserts

Pea protein beverages or biopolymer mixtures with other ingredients can be processed to create dairy-free frozen desserts. Compared to milk proteins, pea protein frozen desserts demonstrate lower melting rates, higher viscosities, and better shape retention (Hasan et al., 2024; Ng et al., 2024). Inulin has been evaluated as a prebiotic or fat replacer in formulations, with added benefit of improving overrun (Vikram et al., 2022; Narala et al., 2022)

Whipped Cream

Kim et al (2024) evaluated native and ultrasonicated pea protein for its use to produce plant-based whipped creams in combinations with cocoa butter and canola oil. The ultrasonication treatment had a favourable effect, significantly reducing whipping time and foam draining as well as increasing overrun, fat destabilization and hardness compared to native pea protein and dairy whipped cream controls.

ANIMAL-BASED DAIRY

Hybrid Products

The evaluation of pea-milk protein mixed gel models has been conducted to determine the feasibility of developing hybrid dairy formulations. Ben-Harb et al. (2019) demonstrated the ability for pea-dairy mixes to form gels under thermal, acid, and enzymatic treatment conditions. It appears that pea protein and milk proteins form networks independent from one another, where the rheological behaviour is determined by whichever is the major protein fraction in the mixture (Ma et al., 2024; Nascimento et al., 2025). Janahar et al. (2022) also highlighted the importance of fat content in the dairy, where pea protein dispersions blended with skim or raw milk demonstrated shear thinning behaviour, as opposed to the gel-like characteristics derived from pea protein cream blends. Ben-Harb et al (2018) highlighted the ability of fat to strengthen the mechanical properties of pea-mixed gels. Processing technology will also impact final product quality, where ultra shear technology successfully produced stable pea-milk suspensions with no sedimentation up to 15 days under refrigerated conditions due to a reduced particle size – where this effect was not observed with high-pressure or thermal-processing treatments (Janahar et al., 2023).

Milk

Inclusion of 2% pea protein into dairy milk demonstrated its ability to **promote growth of probiotic cultures** in formulation, where the dairy matrix played a critical, protective role in preserving probiotic viability during simulated gastrointestinal digestion compared to oat beverages (Pawlos et al., 2024)



Yogurt

Pea protein is added as a functional ingredient (0.1-0.5%) **increasing water holding capacity and thickness** of yogurt gels, or to **enhance acidification rate of probiotic cultures** (Qin et al., 2025; Zare et al., 2012). Pea protein substitution of 25% milk proteins was also successfully demonstrated to have minimal effects on stability and product quality in **hybrid, high-protein yogurt** formulations (Silva et al., 2024). Pea protein combined with gellan gum demonstrated their potential as an **encapsulation agent to promote delayed release** of flaxseed oil in yogurt formulations (Comunian et al., 2024).

Cheese

Hydrolysates of pea protein isolates have been successfully leveraged as **fat replacers** to develop low-fat or fat-free cheese with acceptable rheological properties (Limit et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). A pizza bake test of low-fat mozzarella cheese containing pea protein hydrolysates showed increased bake, stretch and sensory performance with decreased hardness, stickiness and stretch force (Zhang et al., 2024).

Ice Cream

Pickering emulsions stabilized by pea protein-isolate microgels demonstrated suitability to successfully **replace up to 60% of cream** in reduced saturated-fat ice-cream formulations, with high structural stability, overrun, melting and sensory properties when compared to the 100% cream control (Qin et al., 2024).

Whipped Cream

Pea protein-rutin complexes served as a functional additive in low-fat whipped cream formulations, functioning as an interfacial stabilizer by synergistically absorbing to and reducing the interfacial tension of the air-water interface (Xia et al., 2025). Formulations in which 10% of cream was substituted by this complex demonstrated nearly identical texture, microstructure and stability to full fat whipped cream.





BAKERY APPLICATIONS

Pea protein concentrates and isolates are incorporated into bakery products to increase the content and quality of protein. The complementary amino acid profile to wheat flour expands opportunities to establish protein content claims on packaged foods. Enrichment of wheat bread containing 5% pea protein concentrate **increased the protein content** from 10 to 13g/100g and resulted in **increased *in vitro* protein digestibility** under simulated adult and elderly GI conditions compared to control wheat bread (Moretton et al., 2024). While the dilution of the gluten network typically results in smaller volumes, harder texture, darker crust and detectable pea-like aroma flavour and notes, acceptable products with minimal differences to controls have been formulated at inclusion levels $\leq 5\%$. Where a higher inclusion level is desired, there are many opportunities to improve product quality through additions to the formulation (dough strengtheners, vital wheat gluten, hydrocolloids, emulsifiers, fats, and flavour masking ingredients like molasses, honey, or malt) and/or processing conditions (optimize water addition, extended mixing times, lower mixing speeds, reduce baking temperature, extend baking time).

Some functional advantages to pea protein inclusion have emerged in bakery applications. Pea protein concentrate solutions containing zinc were found to be more effective at fortifying biscuits compared to zinc sulfate alone; demonstrating **increased cellular transport, retention and uptake of zinc** (Jindal et al., 2024). Emulsions prepared from butter and water containing 2–4% pea protein isolates added to frozen dough formulations demonstrated ability to serve as **cryoprotectants in frozen doughs** by reducing free water content, inhibiting ice crystal formation, and maintaining the integrity of the gluten network over 4 weeks of frozen storage (Li et al., 2024). As a result, breads produced from frozen doughs containing pea protein exhibit improved loaf volumes and textural properties with minimal baking loss. Research by Pulse Canada indicates the potential for pea protein concentrates to function as binders and browning agents in egg-free formulations.

GLUTEN-FREE BAKING

Pea protein concentrates and isolates are leveraged in gluten-free blends to **develop flour mixtures with comparable nutritional composition to conventional wheat flours** (protein content 10–14%). Compared to gluten-free doughs comprised solely of starch-rich ingredients, **pea protein inclusion significantly enhances the viscoelastic properties of dough**, increasing air bubble retention capacity, resulting in improved crumb textures and volumes (Kumar and Singh, 2024; Shevkani and Singh, 2014). Rolandelli et al. (2024) were able to provide a gluten-free dough from a blend of rice starch, zein, and pea protein isolate containing 1% calcium hydroxide that displayed good rheological properties – similar to gluten at room temperature. It was important to note that this was a synergistic effect between pea protein + zein + alkalization treatment, where neither pea protein or zein alone under normal or alkalized conditions demonstrated sufficient rheological performance. Pea protein isolates in combination with xanthum gum have also been demonstrated as suitable **egg replacers** in gluten-free muffins, simultaneously contributing **lower water activity** levels which has potential positive implications on the shelf life (Kumar and Singh, 2024).

PASTA & NOODLES

Pea protein isolates and concentrates have been incorporated into both wheat-based and gluten-free pasta to enhance protein content and modulate textural properties. In wheat noodle formulations, pea protein isolates (2.5–12.5%) interact with starch granules and surface proteins, restricting starch hydration and limiting protein–protein bond formation (Wee et al., 2019). These interactions contributed to increased noodle hardness detected instrumentally but not perceived by sensory panels. Partial substitution of wheat flour with pea protein isolates (0–35%) yielded higher protein noodles with varied sensory attributes depending on inclusion level (Yang et al., 2024). At low levels (<15%), noodles were easier to chew and showed reduced hardness and cohesiveness, whereas at 25%, a decrease in chewing time and increase in stickiness were noted. Structurally, isolates formed fibrous networks with disorganized clumps (Yang et al., 2024). In semolina pasta, inclusion of 3–9% pea protein isolates or concentrates resulted in a more porous microstructure, elevated cooking losses, and increased adhesiveness and firmness; where no major differences were observed between pea protein isolates and concentrates aside from water activity and color (Nguyen et al., 2024).

For gluten-free pasta applications, combining pea protein isolates with inner pea fibre produced al dente sheets with reduced cooking losses and enhanced water uptake (Muneer et al., 2018). However, fibre inclusion diluted protein crosslinking, lowering network strength and extensibility, thus optimal levels were limited to <20%. Processing at 130°C promoted protein–protein interactions necessary for forming cohesive gluten-free structures (Muneer et al., 2018). In blended flour formulations, inclusion of 10–60% isolates with soy flour reduced cooking time and total solids loss, indicating improvements in cooking quality with increasing PPI levels (Rout and Srivastav, 2025).



OTHER APPLICATIONS

- **Functional Beverages:** Pea protein isolate supplementation at 1–2% in apple/orange juices gave relatively acceptable products when compared to control (Zare et al., 2015). Pea protein nanoemulsions served as an effective carrier and stabilizer for vitamin D in non-fat cow milk, canned orange juice, orange juice powder, banana milk and infant formula with minimal impacts on taste or colour (Akkam et al, 2021). Microencapsulation of probiotics using pea protein was discussed as a promising application in infant formulas in Kent and Doherty (2014).
- **Butters/Spreads:** 0.4–0.7% inclusion of pea protein isolate–pectin–pterostilbene complexes in walnut butter promoted a gel network with good spreadability, indicating potential benefits towards the sensory experience and processibility of spreads by promoting smooth extrusion and pump stability (Tang et al., 2025).
- **Sauces:**
 - **Tomato Sauce:** 1–2% pea protein isolate combined with tomato peel powder allowed for optimization of rheological properties, Brix, and moisture content of tomato sauces (Bal et al., 2024).
 - **Egg-free Mayonnaise:** Pea protein isolates conjugated with hydrocolloids, such as xanthan gum and guar gum, show promise serving as functional alternatives to egg yolk in mayonnaise formulations. Studies have shown improved textural and rheological properties of plant-based mayonnaise, where pea protein isolate–conjugates contribute to structural integrity and reduced phase separation, with rheological behaviour, appearance and microstructure closely resembling egg-yolk based mayonnaise (Choi et al., 2023; Shen et al., 2022).
- **Soups:** 2.5–3% inclusion of pea protein isolate in tomato soups was leveraged to meet leucine content for daily older adults' requirements in one serving, its inclusion also increased apparent viscosity, pH, lightness and yellowness (Jamshidvant et al., 2023).

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