

Spray drying in the dairy industry: Creating shelf-stable dairy products.

Christoph Zimmermann*

Department of Chemistry, University Bern, Bern, Switzerland

Introduction

The dairy industry has seen remarkable transformations in recent years, driven by technological advancements and consumer demand for convenient and longer-lasting dairy products. Among these technological innovations, spray drying has emerged as a crucial process for creating shelf-stable dairy products. Understanding spray drying- Spray drying is a dehydration process that converts liquid or semi-liquid materials into dry powders through the application of heat. This method involves four main steps: atomization, drying, particle separation, and collection. Here's how it works: Atomization: in the first step, the liquid dairy product, typically milk or cream, is atomized into tiny droplets. This atomization can be achieved through various methods, including nozzle atomization and centrifugal atomization. The goal is to create a large surface area for efficient moisture removal [1].

Drying: the atomized droplets are introduced into a drying chamber where hot air is continuously circulated. The hot air quickly evaporates the moisture from the droplets, leaving behind solid particles. Particle separation: once the moisture is removed, the solid dairy particles, now in powder form, are separated from the drying air. Cyclones, bag filters, or electrostatic precipitators are commonly used for this purpose. Collection: finally, the dried dairy powder is collected and can be further processed, such as by adding flavorings or fortifying with vitamins and minerals, before being packaged for distribution. Applications in the dairy industry- The dairy industry relies heavily on spray drying for a wide range of applications, each designed to meet specific consumer demands and market requirements. Some of the key applications include: Milk powder: spray drying is extensively used to produce milk powder, which has a longer shelf life compared to liquid milk. It's used in various food products, such as baked goods, confectionery, and instant beverage mixes [2].

Creamers and whiteners: coffee and tea creamers are often made using spray drying technology. These powdered products are valued for their convenience and extended shelf life. Dairy ingredients: spray drying is employed to create dairy ingredients like whey protein concentrate, lactose, and casein, which serve as essential components in a variety of food and beverage formulations. Infant formula: infant formula production relies on spray drying to create a safe and nutritionally balanced product for infants who are not breastfed. Desserts and bakery products: powdered dairy

ingredients are used to enhance the texture, flavor, and shelf life of desserts, such as ice creams, custards, and cake mixes. Ready-to-drink shakes: high-protein shakes and meal replacements are increasingly popular in the health and fitness market, and spray drying plays a key role in their production [3].

Benefits of spray drying in the dairy industry- The adoption of spray drying in the dairy industry offers several notable benefits: Extended shelf life: one of the primary advantages of spray-dried dairy products is their extended shelf life. The removal of moisture during the drying process significantly reduces the risk of spoilage, making these products ideal for long-term storage and distribution. Convenience: powdered dairy products are convenient for both consumers and manufacturers. They are easy to transport, require less storage space, and offer portion control for end-users. Improved solubility: spray-dried dairy powders often exhibit excellent solubility, making them suitable for instant applications like coffee creamers and milk powder. Customization: manufacturers can customize the composition of dairy powders by adjusting variables during the spray drying process, allowing them to meet specific nutritional and flavor requirements [4].

Reduced transportation costs: the removal of water content from dairy products reduces their weight, which can result in lower transportation costs, especially for long-distance shipping. Minimized waste: spray drying helps minimize waste by converting surplus or excess dairy products into shelf-stable powders, reducing the need for disposal. Challenges and considerations- While spray drying has numerous benefits, it also comes with challenges and considerations for the dairy industry: Energy consumption: the process requires significant energy input to heat the drying air, which can contribute to operational costs and environmental impacts. Flavor and nutrient preservation: care must be taken to preserve the flavor and nutritional integrity of dairy products during spray drying, as some sensitive compounds can be affected by heat and oxygen exposure. Maintenance and cleaning: spray drying equipment requires regular maintenance and cleaning to prevent contamination and ensure product quality [5].

References

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*Correspondence to: Christoph Zimmermann, Department of Chemistry, University Bern, Bern, Switzerland, E-mail: christophzimmermann@unibe.ch

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