

The Great Inulin Shortage

THE CHICORY CROP FOR FALL 2020 WAS ABYSMAL.

Arid conditions and poor irrigation during the planting period of April was compounded by heavy rains in October, leaving harvesters mired in mud. For the lay public, this quirk of agriculture is something of a curiosity, but the initiated know better. The failure of the chicory crop is a disaster for buyers in the food processing world, because nestled in the roots of the unassuming blue flower lies inulin – clean label gold. Or at least, it was gold. With a precarious lack of supply and the Covid colossus stamping on the remains of the global supply chain, inulin graduated to platinum in October, and come February is expected to be a no-sugar-added philosophers' stone. In other words, it is immensely expensive, extremely hard to come by, and its absence is making your life miserable. The lack of chicory inulin is wreaking chaos for food manufacturers across the globe, but as hopeless as it may seem, salvation can be found in yellow-petaled providence, courtesy of your friends at Icon Foods with PreBiotica JA Inulin.

Jerusalem artichoke is another unassuming flower, and like its sibling, chicory, is a member of the Asteraceae family. And like chicory, the roots of the Jerusalem artichoke are bursting with precious inulin: inulin that texturizes like chicory, inulin that replaces sugar like chicory, inulin that creates gels like chicory. Results from food processors and researchers alike boast of the functional qualities of JA inulin. Tests using JA inulin in non-dairy whipped topping (Hu 2008), bread (Rubel et al. 2015), and cakes (Rashid et al. 2018) display excellent results in texture, taste, and usability, demonstrating clean-label clout that puts it on equal footing with its chicory-based rival.

Knowing that Jerusalem artichoke inulin performs the same as chicory isn't particularly useful if the regulatory framework is working against you – after all, it's common knowledge only chicory inulin can be listed as dietary fiber in the nutrition facts. Pervasive as this idea may be, it simply isn't true. The 2018 FDA guidance inducting chicory inulin into the hallowed halls of dietary fiber included Jerusalem artichoke as well. In the FDA's Review of the Scientific Evidence on the Physiological Effects of Certain Non-Digestible Carbohydrates, a supplement to the guidance listing inulin and inulin-type fructans as dietary fiber, the FDA states that inulin is "extracted from numerous plant products, many of which typically are not consumed as part of the U.S. diet (e.g., chicory root, agave, and Jerusalem artichoke)." Moreover, a footnote further clarifies the status of JA inulin, stating that although the FDA only received petitions to add chicory-based inulin as dietary fiber, "we have included in this review inulin and inulin-type fructans (OF, scFOS), regardless of source because of their common β (2,1) linkages." To the FDA, all inulin counts as dietary fiber.





Given that JA inulin performs like chicory, and the FDA views JA inulin as dietary fiber, intrepid buyers are already gobbling up supply. Still, if your packaging lists chicory root fiber, that may give you pause. Fear not – the FDA has thrown you a life preserver. In effect since May 2020, the FDA's Temporary Policy Regarding Certain Food Labeling Requirements During the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency says the agency is “providing flexibility for manufacturers to use existing labels, without making otherwise required changes, when making minor formula adjustments due to unforeseen shortages or supply chain disruptions.” Expanding on this for ingredients present at greater than 2 percent, the guidance states that while “...some manufacturers may choose to specify certain varieties in their ingredient list instead of using a general term... FDA does not intend to object to certain temporary substitutions of similar ingredients without corresponding labeling changes, even if the specific variety is declared in the ingredient statement.” This allowance will be in effect so long as Covid-19 remains a public health emergency, with potential extensions to follow based on industry comments. With vaccines still publicly unavailable and logistical hurdles likely to slow distribution, this regulatory discretion will remain in effect through much of 2021.

Jerusalem artichoke has long been a niche player in the inulin supply chain – chicory is historically plentiful, and the European kingpins of the inulin industry have no reason to invest in new crops – but with the collapse of chicory, the little yellow flower is having its moment. With performance on par with chicory, JA inulin fits into the FDA guidelines on dietary fiber and can currently be substituted without any changes to your label. Best of all, this clean label savior can be found in ample supply at Icon Foods. Chicory shortages may have you on the ropes, but with Icon Foods in your corner, you still stand a fighting chance. Icon Foods has stock on hand and will have stock secured through at least the end of Q2 2021. However, this is a supply and demand issue, and we would encourage you to lock your supply in now while it is available.

- ✓ Performs like chicory.
- ✓ Can be labeled as a fiber.
- ✓ Can replace chicory in your formulation immediately.

For samples, docs and pricing for Icon Foods PreBiotica JA Inulin reach out to your Icon Foods rep, call 310-455-9876 or email sales@iconfoods.com

Icon Foods is proud to be your reliable supply chain partner in the quest to make deep clean cuts to added sugar.

