

CASE STUDY



Developing a High-Fibre Carbonated Soft Drink to Support Digestive Health: The FUNKi-2.0 Project

FUNKi Drinks Ltd & Quadram Institute Bioscience

Project Type:

Collaborative R&D

Project Duration:

1st Spet 2023 - 28th Feb 2025 (18 months)

Project Summery:

The project sought to reformulate an initial product (FUNKi-1.0) into a new version (FUNKi-2.0) containing a novel fibre blend with proven digestive tolerance. The target population includes health-conscious UK consumers, particularly those aged 16–34, with an interest in gut health. The product aimed to increase fibre intake among the general public by leveraging the popularity of carbonated soft drinks.

Client/Partner Background

FUNKi Drinks Ltd is an early-stage food-tech company focused on creating innovative functional beverages. The Quadram Institute Bioscience is a globally recognised research institution specialising in gut health and microbiome science. Their shared mission was to address the UK's "fibre gap" by making fibre intake more accessible through enjoyable, functional beverages.

Executive Summary

The FUNKi-2.0 project, funded by Innovate UK under the "Better Food for All - Nutrition Early Stage" CR&D competition, aimed to develop a reformulated high-fibre carbonated soft drink with improved digestive tolerance and proven benefits to gut health. This innovative collaboration between FUNKi Drinks Ltd and Quadram Institute Bioscience successfully achieved its scope, delivering a new consumer-ready product with validated microbiome impact and commercial scalability. Gilly Brunton served as the Monitoring Officer throughout the 18-month project lifecycle.

Key Responsibilities & Actions Taken

Project Scoping:

- / Ensured alignment with Innovate UK's competition scope and nutritional innovation priorities.
- / Evaluated progress against original application objectives.

Stakeholder Engagement:

- / Facilitated communication across FUNKi Drinks Ltd, QIB, & FoodBuzz amongst others

Monitoring & Evaluation:

- / Provided quarterly oversight and guidance across all six reporting periods.
- / Assessed milestone and deliverable completion, risk mitigation, and financial compliance.

Risk Management:

- / Oversaw resolution of key risks, including recipe acceptance (Mango Passionfruit variant), branding delays, and ingredient cost challenges.

Exploitation Planning:

- / Monitored commercial readiness, investor outreach, SEIS certification, and regulatory compliance.
- Supported post-project planning for IP, investor engagement, and academic publication.

Notable Achievements / Outcomes

- / Successfully completed formulation of a fibre-blend CSD meeting the “high fibre” claim (>6g/100ml).
 - / Conducted 1,000L scale production trials.
 - / Delivered consumer testing with 150 participants, confirming market readiness.
 - / QIB completed microbiome impact analysis with publication planned.
 - / Manufacturing partner and launch strategy in place.
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Challenges & Solutions

- / Consumer rejection of Mango Passionfruit variant resolved via reformulation.
 - / Branding delays mitigated through rescheduling and proactive supplier engagement.
 - / Ingredient cost issues addressed by FoodBuzz through re-sourcing and supplier negotiation.
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Strategic Importance

The project aligns with NHS and government public health objectives to close the “fibre gap” and combat diet-related diseases. It contributes to food innovation, preventative health, and sustainability goals through the creation of a functional beverage with a strong market niche.

Final Reflection

As Monitoring Officer, it was a privilege to support a high-impact innovation tackling one of the UK’s most pressing nutritional challenges. The collaboration demonstrated excellent scientific, technical, and entrepreneurial synergy—yielding a consumer product with meaningful health potential.