

# Forward Thinking: A Wealth of Health

The health and wellness trend spurs food and flavor innovation

Amy Marks-McGee, Trendincite LLC; trendincite@aol.com; 1-888-561-1229



Obesity, heart health, and food allergies are hot topics receiving attention in the press and government. Legislation such as the trans fat and menu labeling legislation, the Let's Move! Initiative and the National Salt Reduction Initiative (NSRI) highlight the severity of these issues. Below are a few US statistics:

On Jan. 17, 2012, *The Journal of the American Medical Association* published data gathered by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that stated, "Overall, 35.7% of the adult population and 16.9% of children qualify as obese. After two decades of steady increases, obesity rates in adults and children in the United States have remained largely unchanged during the past 12 years, a finding that suggests national efforts at promoting healthful eating and exercise are having little effect on the overweight."

According to the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute, "each year, about 1.2 million people in the United States have heart attacks. Coronary heart disease (CHD), which often results in heart attacks, is the leading killer of both men and women in the United States."

According to The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network (FAAN), "As many as 15 million people have food allergies. An estimated 9 million, or 4%, of adults have food allergies and nearly 6 million or 8% of children have food allergies with young children affected most."

In response to these statistics, consumers' concerns about general health and wellness are on the rise, and consumer products manufacturers are developing and marketing healthful products to address many of these issues. The reduction of fat, sugar, and calories and healthful kids' menu options, along with vegan and gluten-free snacks, heart health-specific products and vitamin-infused beverages are becoming more prevalent in the marketplace.

## Less is More

To target health-conscious consumers, low fat and less sugar are popular claims appearing on a variety of product labels and restaurant menus. Technomic, a research firm serving the food industry, published a press release on Dec. 20, 2011, that found "the use of the word 'healthy' within menu descriptions has increased by 86% over the past year and the number of times 'low fat' was used to



describe menu items has increased by 33% over last year, while the incidence of 'fat free' and/or 'non-fat' has gone up by 12%. The phrase 'no sugar' has increased by 51%, year over year. And though it's used much less often than these other healthful adjectives, 'low-calorie' is on 154% more menus than last year."

In the ready-to-drink (RTD) market, beverages that contain reduced or zero calories have been traditionally marketed as diet products.

However, there has been a paradigm shift in consumer behavior and the it word now is "less." Several RTD brands are extending their beverage lines to include less sugar and fewer calorie variants. For example, Naked Juice added *Reduced Calorie Lychee Smoothie* and *Reduced Calorie Citrus Lemongrass Smoothie* variants, both labeled with "35% fewer calories." GuS' (Grown-up Soda) newest flavor is *Dry Root Beer* made with birch oil, vanilla, clove, other natural spices and extracts, and cane sugar. The company states that "a 12-ounce bottle contains 95 calories and 40% less sugar than mainstream root beers." Honest Tea recently launched *Not Too Sweet Tea*, "which contains 40% less sugar and fewer calories than other sweet teas." The product is both fair trade-certified and US Department of Agriculture-certified organic and contains 100 calories sweetened with organic cane sugar and stevia. And Nestlé USA expanded its Coffee-mate Natural Bliss coffee creamers range with *Coffee-mate Natural Bliss Low Fat Vanilla*. According to the company, "the creamer contains 20 calories in each serving and uses a thickener to maintain the texture consumers expect from Coffee-mate." The marketing message, "It's made with only four simple ingredients—milk, cream, sugar and natural flavor" is reminiscent of Haagen-Dazs' Five ice cream line.

The cocktail mixer market has followed suit in introducing low-calorie products. For consumers looking to control their weight, *Powell & Mahoney* introduced "an

all-natural margarita mix [that] contains 70% fewer calories than a standard margarita mix with 20 calories in each serving without alcohol and 100 calories with alcohol.” According to the company, “it’s free of preservatives and is sweetened with organic agave nectar and pear juice.” Also, *Go Cocktails!* are “sugar-free, low-calorie, low-carbohydrate and gluten-free” cocktail mixers available in *Appletini*, *Cosmo*, *Lemon Drop* and *Margarita* flavors with five calories in each single-serve packet.

Frozen yogurt is also capitalizing on the low-fat trend. The Country’s Best Yogurt (TCBY) launched a monthly, limited-time flavor rollout with January featuring “98% fat free *Old Fashioned Root Beer Float* soft-serve frozen yogurt. February [showcasing] nonfat *Bananas Foster Super Fro-Yo* [and] March [offering] 98% fat free *Tropical Coconut Super Fro-Yo*.” Ruggles

Lowfat Greek Frozen Yogurt launched in January and is available in six flavors—*Original Tart*, *Vanilla Bean*, *Peach*, *Honey*, *Blueberry* and *Strawberry Ruggle*—and are “all natural, have no preservatives, artificial flavors, or artificial colors, and have live and active cultures for digestive health.” A novel new product is *Fomz*, “a low fat, dairy-free, and alcohol-free fruit-infused food and beverage foam to add a blast of intense flavor to healthy menus, kids’ menus and specialty beverage platforms.” The foam is made from real fruit, pure cane sugar and air, and is available in *Peach Grapefruit*, *Cranberry*, *Passionfruit Mango*, *Pineapple Papaya*, *Lemon Lime* and *Wild Berry* flavors.

### Eye on Kids

Obesity is not just an adult issue. According to the Let’s Move! Initiative, “one in three American children is considered overweight or obese. Children also consume 31% more calories and 56% more fat than their peers did 40 years ago.” To respond to this, the recent federal MyPlate nutrition standards have been influential, and there have been several restaurant initiatives to create healthier kids’ menu options such as the National Restaurant Association Kids LiveWell program. The program has more than 15,000 restaurants that participate, and the focus “is to increase consumption of fruit and vegetables, lean protein, whole grains and low-fat dairy, and limit unhealthy fats, sugars and sodium.” According to the National

Restaurant Association’s annual survey of American Culinary Federation chefs for 2011, “nutritionally balanced children’s dishes were the No. 4 trend with children’s nutrition as an overall culinary theme coming in at No. 6 on the list.”

In January 2012, Chick-fil-A debuted a new kids’ menu offering of gluten-free *Grilled Nuggets* and *Buddy Fruits Pure Blended Fruit To Go Apple Cinnamon* applesauce. In addition, the company changed its kids drink choices and offers only 1% milk, 100% apple juice, its signature freshly squeezed lemonade or water. Hyatt hotels and resorts also are following the trend and announced a commitment to make their kids’ menus healthier by November 2012. Examples of children’s menu changes include fruits or vegetables automatically being served

instead of fries or chips and French toast being made with whole grain bread instead of white bread.

## Vitamins and Nutrition

Trendincite's "Forward Thinking: It's Mint to Be" article, which appeared in the March 2012 issue of *Perfumer & Flavorist* magazine, referenced chewing gum as one of the latest vehicles for vitamin delivery. RTD beverages are another popular medium for vitamin infusion.

For example, Naked Juice added *Mango Veggie* to its line, which is described as "mashed up mango with yellow carrots, sweet potato, sweet corn, apple, chick peas and a hint of lemon and butternut squash." According to the company, it "adds up to two servings of vegetables and one serving of fruit, including vitamin A; vitamin C; vitamin E; vitamins B3, B5, B6; and B12, a good source of potassium." Jamba Juice's newest launch *Fit 'n Fruitful smoothies* "with a Weight Burner Boost" in *Berry Blend*, *Strawberry Raspberry Banana* and *Peach Mango* "provide 14 essential vitamins and minerals, are a good source of protein and fiber, [and] contain two or more servings of fruit." Another notable introduction is H2M Beverages LLC's 984 beverage, "which features a twist-cap that holds nine vitamins and 84 minerals." Available in *Grape*, *Punch*, *Orange*, *Pomegranate-Blueberry*, *Lemon-Lime* and *Kiwi-Strawberry* flavors, the drinks are made with all-natural ingredients and contain zero calories. Geared toward the energy beverage segment, Celestial Seasonings launched Kombucha Energy Shots in *Citrus*, *Berry* and *Pomegranate Xtreme* flavors. All three shots combine "live, raw kombucha with B vitamins and energizing botanicals, such as ginseng and guarana," and the *Pomegranate Xtreme* "is fortified with additional caffeine from guarana and B vitamins."

Splenda even joins the vitamin band wagon in introducing Splenda Essentials in three variants. *With B vitamins* contains "20% of the daily value of B vitamins B1, B5 and B6 to help support a healthy metabolism," *With Antioxidants* contains "20% of the daily value of antioxidant vitamins C and E, like those found in fruits and vegetables," and *1 Gram of Fiber* gives a "small boost of healthy fibers."

## Heart Health

In addition to brands promoting general health and wellness products, there has been a push to target specific health-related issues such as cholesterol and digestive health. Now heart health appears to be the latest target with new beverage and cereal introductions.

An interesting launch is *Heart Juice Pulse Berry* by Genso LLC, which is formulated with "hawthorn extract, resveratrol, vitamins, antioxidants, garlic extract, pomegranate juice and a small amount of stevia," described by the company as "cardio-protective ingredients." Lifeway Kefir's new *BioKefir Bio Shots in Blackberry* and *Black Cherry* are specifically marketed for heart health and are gluten-free with vitamins A, C and D, and 125 mg of potassium. The company claims the products "have more than 20 billion units of probiotics and combine the power of 10 live and active kefir cultures."

In the cereal category, General Mills' Cheerios continues its heart-healthy campaign and introduced two new flavors to its range, *Multi Grain Cheerios Peanut Butter* and *Dulce de Leche Cheerios*, while Silver Palate released a line of heart healthy *Grain Berry* cereals, mixes and crackers. According to the company, "Grain Berry is a remarkable natural bran—grown in the United States, expressly for these foods—rich in natural antioxidants and dietary fiber. It contains more antioxidants—ounce for ounce—than blueberries, pomegranate juice, red wine, and other foods and grains." The breakfast cereals are "low in sugar, fat- and cholesterol-free" and are offered in *Bran*, *Original* and *Apple Cinnamon* varieties.

## Healthful Snacks

The health and wellness craze and the increase in food allergies also has led consumers to explore alternative diets and lifestyles, including vegetarianism, veganism and gluten-free diets. In the first quarter of 2011, The Vegetarian Resource Group (VRG) commissioned Harris Interactive to conduct a national telephone poll with a nationwide cross section of 1,010 adults (18 and over) to estimate how often Americans are eating vegetarian meals. The study found "approximately 5% of the country says that they never eat meat, fish, seafood or poultry, which makes them vegetarian. Approximately half of these vegetarians are also vegan; that is, they also don't eat dairy or eggs." Additionally, VRG estimates "that there may be 5–12 million adults in the United States who never consume meat, fish or poultry." Packaged Facts "estimates the US market for gluten-free foods and beverages at \$2.6 billion in 2010, for a compound annual growth rate of 30% over the 2006–2010 period."

To meet growing consumer demands for healthful snacks and sides, there has been an influx of vegan, gluten-free and non-GMO (genetically modified organisms) indie product launches. A variety of seeds such as sunflower, sesame and hemp, and grains such as oat, buckwheat, wheat berry and quinoa are main ingredients emerging in many of these new launches while sea salt, cracked pepper and salsa are common flavors.

Kashi TLC's newest line extension is *Pita Crisps* made with "seven whole grains, cracked wheat berries, veggies and natural sea salt." They are offered in *Original 7 Grain with Sea Salt* and *Zesty Salsa* with "a savory blend of herbs, spices and veggies, including onions, tomato, peppers and cilantro." Last year, Somersault Snacks were launched "to create healthy, tasty snacks with high nutritional impact based on sunflower seeds that offer the perfect blend of protein, fiber and balanced nutrition with an excellent taste." The crunchy snacks are nut-free, certified kosher and available in five flavors. *Cinnamon Crunch* is the newest sweet variant launched this year, and *Dutch Cocoa* launched last year. Savory flavors include *Pacific Sea Salt*, the brand's original blend; *Salty Pepper* with cracked pepper and sea salt; and *Santa Fe Salsa* mixed with jalapeno, chili pepper and chives. Hail Mary, a raw, vegan and gluten-free range of snacks, added *Hail Merry Cherry Almond Hemp Grawnola* to its line. The product is formulated

with “almonds, organic buckwheat groats, shelled hemp seeds, organic dried cherries (evaporated cane juice), organic maple syrup, organic dried apples, pomegranate juice, organic sunflower seeds, walnuts, pecans, Madagascar bourbon vanilla, organic flax seeds, brown rice protein powder (brown rice protein, natural vanilla flavor, guar gum), hemp meal, sea salt.”

Purely Elizabeth is “a line of all-natural and organic foods using nutritious alternative grains and superfood seeds, free of sugar, dairy, wheat and gluten.” The company’s latest introduction is *New Ancient Grain Granola Cereal* made with ancient grains, oats and seeds along with chewy dried fruit, organic coconut oil and organic coconut sugar in *Original*, *Cranberry Pecan* and *Pumpkin Fig* flavors. Buckshots Buckwheat “a roasted buckwheat snack that is naturally gluten-free” launched in January at the San Francisco Winter Fancy food show and is available in *Natural*, *Smoky BBQ* and *Dill* flavors. The Good Bean Chickpea Snacks in *Sweet Cinnamon*, *Smoky Chili & Lime*, *Sea Salt* and *Salt & Black Pepper* feature chickpeas roasted in non-GMO canola oil. They are naturally low in calories and high in fiber and protein.

In addition to snacks, there has been activity in healthful side dishes with a focus on grains. *SooFoo* “a contraction of ‘super good food’ is an all-natural, low-fat, sodium- and cholesterol-free blend of barley, black lentils, brown lentils, brown rice, buckwheat, green lentils, oats, rye berries and wheat berries.” In 2011, Village Harvest launched an innovative frozen line of pre-cooked whole grains. Variants include *Red Quinoa & Brown Rice*, *Brown*, *Red and Wild Rice*, *Wheatberry & Barley*, *Farro & Red Rice* and *Golden Quinoa*. Urbane Grain offers “healthy side dishes inspired by the great restaurants of the world” based on quinoa. Of the nine flavors available *Smokey Bacon*, *Cracked Black Pepper & Sea Salt* and *Roasted Garlic and Fines Herbes* are new in 2012.

Two emerging grains to watch for are kañiwa and freekeh. According to the Culinary Collective, kañiwa is a gluten-free grain smaller than quinoa grown in the Andes Mountains in Peru. It is fairly new to the US, and under the Zocalo brand, *Kañiwa Grain* was a 2011 Sofi (specialty outstanding food innovation) silver award finalist in the pasta, rice or grain category of the National Association for the Specialty Trade (NASFT) show. It is described as having “a wonderful crunchy texture and a satisfying earthy flavor that works well as a base for fish, in stir fries and soups, and even served cold in salads.” According to Starchefs.com, freekeh is “a green durum wheat harvested early, sun-dried and then set on fire, leaving roasted, smoky flavored grains.” It is described as having “a firm, chewy texture and toasty, nutty flavor.” The Green Goddess restaurant in New Orleans features freekeh as the star ingredient in their *Freaky Tabouli with Smoked Wheat Freekeh* salad “with loads of herbs, tiny currants, crunchy pistachios, good olives [and] spectacular olive oil, finished with a homemade ajvar (a spicy red pepper spread), layered on slabs of roasted acorn squash.” Portland chef Greg Perrault of June restaurant used freekeh for his *Crème Fraîche Panna Cotta*, *Roasted Carrots*, *Freekeh and Calabrian Chili Oil* salad.

The popularity of grain is further evidenced in its appearance in RTD beverages, particularly oats. Last year, Sneaky Pete’s Outstanding Beverages launched in five flavors—*Apples Away*, *Grape Escape*, *Mango Mystique*, *Peach Perfection* and *Raspberry Beret*. The company claims the products are all natural, contain three grams of dietary fiber and two grams of soluble fiber, and are only 40 calories. *Simpli Oat Shake* is “made from sustainable non-GMO oats grown in Scandinavia that is free of lactose, cholesterol, and high-fructose corn syrup.” Chocolate joins tropical fruits (blended with oranges, pears and passion fruit) in their flavor profile. Naked Juice is the newest player in this market, and recently launched Fruit Juice & Oats Smoothies in three flavors—*Apple Raisin Oat*, *Blueberry Oat* and *Peach Mango Oat*. The line is described as a “mega-smoothie-snack with fruit, fiber and protein.”

In addition to healthy snack options, the way we buy snacks is also changing. In Chicago, the city park district launched a campaign to provide healthy snacks in its facilities by introducing healthy vending machines. The machines will stock snacks lower in calories, sodium, fat and sugar, as well as provide gluten- and peanut-free options. The first vending machine was installed at the Humboldt Park Field House, and the Chicago Park District expects to install 96 additional vending machines throughout the city by the end of the year.

## Health and Wellness Challenges

Because of the US obesity epidemic, health and wellness are universal buzzwords affecting consumers. US consumer products manufacturers and the food service industry have responded by formulating products that have reduced, replaced or removed unhealthful ingredients such as fat, sugar, sodium and GMOs, or they’ve added healthful ingredients such as vitamins and fiber. In addition, products are marketed to target specific health issues. As health concerns continue and new initiatives and regulations are enforced or introduced, new healthful products and applications will be launched, creating challenges and opportunities for the industry. Regardless of the product, moderation is the underlying message to good health.

While food and beverage impact health, health and wellness is a broader issue with facets such as lifestyle and environment. For example, Canada also has an obesity problem, and currently Vancouver is implementing a plan to improve overall health and keep medical costs down through urban planning and managing the way cities are designed, which directly affects the health of its population. By encouraging more physical exercise and outdoor activities, they hope to foster good health habits. Also, Vancouver has an ambitious goal to become the world’s greenest city by 2020. The health epidemic and action to remedy it, and Vancouver’s reaction, demonstrate a larger movement to health and wellness in addition to the emphasis on diet.