

FUNCTIONAL FOODS ROUNDUP

The continued growth of Greek-style yogurt products and the appearance of oats in beverages are two of the new trends in the market.

Words by Ranjan Sharma

Oats making inroads into beverages

Oats as flakes or flour have traditionally been used in breakfast cereals, bakery and confectionery products. To a limited extent, oats in the form of granola have been successfully marketed as toppings for yogurt. However, recent trends suggest oats are now making inroads into functional beverages. Examples include oat-based smoothies, juices and milks, marketed as fibre-rich, grab-and-go breakfasts or as meals for busy people. In addition to claims such as “natural” these beverages boast benefits such as “reducing cholesterol and aiding digestion”.

Oatworks, one of the new beverages, was launched last year in US. The oat and fruit smoothies contains 100 per cent real fruit juice, puree with no added sugar and PromOat, a proprietary water-soluble oat fibre ingredient from Sweden. Each 10.8oz (320ml) bottle of Oatworks contains essential vitamins and minerals in addition to 2g of soluble fibre, equivalent to approximately two bowls of oatmeal. It is marketed as a natural fruit smoothie with the goodness of oatmeal.

Another thick and creamy product launched last year, Simpli OatShake is being marketed as a non-dairy drink made from oat flakes. This 8.4oz (250ml) low-fat smoothie contains 1g of dietary fibre and comes in chocolate, coffee and tropical fruit



flavours. Another oat-based drink, Naturally Oatstanding, was launched to target younger generation to encourage healthy beverage drinking habits. Considerably thinner than a fruit smoothie it has 40 calories and 3 grams of fibre per 12oz bottle (355ml), and is available in apple, grape, mango, peach and raspberry flavours.

One of the main drivers for the success of these beverages has been the awareness of the health benefits of oats and the marketers' ability to communicate recently approved cholesterol-reducing health claim for oat-based ingredients. The key component responsible for the

cholesterol reduction is beta glucan, the soluble fibre that is abundantly present in oats.

Studies have shown a direct correlation between the amount of beta glucan and the reduction in blood cholesterol. When oats are treated with enzymes that destroy beta-glucan, the cholesterol-lowering potential of oats dissipates. One of the mechanisms for the cholesterol lowering effect of oats involves the formation of a viscous gel by beta glucan, which binds bile acids and increases their excretion within the faeces. However, there may be additional ways in which oats lower cholesterol.

The cholesterol-related health claim for oat fibre has also been approved in Australia and New Zealand. Under Food Standards Code 1.2.7, products low in saturated fatty acids containing 3g of beta-glucan per day are allowed to make cholesterol reduction health claim provided the food contains at least 1g beta glucan per serving from oat bran and/or wholegrain oats. Although breakfast products with oats have been widely marketed with health claims throughout Australia, opportunities exist for the introduction of drinking beverages with oat fibre ingredients such as beta glucan.

Overall, functional health and wellness products in Australia continue to be in high demand and the oat-based beverages offer a unique proposition for marketers as they capture the traditionally healthy image of oats (i.e. from porridge) and align them with current consumer desire for convenience and taste.

“Greek” dominates new product launches

In the new food products area, product launches with the word “Greek” seem to be dominating.

The growth of the Greek yogurt in the US and worldwide can largely be attributed to success of the Chobani brand which was launched in Australia last year. Danone, the biggest yogurt manufacturer in the world, has now joined in the race with Greek yogurt offerings.

However, it has been caught up in a legal battle between Greek company Fage and US company Chobani for the use of the word “Greek” in yogurts which are not manufactured in Greece. In order to comply with the court orders, Danone has ceased labelling the work “Greek” on its recently launched yogurt Danio in UK. It appears that in the short term, a ruling in favour of Fage may have some impact on new product launches with the word “Greek” especially in UK and Europe.

Danone has launched a high protein yogurt, Silhouette, in Canada with an eye on weight management. According to Danone, while many women are still not satisfied with their weight, they want to strike a balance between eating right (e.g., to lose weight) and eating enjoyably. These women are looking for more natural, nutrient-dense products with fewer empty calories. Danone Silhouette Greek yogurt comes with no added sugar and twice the protein with only 50 calories per 100g serving.

Chobani has launched two new Greek yogurt products in the US. With an eye on weight loss, Chobani Bite is a 3.5oz (100g) cup of blended Greek non-fat and low-fat yogurt available in four flavours: fig with caramel zest, caramel with pineapple, coffee with dark chocolate chips and raspberry with dark chocolate chips. Chobani has also launched a new product called Flip, which allows the consumers to flip the lid and add bold, delicious mix-ins to strained Greek yogurt. Although twin portion packaging for yogurt and topping such as fruit and cereal has been available in the market for quite some time, Chobani has extended the simply concept to Greek-style yogurt.



Greek-labelled yogurt has also moved into the frozen foods aisle with the launch of Healthy Choice frozen yogurt by ConAgra in US. The frozen yogurt contains 100 calories per cup and is available in four flavours — strawberry, vanilla bean, raspberry and blueberry.

Other products include Greek-style cream cheese from Franklin Foods in the US, which claims to be first of its kind and contains twice the protein and half the fat of regular cream cheese, plus live and active cultures, and a breakfast cereal containing whole grain flakes and crunchy granola clusters coated with Greek-style yogurt.

Ingredient suppliers have also noted the success of the Greek yogurt. Danish-Swedish company Arla Foods has launched protein powder Nutrilac, which it says will enable yogurt manufacturers to produce Greek-style yogurts on its existing plant, with dramatically reduced levels of wastage. Sales of Greek and Greek-style yoghurts are soaring globally according to Arla. But the specialist equipment usually needed to make Greek-style yogurt and the low yields per kilogram of milk required are major barriers to entry into the market for dairy companies. According to Arla Foods, Nutrilac allows companies to get thick Greek-like yogurt consistency at a lower cost than the traditional method. 🍌

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