



FUNCTIONAL FOODS ROUNDUP

A \$70 million yogurt, pressures to change food labelling and issues regarding reducing salt consumption are all making news.

Words by Ranjan Sharma

Innovations

Although true innovation in new product development remains elusive, several new products were recently launched. The key theme for the launches revolves around offering specific health benefits in addition to the nutritional value of the food.

Following the end of its marketing rights for yogurt brand Yoplait, Canada's Ultima Group took a brave step by unveiling its own yogurt for the Canadian market, iögo. Perhaps the single largest launch covering the whole category of products in Canada, more than 15 months of work and \$70 million were dedicated to developing iögo with a full range of dairy and yogurt products. Seven product lines, each with its own distinctive attributes were launched: iögo, iögo 0% (fat-free yogurt), iögo Probio (probiotic yogurt with select lactose-free flavours), iögo Greko (Greek-style yogurt), iögo Nomad (drinkable yogurt), iögo Zip (yogurt in a tube) and iögo Nano (fresh cheese and drinkable yogurt for kids). The unique name, new brand feature and marketing muscles of Ultima Foods is likely to guarantee its success in the market.

Another high profile dairy product, Calin+ from Yoplait, was recently launched in the UK. Calin+ is fortified with calcium and vitamin D and is specially marketed as a functional food for strong bones. The brand is already sold in France where it is targeted at older women. The French website claims it was created by the Yoplait nutritionists and was specially designed in response

to the needs of women over 55. The UK website also targets older women and lists approved claims for bone health following EU Regulation No 432/2012:

- Calcium is needed for the maintenance of normal bones
- Vitamin D contributes to normal absorption/utilisation of calcium
- Vitamin D contributes to the maintenance of normal bones
- Protein contributes to the maintenance of normal bones.

liquid concentrate that can be used to enhance flavours. Although there are no set plans yet, Coca Cola thinks the next logical category for liquid drops would be tea because drinks without high sugar content are relatively easy to turn into a liquid concentrate. In the future, possibilities of liquid concentrates with vitamins and minerals cannot be ruled out.

Another noticeable new product is the Kraft Foods fortified peanut butter product under the brand name



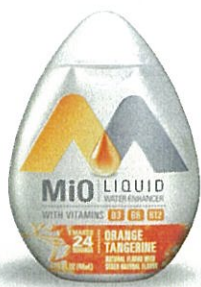
The obvious strategy should be to encourage the reduction in the consumption of packaged foods



Although concentrated energy shots are well established in the market, the emerging trend towards liquid concentrates for food products, which stem from combining existing technologies in innovative ways, strengthened last month. Kraft Foods led the way in liquid concentrates with the launch of Mio, a liquid water enhancer. The packaging allows the user to individually tailor the taste by dispensing the liquid concentrate as drops in water. Mio is available in fruit flavour and functional energy enhancer sub-lines. Also, it is calorie free as it is sweetened with Sucralose.

Following the success of Mio, Coca Cola has launched Dasani drops, another





Planters "NUT-rition". The product marks the first time peanut butter has seen such a transformation with unique combinations of bananas, granola, berries, raisins, cinnamon and nuts. Made with a peanut butter base, Planters NUT-rition peanut butter is nutrient dense and a good source of energy, providing six to seven grams of protein per serving and at least five vitamins and minerals. Overall, it seems to be a unique way of promoting peanut butter but its success in the market remains to be seen.

Regulations

Food package labelling seems to be high on the agenda for European and North American retailers as consumers are demanding greater transparency in what they purchase.

In response to the increased incidences of obesity and lifestyle diseases, retailers are under pressure to identify foods as "good" and "not so good" by simple traffic light symbols (red, amber and green). In the UK, most major supermarkets such as Aldi and Lidl have either adopted or plan to adopt the traffic light labels on food packaging. Last month, after years of rebelling against official advice and protesting that using red, amber and green labels to signal the nutritional value of its products was too simplistic, Tesco supermarket also agreed to adopt the popular "traffic light" system on its food and drink products.

Food labelling is also being demanded for "eco" or "green" status of products and also for products containing GM modified ingredients. Starting next year, products sold in the European market will be required to display eco-labelling, informing consumers of the amount of greenhouse gasses emitted during the manufacture, packaging, transport, and

overall lifecycle of consumer products. The move will allow shoppers to have a direct influence on whether products with a high-environmental impact survive in the marketplace.

In the US, a highly visible battle over genetically modified (GM) foods in California is turning into an expensive war. Agribusinesses and food manufacturers have pledged US\$13 million to a campaign against a proposition that would require food to carry labels noting its GM content.

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Thus far, Australian retailers have given a cool response to compulsory traffic light labelling. According to the Australian Food and Grocery Council, the traffic lights send all the wrong signals to consumers. It argues that healthy foods such as cheese and milk could be mis-labelled with "red" light instead of being a good source of calcium, which is needed for healthy bones, and a good source of protein for growth and development. On the other hand, a carbonated drink may get green "light" symbol for fat, saturated fat and salt. The debate on consumer-friendly labelling in Australia is likely to continue in the near future. At present, Australia also lacks the desire for labelling "green" or "eco-friendly" products.

Consumer intelligence

Salt consumption by both adults and children remains at high levels in Australia. Recent Heart Foundation research has revealed that, on average, children are consuming around 6g of salt per day, which is a recommended amount for adults. Similar consumption values are reported by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) for children in the US. The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)'s Nutrient Reference Values for Australia & New Zealand show the upper limit of sodium consumption for children varies with age, for those 4–8 years it is 1400mg

(3.5g salt), for those 9–13 years 2000mg (5g salt) and for those 14–18 years it is the same as adults, 2300mg (6g salt).

High levels of salt, especially in children's diets, remains a cause of concern as this sets them up for a high chance of heart disease later in life.

So what can be done to reduce the amount of salt intake by children and adults?

According to the Heart Foundation, 75 per cent of our salt intake comes through the consumption of packaged foods

such as snacks. So the obvious strategy should be to encourage the reduction in the consumption of packaged foods. Additionally, food processors can take some responsibility by reformulating products with reduced salt levels.

However, despite the obvious issues with excessive salts salt intakes, the numbers of products making low / no-sodium claims globally seem to be on the decline. According to Mintel's Global New Products Database, North America had 26 per cent new product launches carrying low / no / reduced sodium claims in 2011, compared with 32 per cent in 2010 and 28 per cent in 2007. In comparison, in the EU 35 per cent of new product launches carried low / no-sodium claims in 2011. In Asia-Pacific, 19 per cent had similar claims.

Parents can also take responsibility and help reduce the consumption of packaged and take-away foods with high salt levels. Parents influence in choosing children's diet has been well recognised and it might be time to put this in practice. Activities, such as more cooking at home, may also encourage both adults and children to eat healthy foods with reduced salts levels. ●

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