



Sharon Gerdes

Raising Your Cultural Awareness

Yogurt is a versatile ingredient that plays well in both sweet and savory items.

Yogurt sales for the 52 weeks ending Feb. 21 were almost \$3.9 billion, according to Chicago-based SymphonyIRI, an increase of 3.5% over the previous year. These figures include both cup and drinkable yogurt, but don't account for the many ways that yogurt can be used as an ingredient.

One factor driving category growth may be the popularity of Greek yogurt, a thicker, creamier, strained yogurt frequently used as an ingredient in recipes by celebrity chef Bobby Flay and healthy living expert Ellie Krieger.

According to Mintel's Global New Products Database, in 2009 the food industry introduced more than 250 new foods with the word "yogurt" in the product name. The majority were spoonable yogurts, but the lineup also included 68 dairy-based frozen products; 15 baby dessert, drink and snack foods; and nine salad dressings and dips. Incorporating yogurt as an ingredient is a great way to add the great nutrition of dairy, lower fat content and achieve that coveted "all natural" claim.

Smoothies and frozen delights

While there is no exact definition for the term "smoothie," yogurt is often the ingredient of choice to pair with fresh or frozen fruit or fruit juice.

In 2009, General Mills launched a frozen smoothie mix containing frozen fruit and frozen yogurt pieces. This product can be found in the frozen fruit section in grocery stores nationwide.

"The new Yoplait Smoothie breaks down the barriers for consumers to make smoothies at home, allowing them to achieve the right balance of fruit and yogurt that tastes great with minimal preparation time and cleanup," notes Jason Walters, associate marketing manager at General Mills, Minneapolis. "Samplings were held in 3,500 stores in

October 2009 to create awareness of this unique product in the marketplace. The support of Dairy Management Inc. for the launch of this product was above and beyond our expectations."

Dairy-based frozen novelties represent a significant segment of the new product introductions with yogurt. In 2009, Wells' Dairy introduced new Blue Bunny frozen yogurt granola sandwiches, including Aspen Raspberry Vanilla and Sedona Double Chocolate. Both flavors feature four live and active bacteria.

Although there is a standard of identity for refrigerated yogurt, there is none for frozen yogurt, and plenty of room for innovation in the frozen novelty category.

Baby food

Yogurt has always had a healthy halo, making it an ideal component of foods for babies. Happy Baby HappyMelts organic yogurt snacks are made of freeze-dried yogurt and fruit pieces for babies and toddlers. These melt-in-the-mouth snacks contain both prebiotics and probiotics. Horizon launched Natural Little Blends yogurt with fruit and veggies. Available in a banana-sweet potato variety, these products are recommended for babies age 6 months and older.

Dips and dressings

Enjoying a surge of popularity, yogurt is finding its way into dips, dressings and spreads for a more nutritious option to oil-based formulations. Fresh Food Concepts rolled out a Creamy Cucumber and Feta Cheese Spread, which proudly claims "made with real yogurt" on the package, and lists Labne yogurt (a traditional Middle Eastern yogurt) as the first ingredient. Franklin Foods introduced a Vegetable Savory Yogurt Dip, made with live, active yogurt cultures and touting 64% less fat and 29% fewer calories than spreadable cheese. Bolthouse Farms recently introduced four creamy yogurt dressings made with premium yogurt and touting half the

fat and calories of the leading refrigerated brands. Wegman's rolled out a Greek feta yogurt dressing, and Kühne Salatfix launched a yogurt and lemon dressing, both claiming no artificial flavors, colors or preservatives.

Yogurt levels

Food manufacturers sometimes ask how much yogurt to incorporate into their products. One approach is to declare the level of yogurt on the package.

Unilever rolled out Brummel and Brown yogurt spread; the label states that it contains 10% natural yogurt. In the most recent meeting of the Codex Committee of Milk and Milk Products, the group agreed to adopt 40% (m/m) as the minimum fermented milk content requirement for drinks based on fermented milk. If these proposed regulations become final, then Codex standards will require companies to clearly indicate the percentage of fermented milk on the label.

Ethnic foods

Yogurt is often used as an ingredient in ethnic foods. In Indian dishes, it serves as a low-fat substitute for cream and a thickener for curries. A number of traditional Indian sauces are made with yogurt, cream and spices, and a variety of new shelf-stable Indian cuisine items were introduced in the past year. Lucky Foods introduced Jalapeno Flavor Potato Rolls, an all-natural Chinese vegetarian treat, with a yogurt, cheese and vegetable filling.

Visit Booth 4223 at the IFT Food Expo in July to learn more about the versatility of yogurt as an ingredient. ■

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