



CRUISING THE GREEK AISLES

A trip through a grocer's dairy case finds Greek yogurt introductions and product extensions. The food is dipped, crunched and frozen. In other cultured dairy product categories, processors either simplify the foods or make them more decadent. No matter the direction, the category is booming.

By Donna Berry, contributing editor

Forget about New York's "borscht belt." The hottest food and fashion accessory in the Empire State is the "yogurt belt." Chobani, Fage, Emmi-Roth and Alpina Foods have yogurt processing plants in an east-to-west swath of upstate New York.

Last year, Commonwealth Dairy, a joint venture between Ehrmann USA, and Commonwealth Yogurt, opened a facility in Brattleboro, Vt. However, this is no Northeast phenomenon. Chobani is building a plant in Twin Falls, Idaho, to serve customers in the west. Mid Frisian Dairy in Clovis, N.M., broke ground in March for a yogurt facility where the van der Ploeg family will produce Freanna Original Yogurt.

The action is driven by Greek-style yogurt, one of the fastest-growing foods ever to hit the U.S. market. According to the Chicago-based market research firm Mintel, Greek-style yogurt accounted for about 25% of all segment sales, more than doubling the figure from the previous year.

Consumer interest in yogurt is just part of the story in cultured dairy foods, albeit a big part. Elsewhere in the category, processors

and brands are developing product extensions and cleaning up their labels on cottage cheese, cream cheese, dips and sour cream.

At **Kraft Foods Inc.**, Northfield, Ill., the company now offers the Breakstone's Sour Cream Dip Line with the tagline: "Real Dairy - No Oils. No MSG." The product comes in four flavors: Buffalo, French Onion, Ranch and Southwest Style.

Kraft is also aggressively growing its Philadelphia cream cheese brand. Last year it struck gold with Philadelphia Cooking Crèmes, a line of refrigerated creamy and spoonable seasoned creams to be mixed into pasta, spooned onto a baked potato or stirred into a casserole. The most popular original flavor — Italian Cheese & Herb — now comes in a 15-ounce container (all others are in 10-ounce tubs), as well as in a reduced-fat version. New flavors include Creamy Pesto and Savory Lemon & Herb.

On Valentine's Day, the Philadelphia brand rolled out Indulgence, a cream cheese in dark, milk or white chocolate flavors. The spread is meant to be paired with fruit, cookies or salty snacks. It is sold in the cream cheese section in 8-ounce tubs, as well as in four packs of 1.25-ounce single-serving cups.

■ Stonyfield was the first to freeze Greek yogurt in pints. In addition to authentic Greek yogurt flavors such as honey and plain, Oikos Nonfat Frozen Greek Yogurt comes in indulgent chocolate and fruity blueberry varieties.

Another noteworthy rollout for Kraft is in its cottage cheese. The company is using a trick that yogurt marketers have known for some time: indulgent flavors transform cultured dairy products into better-for-you desserts. The Breakstone's 100-calorie line of 4-ounce cups of cottage cheese (sold in four packs) now comes in Strawberry Shortcake and Peach Cobbler varieties.

Cleaning up labels

A number of dairies have given their cottage cheese and sour cream lines a make-over. For example, Fit to Go is a new line of single-serve (5-ounce) cottage cheese cups from **Friendship Dairies**, Friendship, N.Y., a part of Dean Foods, Dallas. High in protein, cottage cheese is increasingly being recognized by health- and wellness-conscious consumers as a satiating snack. These portion-controlled cups make cottage cheese convenient and portable. Varieties are: 4% California Style, 1% Low Fat and 1% Low Fat with Pineapple.

"Simple" is the name of the game for Smith's All Natural Sour Cream. "Today's consumers are looking for foods with less processing and more natural ingredients," says Penny Baker, director of marketing, **Smith Dairy Products Co.**, Orrville, Ohio. "Our new All Natural Sour Cream is a simple recipe made with cultured milk and cream."

Roseburg, Ore.-based **Umpqua Dairy** sells Natural Sour Cream, which is simply made with cream, milk and enzymes, while its Natural Low Fat Cottage Cheese contains cream, milk, salt, gums and citric acid.

Marty Weaver, director of sales and marketing at Umpqua, agrees that more and more consumers are looking for dairy products with fewer additives.

"They are becoming increasingly aware of what they consume and are paying closer attention to the ingredients that make up their food," he says. "They want a 'cleaner' ingredient statement on the dairy products they purchase for their families."

Downey, Calif.-based **Hermosa Farms**, a family-owned and operated California dairy farm and one of the last dairies in Southern California to own its own cows and to process, package and distribute its own products, also promotes its new line of European-style sour creams as being "simply dairy."

"Rather than focusing on low fat, consumers are now looking for a short ingredients list, and the shorter the better," says Joe Lunzer, Hermosa Farms' general manager and maker of Lilly Sour Cream.

Lilly is 100% all natural, and has only one ingredient: milk. The front of the container states there are no thickeners, gums or preservatives. Made using a patent-pending European-style process, all Lilly Sour Creams contain more protein and calcium than the competition, and at the same time have less satu-



rated fat, cholesterol and sodium. Lilly Sour Cream comes in three varieties: fat free, light and regular.

Artisanal and local

The concepts of artisanal and local have made their way to the cultured dairy products category. In Petaluma, Calif., **Straus Family Creamery** developed organic sour cream in full fat and light varieties. The product is only available in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The sour creams are slow cultured using a traditional 16-hour process and made in small batches without additives, according to the company. The result is a product with a naturally thick texture and a pure, rich flavor with the perfect balance of sweet and tangy on the palate.

"I wanted to create a pure, simple sour cream that tastes great," says Albert Straus, president. "It all starts with the milk. Although making sour cream without gums or stabilizers takes time, it's worth the effort. It's more art than science to let the unique flavor of our milk come through with just the right balance of sweet and tangy."

In the Midwest, **Traders Point Creamery**, Zionsville, Ind., has taken cottage cheese to a whole new level. Made with organic milk from grass-fed cows, the hand-crafted batch process is a slow and vigilant one, which produces delicate cheese curds with a light tartness nestled in the natural creaminess of carefully handled milk. The product is packaged in glass jars — a first for U.S. cottage cheese — to help maintain the cottage cheese's integrity. According to the company, none of the leaching that occurs with plastic containers happens in the new glass jar and the shelf life of the cheese is extended, especially compared to plastic packaging. The transparent glass container, along with eye-catching graphics and the Traders Point Creamery signature cow adorning the lid, help the product sell itself.



■ Umpqua Dairy promotes the clean label of its cultured dairy products. The sour cream is made with cream, milk and enzymes. The cottage cheese contains cream, milk, salt, gums and citric acid. Marty Weaver, director of sales and marketing at Umpqua, says consumers look for dairy products with fewer additives. “They want a ‘cleaner’ ingredient statement on the dairy products they purchase for their families.”

From Down Under

Clear containers are believed to help convey the premium nature of the ingredients inside the package. This is why Bellvue, Colo.-based **Noosa Yoghurt** packages its line of Australian-style honey-sweetened whole-milk yogurts in clear plastic multiserving (8- and 16-ounce) containers. (Noosa is a resort town in Australia.) Consumers can see for themselves the premium, high-integrity fruit included in each container. Varieties are: Blueberry, Honey, Mango, Peach, Raspberry and Strawberry Rhubarb.

Wallaby Yogurt Co., Napa Valley, Calif., a family-owned producer of Australian-style organic yogurts, adds two product lines — Wallababy Organic Whole Milk Yogurt for Babies and Joey Organic Lowfat Yogurt for Kids — to its growing range. (A wallaby is an Australian marsupial and Joey refers to a young wallaby.) Both lines are sold in packs of four 4-ounce cups, an ideal size for young appetites.

“Parents who enjoy Wallaby have been asking us to make a whole milk yogurt for their babies for quite some time,” says Ellie Wells, marketing director. Wallababy is made using organic whole milk, as is recommended for babies, and by adding zinc and vitamin D to further meet a baby’s growing needs. It is available in banana or blueberry flavors and suggested for babies ages six months and older.

Joey is made with Wallaby’s signature Australian-style organic low-fat yogurt and is fortified with vitamin D. Available in grape or strawberry, these carefully selected child-friendly flavors are blended smooth with just the right amount of sweetness. Joey is recommended for ages two years and older.

Processors pledge Greek

As mentioned, Greek is the word when it comes to yogurts, fresh or frozen. Even Wallaby, the maker of Australia-style yogurt, is on board. The company just launched its first line of organic Greek yogurts.

“Initially, there was some hesitation when it came to launching a Greek yogurt. The style and method of manufacturing Greek yogurt is very different from our signature product line,” says Jerry Chou, founder and president of Wallaby. “But as we started to realize how delicious Greek yogurt can be, it became clear that this was the direction we wanted to go in.”

Once the founders had decided this, they tried every brand of Greek yogurt that they could dig their spoons into, and then they developed their own. All Wallaby yogurts are made without the use of starches or other artificial thickeners. Wallaby’s Greek yogurt is strained, which is the authentic way of producing the thick, rich texture. Wallaby also uses its traditional slow-cooking method to create the creaminess and delicate flavor of its Greek yogurt.

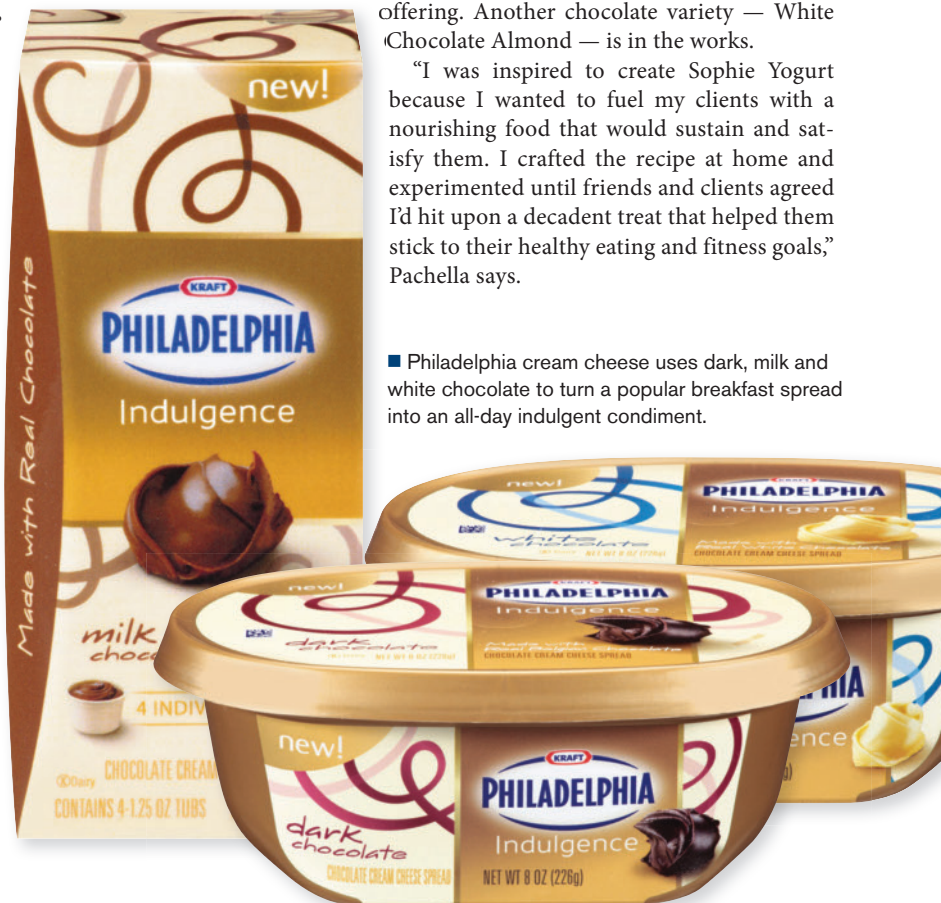
The 5.3-ounce flavored varieties are packaged in a two-compartment cup, allowing consumers to control the amount of flavor they get with each spoonful of yogurt. Flavor pairings include blueberries, cherries, honey and strawberries. Traditional plain yogurt is also offered in both a 6-ounce and 16-ounce container.

Another new brand of Greek-style yogurt is **Sophie Yogurt**, New York City, from Sophie Pachella, a nutrition and fitness expert behind the health and wellness foundation EatStrong.

Chocolate, a flavor not typically associated with refrigerated yogurt, yet alone Greek yogurt, was her first offering. Another chocolate variety — White Chocolate Almond — is in the works.

“I was inspired to create Sophie Yogurt because I wanted to fuel my clients with a nourishing food that would sustain and satisfy them. I crafted the recipe at home and experimented until friends and clients agreed I’d hit upon a decadent treat that helped them stick to their healthy eating and fitness goals,” Pachella says.

■ Philadelphia cream cheese uses dark, milk and white chocolate to turn a popular breakfast spread into an all-day indulgent condiment.





■ The Hain Celestial Group Inc. extended its Almond Dream brand of almond-based, non-dairy products into the yogurt category. Available in four flavors (plain, vanilla, strawberry and mixed berry), the nondairy yogurts contain live and active cultures.

To reacquaint consumers with Greek Gods yogurt, the company has launched a contest challenging consumers to create a two-minute video showcasing the product as part of a pre- or post-workout snack.

Beyond the yogurt cup

A number of dip manufacturers recognize the power of Greek yogurt – both in terms of nutritional value and creating a point of differentiation – and have started using it as a base ingredient. One of the original companies to do this was Future Food Brands, Dallas. The past year’s success has resulted in a new flavor

Other flavors include Banana Cream Pie, Vanilla Bean, Plain and Plain without Fiber. Each 5.3-ounce container delivers 17 grams of protein and 90 to 140 calories, depending on variety. The flavored yogurts, along with plain, also contain 2.5 grams of fiber in the form of oligofructose.

Tula Foods Inc., Evanston, Ill., markets Better Whey of Life, said to be the first all-natural brand of Greek yogurt made with whey protein from grass-fed cows. In addition to the “made from whey” positioning, the product also comes in some interesting flavors: Acai Mixed Berry, Blackberry Pomegranate, Strawberry Goji Berry, Raspberry White Grape, Vanilla Bean and Plain.

According to the company, most Greek yogurts strain out the whey, but Better Whey of Life uses a unique process that retains the whey protein, enabling a distinct thick, smooth and silky yogurt with exceptional health benefits. This includes the presence of the branched-chain amino acid leucine, which is recognized for maintaining and building muscle, and at the same time burning fat.

Without a doubt, one of the underlying powers of all Greek yogurts lies in its higher protein content, an attribute that is especially appealing to male athletes. It’s no wonder that **The Hain Celestial Group Inc.**, Melville, N.Y., owner of The Greek Gods brand, has teamed up with ultramarathon Man Dean Karnazes.

that rolled out this past month. Santa Barbara Bay Spinach Feta Greek Yogurt Dip joins Spinach, Roasted Red Pepper and Asiago Cheese, Zesty Ranch, Cucumber Dill and French Onion.

“Creating products from fresh and flavorful ingredients is something we strive to do every day,” says Emily Alfano, director of marketing and new product development. “And based on the popularity of our other Greek Yogurt Dips, we fully expect Spinach Feta to become a big seller for us in the months ahead.”

Greek yogurt is also becoming more prominent in the freezer. Unilever’s **Ben & Jerry’s**, Burlington, Vt., rolled out pints and mini-cups of Greek frozen yogurt to grocery stores nationwide. (See Eat. Drink. Dairy., page 24.)

The **Apollo Food Group LLC**, Boston, rolled out Yasso Smoothies, an all-natural frozen Greek yogurt smoothie product sold in the freezer and intended for at-home blending. A single serving is prepared by blending 3.7 ounces of the product, which comes in three varieties (Mango Pineapple, Mixed Berry and Strawberry Banana), with 8 ounces of skim milk. The blended beverage is fat-free, low in sugar, and contains 8 grams of protein and 4 grams of fiber.

The 3 Fs: Fruit, Flavor, Fiber

What’s next for cultured dairy products? No doubt, some yogurt processors who have not yet embraced Greek-style yogurts will get on board. Other processors, seeing the suitability of cultured dairy to deliver flavors (like chocolate), fruits and fibers, will develop their own products. Dairy brands should also look to develop products for nontraditional dayparts. Kraft has moved cream cheese beyond breakfast into dinner time and as a snack. The category has plenty of room for growth and innovation. ■

■ A number of dip manufacturers use Greek yogurt rather than sour cream as a base.

