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producebusiness

OCT. 2007 • VOL. 23 • NO. 10 • \$9.90

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Consumer Demand Leads To New Juices

Companies continue to develop new blends and products.

BY SUZY LOONAM

Innovative juice companies are discovering new and healthful juices, revamping traditional juices and creating new juice blends to promote wellness and longevity.

Consumers are paying premium prices for these immune-boosting, cancer-fighting, youth-restoring blends enhanced with and by vitamins, minerals, fiber, antioxidants and a variety of nutrients.

While some juice manufacturers are searching the world for new super-juice ingredients, others are finding success in unfamiliar domestic juices or by creating new interest in old favorites.

Traditional juices such as citrus and apple have long been staples, but recently a plethora of out-of-the-ordinary juices have entered the market.

First came cranberry with its proanthocyanidins for urinary tract health, followed by blueberry juices and its anti-aging properties and antioxidant-laden pomegranate. In 2006, açai became the new pomegranate. Unfortunately, açai fell a little short in appeal. Though products with açai are still selling well, the predicted açai-tinis and frappe açai never came to be.

So what's next in the category? Industry innovators (in alphabetical order) share their predictions.

BARSAOTTI JUICE COMPANY

Smaller companies are feeling the pressure to keep up with market trends and are thinking "outside the box." Mike Barsotti, president, Barsotti Juice Company, Camino, CA, has hired a consulting firm to help determine marketing strategies. "We're going to explore whether to change or take advantage of our family image."

Mike's sister, Cathy Barsotti-Dooling, recently joined the

company as vice president of sales and marketing, bringing another source for innovation and sales growth in Barsotti's near-future.

FRUTZZO

"We are truly juice innovators," says Terry Xanthos, president, COO and co-founder of Frutzzo, Alpine, UT. "We were first in the world with organic pomegranate juice, and the first to bring in açai." Now, the company with "Fight free radicals" as its motto is the first to bring yumberry juice — the latest "super-juice" — to North America.

For more than 2,000 years, the subtropical fruit has been harvested in May and June in the mountains of Zhejiang, China. "Yumberry" may sound like a marketing gimmick, but Xanthos says it is derived from the fruit's Asian name, "yungberry."

"We're excited about yumberries because the level of antioxidants is similar to açai and the finished level of sugars is similar to blueberries," Xanthos explains. Yumberries are more manageable than açai because yumberries have more juice and better taste.

Frutzzo yumberries are carefully selected, pressed, de-pectinized, filtered, pasteurized and purified within 24 hours of harvest to ensure quality and preserve nutrients; then the processed berries are shipped to North America. The final product is a dark-red 100-percent juice with no preservatives, added sugars or added colors.

Frutzzo introduced organic yumberry juices in early September, and natural yumberry juices two weeks later. The company has contracts for about 75 percent of the world's yumberry supply and the new product has been well received by key retailers, Xanthos says.

MAPLE LANE FARMS

Allyn Brown, III, owner of Maple Lane Farms, Preston, CT, will not be looking to exotic ingredients to grow his share of the juice market. Instead, this first-generation farmer and owner of North America's largest grower of black currants will stick



to what works for his business.

Widely consumed in Europe and New Zealand, black currants are unfamiliar to most Americans, Brown says. The black currant is native to North America but was banned in the late 1800s because it was thought to be an alternate host for white pine blister rust, a threat to white pines. New York was the largest producer of black currants at that time, but "the federal government destroyed whole plantations without a whole lot of proof," he explains. The federal ban was lifted in the 1980s, leaving currant restriction up to each state.

Maple Lane's black currant juice sales have been increasing steadily for about two and half years, but "it's been slow going because we use only our own fruit," Brown explains. Each year, his crop gets a little larger. All his black currant crops are grown in Connecticut, perfect for the once-forbidden fruit that requires a certain number of chilling-degree days to thrive.

Black currant juice may be less exotic than many of the new juices on the market today, but it is no less a super-juice. Research shows black currants have more antioxidants than blueberries, three times the vitamin C in oranges and significant amounts of vitamins B6 and E, potassium, copper and soluble fiber. They're rich in

anthocyanins, known for their outstanding anti-inflammatory benefits.

Brown plans to introduce a 100-percent juice blend of apple and black currant. A new cranberry-black currant blend and smaller portioned packaging are next, he says.

NATALIE'S ORCHID ISLAND JUICE CO.

Natalie's Orchid Island Juice Company, Fort Pierce, FL, is sticking to basics — pure, natural, fresh-squeezed citrus juices. "Fresh-squeezed orange, grapefruit and citrus juices are nutritionally sound products. Why would we want to change that?" asks John Martinelli, executive vice president.

"Our products are the most natural," he says. "If you could pick a product off a tree, squeeze it into a glass and drink it, that would be the most natural way to drink it. Because citrus juice is very easy to extract, we can keep it natural as fresh-squeezed. It's as natural as you can get. We are all-natural, and many of the other products in the juice aisle are not."

The company will introduce a new tangerine juice and new packaging at the Newark, DE-based Produce Marketing Association's (PMA) Fresh Summit in October, "but it's not very glamorous. We think pack-

aging is more about sales than nutrition, and we'd rather focus on what's in the carton than what's on it. The quality of the product in the jug is our highest priority."

NOBLE JUICE

Noble Juice, Winter Haven, FL, is another small juice company with plans to showcase packaging innovations and other new products at PMA Fresh Summit.

For its natural fresh and fresh organic citrus juices, Noble is the first juice company in the United States to use a biodegradable 32-ounce container made from PLA, a plastic resin derived from corn sugar. Introduced in 2006, Noble's "E-Bottle" is soon to be adorned with new labels, also made from PLA. "We're using a resource that is annually renewable and saves energy," says Allison Lee, marketing manager. "We've had really good success with it."

The E-Bottle will not be rolled out nationally any time soon, as there is a limited supply of material. "It's pretty much sold out," explains Wade Groetsch, president, "but there is enough support for us and our growth due to an early partnership with the supplier."

At Noble, tangerine juice is the up-and-coming flavor. "There are some really neat things on the horizon for tangerine juice,"



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Groetsch adds.

Thanks to an unexpected plug from Oprah Winfrey this year, tangerines were reborn as an ingredient in a new summer drink she named the "Tang-O-rita." "We're excited about that because we believe tangerine is a great product. It's nice to see the product and the fruit getting some attention," Groetsch says. "Consumers see all these other exotic products out there." He plans to do all he can to make tangerine "the new juice."

"The tangerine has always been the second cousin to orange juice, but there are unique health properties in tangerines," Groetsch continues. "Preliminary studies on the health benefits of tangerines indicate there are some components of tangerine peel that can kill cancer cells, and certain antioxidants in tangerines may help with

brain cell regeneration in Alzheimer's patients."

At PMA, Noble will showcase two new products, Cranberry-Tangerine Juice and Blood Orange Juice. Noble is also working with the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute's Heart Truth Campaign to promote heart health for women. "We have such an opportunity to communicate better with women," Groetsch says. "Heart disease is the No. 1 issue in women's health, and as an industry, we don't do enough to promote the complete nutrition of juice."

PACIFIC ORGANIC PRODUCE/ PURITY.ORGANIC JUICE

Pacific Organic/Purity.Organic Juice, San Francisco, CA, has launched two new organic juice blends enhanced with vitamins and nutrients. "We're real excited

about what we're doing," notes founder and CEO Greg Holzman about the world's first organic, juice-based energy drinks. "We are the only organic tree-fruit marketer in America. The right way to do that is to use organic process grades that offer good return to the grower. We're very proud of that. When and where we can, we use the fruit we work with at Purity."

Holzman plans to support all his grower-partners "from the bottom up," using organic fruit from Pacific Organic in Purity.Organic juice blends. The organic juice and water products, called functional drinks, offer a lighter alternative to rich fruit juices, he says, and are rightfully sold in the produce department due to their organic juice bases. Functional drinks are a part of an organic hydration line of enhanced juice drinks that offer vitamins, antioxidants and low sugar.



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Each of the four functional drinks has a specific purpose: Pomegranate Blueberry for memory, Acerola Cherry for immunity, Pomegranate Raspberry for energy and Orange Mango Tangerine for restoration.

"People first saw us as a grocery item," he says, "then we realized that produce sections were serving our juice." Retailers such as Austin, TX-based Whole Foods are selling the product in the produce department, Holzman adds.

Purity. Organic juices are flash pasteurized to ensure a one-year shelf life with no additives or preservatives. The juices and juice drinks are currently sold throughout New York City, New England, Northern California, Chicago, the Mid-Atlantic, Seattle, Portland and the Midwest. Looking ahead, the company is considering new bilingual packaging and possible entry into the Cana-

dian market.

RED JACKET ORCHARDS

Red Jacket Orchards is a Geneva, NY-based on-orchard manufacturer with a long history of family management and a bright future in the manufacture of juices and ciders. "It's who we are that makes us different," says Brian Nicholson, vice president of marketing. "Because we are an orchard and grew from the orchard, we are very close to the product."

Red Jacket produces its line of minimally processed, freshly pressed juices and ciders in small batches with no concentrates, added sweeteners, color or flavoring. Apples are pressed on-site at the sprawling 600-acre orchard, thriving in what he calls "the incredible growing region known as the Finger Lakes."

While apple juice and cider are nothing new, Red Jacket products fit perfectly within modern health trends. "Our juices are 100-percent orchard fresh, made with whole fruit," Nicholson explains. "Juices are flash pasteurized, and there is no water added. Because the apple base is fresh, we have soluble fiber in our juice, and there is 5 percent pectin in the apple that doesn't get cooked out." Natural soluble fiber slows the body's absorption of sugar.

The orchard was originally planted along the rolling hills of Seneca Lakes in 1917. The Nicholson Family has managed it and the juice company since 1958.

In addition to apples, the company "nurtures and handpicks" apricots, peaches, plums, raspberries, rhubarb, strawberries, sweet and sour cherries and summer and Italian plum tomatoes. **pb**



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