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Gut Feeling

Written by Heather Landi

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Consumers' growing interest in digestive health is fueling new product innovation as beverage manufacturers look to incorporate good-for-your-gut ingredients like fiber, probiotics and prebiotics into a variety of drinks, beyond just dairy-based beverages. Gut health has long been a top health concern in Asian and European countries, where consumers have been drinking a daily probiotic drink, such as Yakult, or fermented drinks like kefir for generations. However, even in the United States, consumers are slowly gaining awareness of the benefits of good digestive health and the functional ingredients that support this health need.

Innova Market Insights tracked more than 4,000 food and drink launches globally in 2009 marketed on a gut or digestive health platform, up from about 2,000 just five years ago. In the US, 364 new products launched between 2005 and 2009 with digestive health claims, second only to food and drink products with cardiovascular health claims.

"It appears that high levels of interest in gut/digestive health foods are continuing. It has been a key focus for European product activity for a number of years, and US levels of interest have risen sharply over the past five years to create a market combining interest in developing established high-fiber products on the one hand and the newer probiotic dairy lines on the other," LuAnn Williams, head of research for Innova Market Insights, says.

Here's a round up of key trends in the digestive health beverage market:

Fiber

Medical studies have shown that diets high in fiber support a healthy digestive system and a growing number of functional beverages now incorporate forms of soluble fiber to make health claims.

One offering in the fiber-enriched enhanced water category is Elevate natural fiber water, a sugar-sweetened fortified water that features inulin, a form of soluble fiber. Boasting a healthy boost of fiber (six grams per bottle) with only 50 calories, Elevate comes in lemon and orange flavors. In an innovative approach, Spanish brewer La Zaragozana launched Ambar Mansana con Fibra, a non-alcohol beer targeted to women made with 40 percent fruit juice and containing 7.5 grams of fiber per bottle.

Vitamin Fiber Water uses Fibersol-2, a highly soluble fiber ingredient, in order to deliver three grams of fiber per 8-ounce serving without impacting its taste or color. Marketed by ADM, Fibersol-2 is stable and transparent in solution, has low viscosity and adds virtually no flavor to the finished product.



Probiotics and Prebiotics

Probiotic and prebiotic ingredients, which trigger the growth of beneficial bacteria in the digestive tract, traditionally can be found in yogurt-based drinks, such as Activa or Yakult. But, innovations in ingredient development and formulations have made it possible to incorporate probiotics and prebiotics into a variety of more mainstream beverages.

According to Business Insights, the market for probiotics has rapidly grown from a relatively small base and is now an \$11.3 billion market. Although slightly slower, growth is expected to remain strong until 2013 at 6.2 percent (CAGR) when the market for probiotics could be worth \$15.3 billion globally.

A new single-serve probiotic juice drink, GoodBelly Splash, contains the probiotic bacteria Lp299v, which has been clinically tested and proven for 15 years to improve overall digestive regularity and promote immunity. In flavors blueberry açai, mango and pomegranate blackberry, GoodBelly Splash is organic and contains a dose of 20 billion live and active probiotic cultures.

Another drink, Pre Probiotic Enhancer, is a blend of organic juice with Jarrow Formulas prebiotic health blend for 3.5 grams of prebiotics per bottle. Sweetened with organic cane sugar—a 10-calorie version is sweetened with stevia—Pre comes in flavors açai acerola, passion orange guava and pomegranate blueberry.

Beneo-Crafti offers its line of chicory root-based prebiotic ingredients, Crafti inulin and oligofructose. The company has optimized a gentle extraction process, which enables it to make inulin and oligofructose available in forms that can be used in a broad range of food and drink applications. When added to beverages, such as Dos Pinos Fibrilac, a skim milk sold in Costa Rica, it provides an added boost of fiber.

One of the big challenges with probiotics is heat sensitivity to typical manufacturing processes, beverage formulators say. Cargill's Oliggo-Fiber inulin is a well-recognized prebiotic with excellent heat stability, which allows food and beverage manufacturers to deliver digestive health benefits to consumers in innovative and shelf-stable products, the company says.

Danisco launched Howaru Bifido probiotics for use in refrigerated juices. "Test results have shown our capability to obtain a good survival of probiotics in fruit juice over 40 days at 4 C. Our applications specialists have been working extensively to gain specific expertise in process and formulations in this area. Thanks to our knowledge of developing formulations for fruit juice, we can guide manufacturers through the parameters that can influence the survival of probiotics such as fruit type, pH level, sugar level, other additional ingredients and recommended chilled storage conditions," says Audrey Bernard, communications specialist, Danisco.