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the confines of specialty foods stores, and moving into major retail outlets. Currently their products are sold in 42 countries. "We've even co-branded a product with Kirkland (Costco's private label brand) called Ancient Grains Granola," says Hochfilzer. "This happened towards the end of last year. We saw this as an opportunity to expand our presence and reach." This, she adds, is an indication of how mainstream organics have become.

PRODUCT OPTIONS EXPAND

As Bamberg mentioned, all manner of companies are incorporating organic products into their lineups. Take Snyder's-Lance, Inc. (formerly Snyder's of Hanover, Inc.), a manufacturer of crackers, cookies and salty snack items. The company is currently offering three USDA-certified organic pretzels. They are adding a fourth organic pretzel item this February, says C. Peter Carlucci, business development manager. "We will see more and more items being offered in an organic state," Carlucci predicts. "Snyder's-Lance, Inc. will continue to focus on bringing superior products that are USDA-certified organic to healthy consumers. As more 'super' ingredients are discovered, we will incorporate them into our portfolio to offer a wider variety of organic products with even more health benefits."

Or consider the product expansion undertaking by the Cooperative Regions of Producer Pools (CROPP), which are regions of small family farms across the country, explains John Morrissey, Northeast regional sales manager. The two brands produced by CROPP are Organic Valley and Organic Prairie. "Everything we grow and manufacture is certified 100 percent organic," says Morrissey. "We do not offer conventional foods or even 'natural', whatever that is. Our

mission is to reduce the toxins released into the earth and water, humane treatment to animals, pure chemical-free foods for everyone and to save small family farms across America."

They have an extensive array of dairy items under the Organic Valley label including regular, chocolate, strawberry and vanilla milks, lactose-free milks, a new Omega 3 milk, eggnog, buttermilk, cream (including whipping cream) cottage cheese, ricotta and a host of other cheeses, eggs, orange juice, soy milk, and—brand new on the shelves as of this February—a line of coffee creamers. "This launch will include certified-organic flavored dairy creamers (French Vanilla and Hazelnut) as well as the first and only organically certified flavored soy creamers," he says. Each soy carton is traceable back to the Organic Valley farmer who grew the beans."

Organic meats are found under the Organic Prairie brand, including ground beef patties, ground beef and ground turkey chubs, beef hotdogs, and organic turkeys. Since its launch four years ago the line has grown steadily in sales. However, says Morrissey, last year sales skyrocketed by 102 percent. He speculates that some of this growth can be attributed to the large FDA recalls impacting the conventional meat supply chain. "It appears consumers are turning to organic foods as an alternative to conventional food production systems, with perhaps an added emphasis on meat products," he says.

Consumers are also increasingly scouting out organic personal care products, says Edward Schack, CEO of EES Cosmetic Solutions. Based in Forked River, NJ, the company serves as a manufacturer's representative and distributor to the cosmetic and personal care industries. He provides figures from Datamonitor that indicate 28 percent of consumers



MADE WITH
ORGANIC
INGREDIENTS



Becoming a Way of Life

Organic products are increasingly finding their way into shopping carts as consumer awareness of their benefits grow. By Pamela Mills-Senn

There are two major themes currently defining the organic products arena. One is that, in spite of the recession, the clamor for these products has intensified, even though they typically carry a higher price than their conventional counterparts. According to the Organic Trade Association's (OTA) 2010 Organic Industry Survey, organic sales are continuing their climb. For example, 41 percent of survey respondents indicated they purchased more organic foods compared to the previous year. By last October, organic sales had grown by eight percent. Survey indications were such that sales growth was projected to hit 10 percent by the end of 2010.

Todd Bamberg, president of Launch Pad Consulting, a Chicago-based firm that provides guidance on product development initiatives and other projects to the organic/natural foods industry, says that most of the manufacturers he talks to are doing something with organics. "Organics have a strong position with just about every major retailer," he says. "For a lot of folks, it's not a purchasing decision; it's the way they live." This is spreading to all manner of product categories—for example, the pet industry is seeing an influx of organic products, particularly when it comes to foods and treats. And where once organic pet foods and treats were

strictly the domain of pet specialty retailers, these products are now moving into the big box pet stores.

The chains are nibbling at all kinds of organic products. Janie Hoffman, CEO and founder of Mamma Chia, a San Diego-based company that makes certified organic vitality beverages from organic chia seeds and organic fruit juices, originally launched her Mamma Chia drinks into natural foods outlets and Whole Food stores last October. "However, already there has been a great deal of interest from conventional retailers that reach out to us weekly," Hoffman says. "And the reason is that the organics segment is one of the fastest growing in the store."

Consider Nature's Path Foods. Based in Richmond, BC, Canada, Nature's Path is "America's number-one producer" of certified-organic cereals, granolas, toaster pastries, energy and granola bars, waffles, pancake mixes and flax products, says Kyla Hochfilzer, marketing and communications specialist for the company. Nature's Path has three plants (two in the U.S.) and manufactures products under the Nature's Path, Flax Plus, Optimum, and EnviroKidz brands. The company has been in operation for 25 years. As such, it has had a frontline view of the gradual embracement and acceptance of organic products, watching them escape

are consciously avoiding certain cosmetic/personal care products because of their concern over ingredients, and that 39 percent describe themselves as "somewhat" or "extremely" concerned about parabens or petrochemicals in beauty product formulations. "The organics trend started on the food side, but now we're seeing it in the personal care side," says Schack. "Consumers are more aware of synthetic ingredients and are forcing the manufacturers to move away from them, and the manufacturers are responding."

Organix-South, headquartered in Bowling Green, FL, manufactures organic bodycare products and formulates organic supplements under the TheraNeem Organix and TheraVeda Organix brands respectively. The bodycare line has over 40 products; the other consists of seven condition-specific dietary supplements, explains Autum Blum, group vice president and founder. The products contain anywhere from 76 to 98 percent certified organic ingredients. She believes the recession, particularly rising healthcare costs, has actually fueled interest in organic products. "Consumers no longer want to go to the doctor for every rash or sniffle, and are often seeking alternative remedies first," she explains.

Sara Damelio, founder of Skincando, located in Washington, DC, manufactures a line of USDA-certified organic skincare products dubbed Combat-Ready. The line includes a balm, formulated to moisturize dry skin, soothe sunburn, and counteract heat rash, blisters, insect bites, eczema and more. They also produce a bar soap and lip balm. In 2008, Damelio sent the balm to her husband, stationed in Iraq. Requests for the balm followed from other troops, eventually leading her to found "Operation Sand Flea". As of this writing, Damelio has shipped 6,000 of the Combat-Ready balm to troops overseas.

THE SECOND TREND

At the same time as demand is growing and products are proliferating there is concern within the organics industry about tightening supplies, most directly attributed to the issue of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) and their impact on the organic food supply. Certain crops, notably corn and soybeans, have undergone a great deal of genetic tinkering in an effort to improve yields, make them more resistant to drought and pests and so on. According to material provided by Nature's Path, many plants are now engineered to be resistant to pesticides or to even contain pesticides within their cells.

Many people are suspicious and wary of genetically modified foods; for organic producers and suppliers, they are an anathema. Europe and other regions around the world have severely restricted or banned the production of GMOs but the issue is just now moving to the forefront for American consumers, says Carlucci, although for certain crops, corn especially, this awareness may be arriving too late. "There will be significant challenges with all products derived from or whose main ingredient is corn-based," he says. "Sourcing non-GMO corn from the USA is almost impossible. Long ago, American farmers embraced the work of agricultural scientist to make crops superior in preventing disease, insect infestation and to produce more and larger

corn. Due to these modifications happening such a long time ago and being so prevalent, sourcing USA, non-GMO corn is difficult."

According to an article in the February 5th 2011 edition of the Los Angeles Times newspaper, farmers have recently received approval to plant genetically modified sugar beets and just days prior to that announcement, were approved to plant genetically modified alfalfa—both decisions have infuriated GMO opponents. "The whole organic movement is threatened by the GMOs," says Julia Stamberger, CEO and president of GoPicnic, Inc., a provider of ready-to-eat, shelf-stable meal solutions. Thanks to GMOs, organic prices could move even higher, especially as consumer understanding of what organics means increases causing demand to rise in the face of tightening supplies, she says. The problem is stopping the encroachment of GMO crops into organic fields, Stamberger says, explaining that GMOs can invade via wind or some other natural mechanism, damaging the organic crops. "GMOs can very easily overtake an organic crop or field that has been very meticulously maintained," agrees Bamberg. "A farmer spends time and money developing a field to produce organically and yet somehow a crop he had no intention of planting [finds its way in]. And if testing reveals there is a GMO, he can be sued because he's not licensed to grow this."

It takes a long-term commitment to go organic, a reality that also impacts supply, says Morrissey. "The production methods involve refraining from using prohibited substances in the soils for three years. Thus it is difficult to turn the spigot on for increased production when demand increases," he explains, adding that supplies in the organic dairy arena are tight. "In times past the demand has exceeded supply in some years," he continues. "It is expected that we are re-entering that cycle again due to the shortage of organic farmers. The problem is worse in the east than in the west where we have more organic production."

Contributing to the concern is that organic manufacturers are intent on being as Earth-friendly as possible. The idea of having to obtain non-GMO ingredients overseas, increasing their transportation/carbon footprint is troubling. Producers and manufacturers are taking counteractive measures. CROPP now has 2,000 farms in its co-op, says Morrissey. Nature's Path is deeply involved in the nonprofit Non-GMO project, designed to preserve and build sources of non-GMO products, educate consumers and provide verified non-GMO choices. The company has also purchased 2,240 acres of organic farmland, partnering with local organic farmers, and providing grants to communities used for installing organic community gardens.

Still, despite the seriousness of this issue, things look good for the organics arena. "I anticipate a greater variety of products, greater availability at retail and greater demand by consumers," says Morrissey. "As people continue to achieve a greater understanding of our food systems, they continue to make more informed decisions about what they consume. Organic products do command a premium due to the ingredients and higher standards," he continues. "However, the consumer finds this a tremendous value." ■