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Daily Herald

Kraft unveils new line of digestive-friendly dairy items

By **Kate Rockwood**
Medill News Service
Posted Thursday, May 03, 2007

Kraft Foods Inc. plans to roll out a new line of cheese products at the Food Marketing Institute show in Chicago Sunday in an effort to cash in on the latest consumer trend toward nutritionally enhanced foods.

The Northfield-based food giant will unveil a line of probiotic cheese cubes and individual cheese sticks that includes living microorganisms aimed at balancing naturally occurring gut flora and at aiding consumer digestion. A cottage cheese includes prebiotic fiber, marketed to help consumers boost their daily fiber intake and maintain regularity.

They will be marketed under existing brands but labeled LiveActive.

"Retailers are very excited about it," said Kraft spokesman Basil T. Maglaris. "Many people suffer from some form of digestive health issues, and this product is well positioned to meet that need. There has been a lot of buzz around the topic of probiotics and prebiotics."

In a survey conducted by Impulse Research in February, 60 percent of Americans reported suffering from some form of digestive health issues.

In March, Kraft became the first mainstream North American company to market probiotic cheese at a national level, selling LiveActive at Canadian supermarkets. The cheese is coming to the U.S. by September, according to Maglaris.

"Probiotics are hot hot hot and it seems like the United States is finally ready to embrace talking about bacteria in the gut," Donna Berry, editor of Dairy Food Magazine, said in a talk on industry trends earlier this week at the American Dairy Products Institute's American Butter Institute annual conference in Chicago.

Dannon launched Activa yogurt at the beginning of 2006 and in its first year it surpassed \$100 million in annual U.S. retail sales, a goal achieved by fewer than one tenth of 1 percent of all new products, according to Dannon.

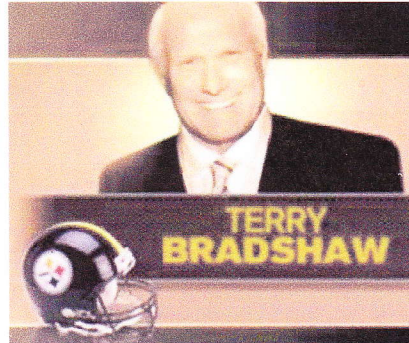
Jim Armetta, 40, of Naperville, consumes three or four bottles of drinkable yogurt with probiotics manufactured by White Plains, N.Y.-based Dannon Co. He was turned onto the trend when his father, Dominic, was instructed to take probiotics by his doctor.

"My 84-year-old father has a condition that affects his lungs, and it makes him more susceptible to infections," Armetta said. "He was getting infections every one or two weeks before. He started drinking probiotics at Christmas and he hasn't had an infection since."

In other parts of the world, probiotics are a well established though still-expanding market. Dannon first introduced its DanActive line of probiotic drinkable yogurts in Europe in 1984.

Likewise, Dean Foods Co. recently brought its probiotic yogurt brand, Rachel's Organic, to the U.S. The brand has been a hit in the U.K. for years.

Morton Grove-based Lifeway Foods Inc. added a line of probiotic, organic milk drinks in January. Called ProBugs, the line is aimed at children, packaged in flexible, juice box-like pouches with no-spill tops.



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In late March Dean introduced probiotic cottage cheese under its Dean Foods, Country Fresh and Land O'Lakes brands.

"Our research revealed that probiotics are one of the major new trends emerging in the food industry," said Dave Haley, regional marketing director of Dean Dairy Group, in a statement.

Probiotics fits into a larger trend of "functional" foods and beverages-products pumped with everything from Vitamin D to Omega-3 fatty acid in an effort to boost nutrition and lure customers willing to pay top dollar for super foods.

Americans got a sneak peek at the LiveActive label when Kraft introduced cottage cheese with prebiotic fiber under the Breakstone's and Knudsen brands in late March.

The cottage cheese with prebiotic fiber is now selling at \$2.59 for a 16-ounce tub, while the upcoming cottage cheese with prebiotic fiber and fruit will retail at \$3.19. Eight-ounce packages of cheese cubes and 7-ounce packages of cheese sticks are expected to retail at \$3.49.

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