

SPARKS!

Igniting new ideas

Another in a series of occasional sparklers

The 50th Summer NASFT Fancy Food Show at the Javits Center

A visit to the **New York Fancy Food Show** is a condensed trip around the world. Flavors, colors, languages and aromas assault taste buds, nose and ears. As consultant and market researcher who has worked with many major food manufacturers, I find a day at the Show, seeing the up and coming food companies, a great source of information, inspiration and ideas.

On this, my 9th annual trek, I've learned that it's impossible to attempt to take it all in.

I began the morning of the Show with a short list of focal areas for my day's visit, but with the recognition that I would follow my nose. Come, walk the Show with me in this report. Feel free to focus on the areas that seem most intriguing; walk past the stuff that doesn't grab you.

With over 70,000 food and beverage products displayed this year, what follows is certainly not a definitive report of trends and products shown, but an impressionistic summary of items that caught my interest, with the following as my primary filters:

1. Chocolate and desserts
2. Beverages
3. Health/nutrition
4. Packaging
5. Sauces/dips/marinades

Notes: I did not look at all at meats, fish or poultry, gift baskets or housewares.

While I've highlighted products that I've sampled, I've not evaluated them, nor am I endorsing them; I don't know whether they live up to their claims.

I've peppered this report with my thought-starters in italics, in brackets.

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Ten Big Trends That Cut Across Food Categories:

1. **Spice is hot!** And it has been for several years. Hot spicy food items paired with sweet, fruity items in particular, like *Scorned Woman Jalapeno Fudge*, and *Ass Kussin' Lips* (a sugar confection with cinnamon and habanera peppers.)
2. **Food is armchair travel and romance, even in products that may have been commodities before.** Country and geography of origin is now important. It's no longer "salt", but *Himalaynia Pink Salt* from the foothills of the Himalayas. The owner of *Big Tree Farms Handcrafted Balinese Sea Salts* told me that the distinctive way in which this salt is harvested results in "unique flavors and textures which provide a culinary experience that is unrivaled." (*What other products do we think of as commodities have a fascinating story behind them?*)
3. **Focus on health claims, functional foods, with taste benefits too.** Products in all categories featured multiple health claims: low carb, organic, natural, gluten free, no GMO, no preservatives, no sugar, no hydrogenated oils, no cholesterol, no trans fat, Kosher-certified, etc. The trend carries over to pet foods too. (*What new functional/health claims might emerge 5 years from now?*)
4. **Chocolate is no longer "not bad for you", it's now "health food".** *Ecco Bella* touts a "revolutionary chocolate experience...health by chocolate, a delicious way to look and feel beautiful." *NewTree's* line is positioned as "innovations for pleasure and health", with product names: *Pleasure, Vigor, Renew, Forgiveness, Tranquility, and Rejoice*. Their Belgian chocolate bars are designed to "fuel the body and well-being".
5. **The back-story is as important as the product.** The flyer for *Zhena's Gypsy Tea* for example reads: "When you sip a cup of Zhena's Gypsy Tea...you will be loved. You will belong. You will hear children laughing, and you will join hands with the world." (*And that's just the front cover! Inside we learn that "...teas are based on the freedom and passion of the Gypsy culture", and much more.*)
Similarly, it's not just the food, but also the company you keep. An increasing number of products are being sold under an environmentally or socially responsible umbrella. *Soy Kaviar*, was created as a "healthy, environmentally friendly alternative for lovers of fish caviar." A range of companies highlighted their support of environmental sustainability and social justice and were listed as part of the Rainforest Alliance or were Fair Trade Certified.
6. **Low carb rules.** It's in salad dressings, sauces, condiments, chocolates, fudge, nuts, snack foods, cakes, pastries, crackers, breads, pasta sauces, fruit butters, and in main dishes too: like soups, stews and gourmet frozen meals. It's positioned not as a deprivation of taste, but as a boon to health. (*While everyone is on the low carb bandwagon, there's a hint that the tide may turn against low carb rhetoric.*)
7. **Gourmet in a minute with versatile sauces/marinades.** A continuing trend is the variety of sauces, dips and marinades that enable time-impooverished users to be adventurous cooks. Examples include *Neera's* Chutneys, Salsa, Sauces, Marinades and Spice Pastes. Her *Pear Cardamom Chutney* and *Tomato Mint Chutney* were two of my favorites. (*Indian foods are trendy; I wonder what the new cuisine centers will be: Africa? Northern Canada?*)

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- 8. Good taste a given, in products with multiple benefits.** As in Neera's line, it's not just delicious ingredients, but the products are also "good for you" –made of "fresh fruits and vegetables, only expeller pressed oils, no preservatives or fillers." (Could be confusing to consumers to see so many benefit claims on a product package.)
- 9. Package design a critical selling element.** The elegant glass bottles of *O Olive Oil* are beautiful on display and they convey a premium product line. *Numi's Artisan Bamboo Bins* are colorful, beautiful packages containing "the finest hand sewn and hand-crafted tea leaves specially designed in a variety of unique shapes... the Artisan Teas slowly blossom into a stunning bouquet of sweet and subtle flavors." (Hmmm... what about beautiful edible packaging.)
- 10. Artisan foods are found in all categories.** Hand crafted, hand-made, lovingly made food stuffs are found in breads, cheeses, chocolates, teas, confections, and elsewhere.



According to artisan honey manufacturer, *Beehive Bee Products*: "A bee must fly the human equivalent of three times around the globe to gather a single teaspoon of honey."

A Taste of Interesting Items In My Areas of Focus

Desserts and chocolate ranging from the extremely indulgent to good-for-you.

- *Ciao Bella's* variety of gelato and sorbets have creamy texture and fresh fruit tastes. There's no such thing as plain vanilla any more. They have five different kinds of vanilla gelato including *Vanilla Bourbon*, *Vanilla Hawaiian*. (I wonder about more exotic fruits like *Carambola Chocolate*?)
- Eggs give the custard richness in *Crème Cremaillere* French ice cream. In addition to more traditional flavors, they offered *Crème Brulee*, *Wild Forest Strawberry* and *Coffee Chocolate Express bean*.
- Figs are in vogue with various confectionery products and meal accompaniments. Two examples: *Crossing's French Fig Caramels*, *Matiz's Spanish Chocolate Covered Figs*.
- *SparX Spicy Cookies*, wants to "ignite your taste buds" with cookie flavors: *Chipotle Chocolate Chip*, *Cayenne Toffee Pecan* and *Ancho Oatmeal Raisin*. (What about spicy veggie cookies.)
- *Dagoba* organic chocolate says, "There is an art to the alchemy of flavor infusion, an art we explore with mystery and integrity." Their award winning organic chocolate is available in bars and baking products. (Marketing spiritualism in food...are *Kabala chocolates* next?)
- *David Burke's Gourmet Pops Cheesecake* line provided a unique way to eat dessert: cheesecake dipped in chocolate on a stick. Flavors included *Cherry Pink Cashmere*, *Three Chocolate Tuxedo* and *Toffee Top Hat*. (What other hand held indulgent shapes and devices might be created?)

Beverages: grown up, upscale, and artistically packaged.

- Teas were strongly represented in whole leaf, sachet and bottled forms. *Teas' Te* describes their products as "groundbreaking and refreshingly unsweetened green tea...for lifestyles of the active and health conscious." Flavors include *Pure Green*, *Green White*, *Green Jasmine* and *Green Hoji*.

- *Two Leaves and a Bud* builds their platform on "single origin teas" grown solely in one location, using traditional growing methods. They speak of tea as similar to estate grown wine. Their *organdie* sachets hold full tealeaves that expand and disperse flavor when brewed.
- *LT Blenders Frozen Concoctions* asks consumers to "think outside the blender" with a pouch package innovation that enables one to have a *Margarita in a Bag*. (Seems like the package could work for smoothies or protein power slush.)
- Adult sodas were in evidence with *GUS* (Grown Up Soda) in "not too sweet, distinctive flavors". These real fruit, caffeine free, lightly carbonated beverages were refreshing and shown in flavors including *Dry Valencia Orange*, *Dry Meyer Lemon*, *Dry Crimson Grape*. (Specifics add to the romantic imagery.)
- *Izze Sparkling Juice*, a 100% pure fruit juice line was displayed in interesting fruit flavors: *Blueberry*, *Blackberry*, *Pear*, *Grapefruit and Clementine*.
- After tasting so many varieties of products, it was a palate cleanser for me to come across *Metromint*, a new mint flavored water. The company highlights the purported benefits of mint as soothing, cooling and calming. The tall clear glass bottle with a contemporary blue logo is attractive.

Sauces, dips and marinades turn into unique snacks and quick "meal solutions."

- One line that stood out was by *Moosewood Hollow*, *infused maple syrup*. With a tagline "Imagine the possibilities", I was naturally drawn to it. The sweet lavender infused maple syrup was breathtaking. The sweet savory line could be used in various preparations from main meat grills to breakfasts or desserts. (I could imagine it as an exquisite marinade for salmon or steelhead trout.)
- *Mike's Lifestyle Gourmet* claims: "The first frozen low carb meals and dessert with restaurant-quality taste for those who wish to restrict their intake of carbohydrates or sugar."

The line includes a variety of traditional main dishes including *Old Fashioned Meatloaf*, *Yankee Pot Roast* and *Grilled Chicken Breast*, as well as *Low Carb Cheesecakes* and *Gourmet Breakfast Bowls*.

- Designed for versatile use, *Cali Fine Foods* presented colorfully packaged spices and ingredients including: *Herb Medley*, *Spicy Fiesta*, *Dill Delight*, and *Garlic Gusto*. The products, designed to create snacks and meals in minutes, are used in dips, dressings, marinades soups, stir-frys, with tofu, eggs, bean & rice. They are reported to be "gluten free, dairy free, fat free, no trans fats, low carb, low sodium and no preservatives."
- *Zio World Cuisine* took the easy-to-prepare approach with its "Daringly Authentic" recipes. Their six meals included *Armenian Wednesday Pilaf*, *Cuban Chili con Cilantro e Cumin*, *Peruvian Farmers' Lunch*, and *Sardinian Fisherman's Lunch*.
- *Scarpetta* featured *Sauces 'N Love*, "fresh homemade sauces for delicious meal solutions." Flavors include: *Puttanesca*, *Mint Pesto*, *Arrabbiata*, *Tuscanodka Sauce*. Oprah is a fan of this line (and her name was seen on other products as well.)
- *Original Juan* takes an in-your-face-attitude with its *Pasta Sauces*, *Salsas*, *Hot Sauces*, *BBQ Sauces*, *Condiments*, *Hot Snax* and *Spices*. With marketing copy stating "Pain is Good Pasta Sauce"...created by the "Sultans of Sizzle" and the "Divas of Spice", the stories are as outrageous as the products are fiery. (OK, so these go after the young, hip crowd...how to bring sex appeal to the foods of the retirement set?)

While there's certainly more to report on this year's Show this is probably more than enough food for thought for new products developers and marketers. If you would like to know more about products and trends or if you would like to jumpstart your product innovation process, I'd enjoy talking over possibilities with you.