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## New Generation of Snacks Packed with Nutrition

By John Karolefski

Food makers are producing a new generation of snacks for consumers who are looking for chips, peanuts and bars that contain ingredients beneficial to health, or at least not harmful to it.

So, you won't find saturated fat or trans fat in these new age snacks. Many of them are even packed with vitamins, herbs and "good" bacteria to promote good digestion and heart health. The most successful of these products taste good, too – an essential factor to consider for consumers deciding which snacks to buy.

"The consumer is propelling the market," said Rally Ralston, managing partner of Salba Smart Natural Products, a maker of chips and pretzels. "The public is screaming, 'Give us better products.' Anybody can create something that tastes good. We can add sugar or corn syrup. But there are other choices. The natural and organic markets have been growing by leaps and bounds."

Indeed, retail sales of functional foods and beverages are expected to reach \$33 billion this year, according to some industry estimates. Healthful snacks are a growing and evolving sub-category of these functional products.

"We're seeing snacks that either deliver specific health benefits like Kraft's LiveActive granola bars and/or are positioned as healthy products such as Dove's CocoaXia line of chocolates," said Denise Lee Yohn, a marketing consultant based in San Diego.

"The trend reflects changing snack 'need-states' which is a state of demand that resides at the intersection of a consumer's attitude and the eating occasion; for example, to acquire energy for a pending workout, to escape boredom, to reward themselves, to relax and unwind, etc," she said.

While many of the makers of these snacks are small- to mid-sized companies, the food giants are also part of the emerging market. For example, Frito-Lay sells Flat Earth Baked Veggie Crisps that contain a half serving of real vegetables in every ounce. Kraft Foods, marketer of the iconic Planters brand of peanuts, has expanded its portfolio with NUT-rition in a can that contains peanuts, almonds, pistachios, pecans, walnuts and hazelnuts. The label boasts "a heart healthy mix {that} may reduce the risk of heart disease."

Kraft recently launched LiveActive Chewy Granola Bars to promote digestive health. The bars contain a live probiotic culture that aims to replenish live cultures in the digestive system and promote good health. It is the first nationally available probiotic snack bar that doesn't need to be refrigerated.

Another company marketing probiotic snacks is Attune Foods which recently introduced Chewy Chocolate and Peanut Butter & Chocolate granola bars. The San Francisco-based company offers

10 varieties – six granola and four chocolate – packed with probiotics to support digestive health and boost immunity.

“Digestive health is becoming an increasingly important part of daily health for adults and kids alike – especially as kids return to school and our frantic lifestyles mean eating on the run,” said Rob Hurlbut, CEO of Attune Foods.

The bars are stocked in the refrigerated section of more than 4,000 retail stores, including those operated by Safeway, Whole Foods, Publix, H-E-B, Wegmans, Hannaford, King Sooper and Giant Eagle.

Salba Smart Natural Products in Denver offers a full line of snacks is made from the Salba grain, a rich whole food source of Omega-3 fatty acids and fiber.

“Ounce for ounce, whole Salba grain provides three times more iron than spinach, 15 times more magnesium than broccoli, and six times more calcium than whole milk,” said Ralston. “Salba grain is the only food that is part of each of the six groups of the USDA Food Guide Pyramid. We have made it easy for parents to incorporate this essential food into their children’s diet with Salba products that meet the demands of busy, on-the-go lifestyles.”

Salba Smart’s products include: 100-calorie Bite Size Organic Tortilla Chips (0.7oz); All Natural Whole Wheat Tortillas (10.5oz, 12.4oz, 20.8oz); and Pretzels made with organic flour in Sticks (7oz) and Thin Twisted (7oz). Its Whole Grain (12.7oz) and Ground Salba (6.4oz) can also be added to everyday foods such as cereal, pancakes and smoothies.

Salba Smart can be found at Whole Foods Market, Wild Oats, Wegmans, Vitamin Cottage, and other natural foods stores.

Genisoy Food Company, a maker of soy protein products, offers a line up that includes bars, shakes, powders, soy nuts, trail mixes, soy crisps, potato soy crisps and low-carb bars. The company uses only non-GMO (non-genetically modified organism) soybeans. Also, the snacks include the same soy protein proven to reduce the risk of heart disease by lowering blood cholesterol.

Arguably the most demonstrative packaging for the new generation of snacks is the deluxe microwave popcorn from Smart Balance. On the box are the following in bold letters: No Diacetyl Added, No Trans Fats, Low Sodium, Low Fat, and Non-Hydrogenated. There is also an advisory from the American Heart Association that reads, “Meets American Heart Association food criteria for saturated fat and cholesterol for healthy people over age 2.”

What’s next for healthful snacks?

“Expect to see more vitamin-enhanced products and more unusual or exotic flavors; for example, mango ‘potato’ chips,” predicted Yohn, the marketing consultant. “Beyond product innovation, we will also see the positioning, advertising, and packaging of snacks become more overt in reflecting and appealing to different need-states.”