

Emerging trends and innovations at Natural Products Expo East



Photo: Sosland Publishing Company

09.13.2019

By

[Monica Watrous \(/authors/18-monica-watrous\)](#)

BALTIMORE – Grain-free waffles, craft mocktails and non-dairy yogurt were among new products featured at Natural Products Expo East Sept. 12-14 in Baltimore. Shoppers are seeking more options with less sugar, alcohol, meat, dairy and carbohydrates – and the natural and organic marketplace is responding.

“The natural and organic industry continues to find innovative and delicious ways to get sugar, sodium and some of the other bad guys out of our products while creating options that truly support health and vitality in specialized ways,” said Carlotta Mast, senior vice-president of content and market leader at New Hope Network, which produces the Natural Products Expos.

The plant-based market is a key driver of continued momentum within the natural and organic sector, she said.

“There is so much innovation and disruption coming from the plant kingdom in this industry,” Ms. Mast said during a Sept. 12 presentation at the event. “From providing creative and increasingly delicious, but maybe not always healthy, alternatives to traditional meat, dairy and seafood products to fortifying snacks and other packaged foods with inherently functional ingredients and nutrient density, plants are redefining our food and C.P.G. systems.”

An estimated 29,000 attendees viewed the latest innovations from more than 1,500 exhibitors, including 537 first-timers, Ms. Mast said.

“A lot of the innovation is geared toward revolutionizing our supply chain and ... making our products truly cleaner and safer and healthier for consumers,” she said.

A top trend in new product development demonstrates mainstream appeal of low-carbohydrate diets such as keto and paleo. The keto-genic diet was identified as the most popular consumer diet for 2019, according to more than 1,300 dietitians surveyed in the seventh annual “What’s trending in nutrition” survey from Pollock Communications, New York, and

Today’s Dietitian

. The lifestyle has gained traction in the health and fitness community as a solution for disease prevention and weight management. Followers of the diet generally aim to eat 20 to 50 grams of carbohydrates daily, plus a moderate amount of protein and a high intake of fat.

“Keto is really, really on fire as consumers understand the weight management and health benefits of a keto diet,” Ms. Mast said. “These keto products are often low-sugar offerings that have good healthy fats and even fiber.”

Keto-friendly products featured at Expo East include baking mixes, frozen desserts and condiments. Keto and Co., Belmont, Mass., offers a fudge brownie mix and flatbread and pizza keto bread mix made with coconut flour. Beyond Better Foods, L.L.C., New York, recently unveiled a Keto Collection of ice cream pints and bars made with cream and sweetened with monk fruit and erythritol. Lilly’s Hummus, Portland, Ore., is launching a keto cauliflower hummus, made with five organic ingredients: cauliflower, sesame tahini, salt, garlic and olive oil.

The keto craze is part of a broader consumer trend of sugar avoidance. Recent data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture suggest that per capita sugar consumption is declining, joining high-fructose corn syrup that has been on a downhill trend for two decades.

Many product developers are sweetening foods and beverages with fruit, which does not require an added sugars declaration on the Nutrition Facts Label.

Lopaus Point, Columbus, Ohio, produces gluten-free waffles sweetened with organic fruit, such as bananas, pumpkin and dates. Dates add sweetness to a new line of packaged oats from RXBAR, a subsidiary of Kellogg Co., Battle Creek, Mich. Lavva, Aiken, S.C., offers a range of plant-based yogurt alternatives featuring a blend of coconut, pili nuts, plantains and fruit. True Made Foods, Inc., Delmar, N.Y., is introducing barbecue sauces sweetened with butternut squash, carrots or apple.





Sugar avoidance is fueling new product development in the beverage category, where emerging brands are offering lightly sweetened or unsweetened alternatives to carbonated soft drinks. Cawston Press, Pittsburgh, produces sparkling beverages that contain pressed fruit and sparkling water. Varieties include rhubarb blended with apples, elderflower lemonade, ginger beer blended with apples and cloudy apple soda.

At Expo East, sparkling teas are highlighted by brands including

Tama Tea, Minna and Sound Sparkling Tea. Such products offer a hit of caffeine with botanical flavors and no sweeteners.



Water kefir is the new kombucha

Kombucha continues to gain traction as consumers seek the various health benefits linked to the tea-based beverage. Meanwhile, another fermented, functional brew is bubbling up.

Water kefir, also known as tibicos, is concocted with water, sugar, fruit and a “symbiotic culture mixture of bacteria and yeast.” The result is a slightly tart, effervescent drink. Several brands at Expo East offer ready-to-drink water kefir, which is said to be rich in electrolytes, probiotics and enzymes.

Asheville Kombucha Mamas, L.L.C., the Marshall, N.C.-based maker of the Buchi Kombucha brand, now offers a range of organic kefir soda in varieties including watermelon mint tulsii, lemon lime echinacea, ginger turmeric cayenne, strawberry coconut passionflower and pear ginger chamomile.

Good Wolf Feeding Co., Portland, Ore., was selected as a semi-finalist to compete in the Expo East Pitch Slam competition, where early-stage businesses vie for resources and financial support. The company’s flagship product line is Goldwolf Water Kefir featuring flavor combinations such as pineapple turmeric ginger and coconut lime. The company describes the product as “a raw, light and living probiotic drink that helps you feed the good inside.”



Please pass (on) the alcohol

A growing number of adults are avoiding alcohol but may still crave the taste of a craft beer or cocktail. Several exhibitors at Expo East offered bottled alcohol-free beverages featuring sophisticated flavor profiles and packaging.

Bar None, a brand of non-alcoholic beverages developed by the Coca-Cola Co., Atlanta, contains libation-inspired flavors and ingredients such as apple cider vinegar, green tea and peach puree. Varieties include spiced ginger mule, bellini spritz, dry aged cider and sangria.

Bar None was born out of a desire for more sophisticated non-alcoholic beverages than sugary mocktails or club soda with lime. A team working in the Coca-Cola Co.’s Venturing & Emerging Brands unit created the product line, tapping several industry veterans to bring Bar None to market, according to

the company.

“We talked about not wanting to drink as often, or as much, as we had before,” said Sabrina Tandon, general manager for Bar None. “We wanted something we could actually look forward to enjoying as much as an alcoholic drink – something sip-able and savor-able.”

Mocktail Club, Washington, offers lightly sparkling beverages featuring herbal tea, spices and apple cider vinegar for a touch of tartness. Varieties include Havana twist, Capri sour, Bombay fire and Manhattan berry.

Partake Brewing Co., Calgary, Alta., featured craft non-alcoholic beers in the styles of India pale ale, stout, blonde lager and pale ale.

Sparkling Drinking Bitters by Bitter Love, Portland, Maine, are ready-to-drink beverages with a bite. Varieties include toasted pineapple, peppered grapefruit and tart cherry. The products contain no added sweetener and 40 calories per bottle.



C.B.D. meets C.P.G.

Consumer curiosity about cannabis has sparked a surge in new product development featuring hemp extract or cannabidiol (C.B.D.). While mostly seen in supplements and skincare products at Expo East, a crop of food and beverage products included C.B.D. claims.

“It’s a complex category,” Ms. Mast said. “The regulatory landscape is still very murky, and there’s a lot of questions to be answered, but despite all that, innovation is just on fire in this category.”

PLNT Blend, Norwalk, Conn., has a line of full-spectrum hemp beverages in three flavors: turmeric ginger, mint matcha and pineapple chamomile.

UbU Beverages, L.L.C., Santa Monica, Calif., features UbU Hemp Tonic, a sparkling beverage boasting prebiotics, antioxidants and electrolytes, plus full-spectrum C.B.D. Flavors include yuzu with lotus flower and citrus ginger.

Evo Hemp, Boulder, Colo., recently added a line of protein bars infused with full-spectrum hemp oil. Flavors include cookie dough, mocha chip and brownie chip.

Pure Fluff Co., Charleston, S.C., offers artisanal cotton candy in a range of flavors, including watermelon beet, sriracha berry and lavender lemon. Products also include hemp-infused varieties like “vanilla haze.”



Against the grain

Grain-free is gaining ground, casting a spotlight on cassava, coconut and almond flour in new takes on tortillas, donuts and pizza crust.

Unbun Foods, Toronto, makes grain-free, keto-friendly, plant-based products, including mini baguettes, pizza crusts and buns using ingredients such as almond and coconut flours, pumpkin and chia seeds, and psyllium husk.

The frozen grain-free waffles from Swapples, Washington, feature yuca root, coconut oil and spices. Flavors include blueberry, cinnamon, tomato pizza, garlicky greens and “everything,” in the style of an everything bagel.

Grain-free baking mixes offered by Cooggies, Hollywood, Fla., contain coconut flour and vegetables, including butternut squash, sweet potato, spinach and carrots. The brand offers mixes for muffins, cakes, cookies, pancakes and waffles.

Uplift Food, a New York start-up backed by Mondelez International, is introducing Gut Happy Cookies, which are plant-based, organic and grain-free. The cookies are low in sugar, high in fiber and made with a blend of five prebiotic-rich ingredients, plus probiotics, according to the company.

Mikey's, Scottsdale, Ariz., is introducing burrito-size grain-free tortillas made with cassava flour. New from Soozy's Grain-Free, New York, are maple and chocolate donuts made with a blend of coconut, cassava and almond flours.

EggLife L.L.C., Wolcott, Ind., offers a range of refrigerated, grain-free wraps made with egg whites. Varieties include original, Italian, Southwest and rye. The wraps contain 30 calories or fewer with 5 grams of protein and up to 1 gram of carbohydrates. Founder Peggy Johns said, "Like so many others, I don't want to eat a lot of carbs, sugars and fat, but I do want to eat more protein. So, I began creating my own foods in my kitchen, using egg whites because they have high-quality protein."



Elevating the frozen aisle

Millennial consumers are warming up to frozen food as product developers dish out frozen fare with premium and nutritious ingredients.

Eat Nice, Montclair, N.J., offers frozen plant-based ravioli made with organic nuts, seeds and tofu. Varieties include ricotta-style and sundried tomato with walnut.

Caesar's Kitchen, Blackwood, N.J., has a new line of frozen entrees with restaurant-inspired recipes and organic ingredients. Organic Tuscan-style garden ravioli and organic asiago and mushroom penne pasta are among the varieties offered.

"I truly believe that organic gives an edge to innovation," Ms. Mast said. "Innovation is so alive and well in our industry as you will see at this Expo East, but some of the best innovators are ensuring their products are certified organic, and I believe this will provide an edge over the competition."

On the sweet side, People's Pops, USA, Brooklyn, N.Y., are premium ice pops in flavors such as lemon ginger, strawberry rhubarb and peach jasmine.

[New products \(/topics/477-new-products\)](#)

[Natural \(/topics/188-natural\)](#)

[Trends \(/topics/111-trends\)](#)

[Organic \(/topics/104-organic\)](#)

Fresh ideas. Served daily.

Subscribe to Food Business News' free newsletters to stay up to date about the latest food and beverage news.

**Subscribe ([https://sos.dragonforms.com/init.do?pk=ArticleLink&omedasite=SOS108_FBN_pro-
file](https://sos.dragonforms.com/init.do?pk=ArticleLink&omedasite=SOS108_FBN_pro-
file))**