

Flavor and cost concerns driving innovation in ice cream

Consumers looking for variety in flavor

While consumers might be looking for healthier ice cream products in some instances, there is still a prevalent desire to indulge. Mintel International, Chicago, said the use of mix-ins and combinations of favorite premium ice creams in a single product is one way of adding to the decadent quotient of ice cream. In addition, Mintel noted provenance positioning that adds in exclusivity, uniqueness and quality, as well as sustainability and ethical claims, having a clean label and using functional ingredients are also ways of adding attraction.

"Brands that have traditionally lived in the realm of chocolate, vanilla and strawberry are being much more creative, much more adventurous in their flavor variance, and that

nation. In addition, she said a developing trend in global markets includes ice creams paired with herbs.

The concept of sweet and salty also is growing. For example, Haagen-Dazs Reserve series has introduced Fleur de Sel Caramel ice cream, which is designed to combine these flavor opposites for heightened taste sensation. HP Hood, Lynnfield, Mass., has a freedom trail mix ice cream, which falls into the sweet and salty category as well.

Steve Platt, vice-president of new business development at Star Kay White, an ice cream ingredient company based in Congers, N.Y., said indulgence and excitement may be expensive for a manufacturer.

"You have to be very cognizant of the cost you incur when you bring

including a chocolate cookie variegate, sugar cone variegate and a cinnamon graham variegate.

Gelato also is increasing in popularity, Ms. Faron noted. It originally started in the food service channel in the past several years, but now is available in the retail channel, with Ciao Bella being a leader in gelato.

Ms. Faron said the trend toward premium products is driven by a consumer desire for high-quality flavors and more unfamiliar tastes. She also noted a quality association goes along with these products. Haagen-Dazs has been a leader in the premium positioning category for ice cream.

"(Premium products) have the aura of being great-tasting, high-quality, fresh ingredients," Ms. Faron said. "Those are all things we are seeing consumers want to seek out."

Mintel said the process of using mix-ins and co-branding is important in premium positioning innovations.

In addition, with dark chocolate increasing in popularity in the confectionery category, it's making its way into ice cream. In February, Cold Stone Creamery began offering a Ghirardelli dark chocolate ice cream. Mr. Beem said the company will expand its dark chocolate line in the future.

With premium and high-end products increasing in popularity, current economic conditions and rising food and commodity prices could potentially impact sales of such products.

"My prediction is that products on the value end of the spectrum and the super-premium end of the spectrum may be able to withstand the economy," Ms. Faron said. "Super-premium products likely attract a consumer base that may be a bit more resistant to some of these economic downturns. The middle-of-the-road players — that mainstream market — could suffer the most."

In the future, Ms. Faron said the desire for a clean label and allergen-free or lactose-free products will be important trends to watch. **ENR**

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doesn't seem to be slowing at all," said Krista Faron, senior analyst with Mintel Research Consulting.

Some of the more adventurous flavors on the market include Wine Ice Cream from Mercer's Dairy, Boonville, N.Y. The flavors include Ala Port, Cherry Merlot, Peach White Zinfandel, Red Raspberry Chardonnay and Royal White Riesling. Each product contains 5% alcohol by volume and a consumer must be over 21 to purchase.

Another interesting flavor identified by Ms. Faron comes from Target Corp.'s Archer Farms brand, which has a sorbet in a blueberry lavender variety. She said it is interesting to see a fruit paired with a flower in a flavor combi-

indulgence and excitement into the category," Mr. Platt said.

Specifically, he said there has been some debate regarding the standards of identity for ice cream, which requires 10% butterfat. Mr. Platt said there are manufacturers coming out with frozen desserts, which have no legal standards, and this gives them the flexibility to stay outside the standards of ice cream, brings their costs down, and allows them to add more inclusions. Specifically, Star Kay White said some manufacturers are swirling either sorbet or sherbet into ice cream in an effort to manage costs.

He said some of the biggest new product introductions from Star Kay White include textured variegates,