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Concord Foods operates in fresh and manufactured-food realms

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BROCKTON, MA — For Concord Foods Inc., a discussion on market positioning is an interesting mix of produce marketing combined with consumer products marketing.

For example, a new kale and apple smoothie mix will be coming from the marketing office, test kitchen and production line of this suburban-Boston food manufacturer.



Peter Neville, company president and chief executive officer, with Samantha McCaul, marketing manager, and Charles Olins, vice president of

sales and marketing. Charles Olins, Concord's vice president of sales and marketing, said fresh produce is an ingredient in 90 percent of the items offered by a particular division of Concord Foods. To be on-target with consumers, fresh produce trends are constantly tracked.

"We're told that kale sales have tripled in the last year," Olins said. The new smoothie mix will be released late this year. "We are tinkering with the new formula now," Olins said in June.

One interesting marketing aspect of Olins' work is the need to serve niche markets, but not to be too narrow, or the efficiency of serving the mass market will be lost.

"The household penetration of avocados is growing very fast." And, guacamole is a key sales draw for fresh avocados. Thus, guacamole seasonings are Concord Foods' top category offering. The market is of sufficient size that the firm can efficiently offer five flavors of guacamole mix. He noted that Northeastern consumers typically prefer guacamole party dips. "In the Southwest, they prefer more of a natural flavor."

This fall Concord Foods will offer consumers a "bowl season" promotion promoting guacamole as part of tailgating parties. The grand prize winner will receive travel expenses and tickets to a top bowl game.

The guacamole mixes were part of a Walt Disney rebate in February when Walt Disney Studios re-released "The Jungle Book." The promotion was titled The Bare Necessities for a Great Movie Night. Last year Concord Foods had a similar rebate promotion in support of "Peter Pan" with the theme Hooked on Guacamole.

Another popular Concord Foods item is Chiquita Banana Bread Mix. Consumers need to add two bananas to the mix. Olins said that because banana brands can vary from one retailer to the next, the fresh banana bread mix is not directly tied to "Chiquita" brand banana sales.

Furthermore, Concord Foods this year is running a 55-cents-off per package promotion in a banana bread mix, co-branded with Chiquita and "Sun-Maid" raisins. The "Sun-Maid" promotion — tagged "much sweeter together" — will involve 250,000 specially marked packages.

"We do all we can to have the best health profile, and at the same time maintain great flavor," Olins said of his product line. Over time the ingredients of every product have been reviewed to assure that sugar, salt and other ingredients have been minimized.

Concord offers seasoning mixes, smoothie mixes, fresh dessert mixes and glazes, and specialty products, including other bread mixes, like cranberry, sweet potato and blueberry.

Olins said the only product not made in the firm's Brockton plant is its bottled, not-from-concentrate lemon juice and concentrated lime juice, which is processed in Sicily.

"We have more promotion ideas than we can handle," Olins said.

Beyond a sales staff of two, the firm has a lean marketing department, with Olins working with Samantha McCaul, marketing manager. "There is a wide range of potential tie-ins for us. But we have limited time and resources. We have a lot of approaches. Every promotion takes a lot of time to put together." The motivation of the tie-ins is "to take a big product and make it bigger."

The firm is about to re-launch its products in Canada, and Concord Foods continues doing “a little business in Mexico.”

Olins is active as a committee member with the Produce Marketing Association and is a loyal exhibitor at PMA conventions. There, he is regularly approached by a wide variety of international buyers interested in the products. The firm is careful not to overextend itself.

The firm has a 250,000-square-foot manufacturing plant. Olins said the firm has the capacity to increase production by extending the hours of utilization to three shifts.

Concord Foods was founded in 1968 by Jeff Neville. Today, his son, Peter Neville, is president and chief executive officer of the firm.

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