

Everyday Innovation

When you're in the food industry, any grocery store you visit – at home or away – is like a museum. Food and beverage product developers and packaging manufacturers invent new and ingenious ways to balance consumers' requirements that the products they buy should be nutritious, convenient and, above all, good-tasting. Here's a brief sampling of a few extraordinary innovations hitting the shelves.

DASHING AND DINING

Soup-Meets-Coffee: Campbell Soup has designed an inventive way to enjoy soup on the go. The cup-like package is both suitable for a car cup-holder and ergonomically designed to fit comfortably in the hand. The plastic sip-cup lid can be removed, revealing a pull-top metal lid, which you remove before microwaving the soup and replacing the sip-top lid.

Self-Heating Cans: How can you top a self-heating can for convenience and ingenuity? The tamper-evident package is made up of a plastic outer cup (which contains the beverage), an inner plastic cone (which contains calcium oxide, or quicklime) and an activating puck. The consumer simply removes the tamper-evident base, and presses a button to start the heating reaction. The foam label brands the product and insulates the handle. The cans can keep the liquid hot for up to 30 minutes and warm for up to 60. While they can heat any kind of liquid, including tea, cocoa, soup and even alcoholic beverages, it's the Wolfgang Puck line of self-heating coffees, which are garnering media attention – boosted, no doubt, by their famous namesake's popularity.

FOOD CORRALS

Baby Food Goes Square: Gerber has developed a two-pack of low-acid baby food (squash, peas and carrots) in a retortable square container with a foil laminate seal under a recloseable lid. No more possibility of shards of glass, and the packages are lightweight to transport, both for the

Campbell Soup has designed an inventive way to enjoy soup on the go. The cup-like package is both suitable for a car cup-holder and ergonomically designed to fit comfortably in the hand.



manufacturer and for the consumer.

Squeezy Skippy: On her recent trip to Florida, Carol Zweep, senior research scientist with GFTC, found Skippy peanut butter available in a squeeze tube. "Imagine the fun kids would have, and how much less cleanup there would be for the parents," says Zweep.

Controllable Spaghetti Sauce: In the same store, Zweep also spotted Ragu spaghetti sauce available in a large 1.87 kg or 4 lb PET jar (made by Graham Packaging) with easy grip and metal-plastic composite closure.

Cup-o-Candy: Sour Patch Kids candies are now available in a "Travel Treats" recloseable cup format, ergonomically shaped to fit either an adult's or a child's hand, and easily slotted into a car upholder.

ECO-FRIENDLY ALTERNATIVES

Fully Degradable Meat Soaker Pads: Paper Pak Industries California, in conjunction with EPI Technology, have recently developed fully degradable/bio-degradable meat soaker pads, which are used to control and absorb waste fluids in the packaging of fresh meat,

poultry, fish and vegetables. "Soaker pads are used under most fresh meats and vegetables to help them stay fresh, presentable and extend shelf life, which reduces costly rewraps," says Griff Hopkins, director of international sales with Paper Pak Industries. "Once you open the package, the pad has to be thrown away, and in our new pads, the plastic material and the cellulose core within the pad will degrade and bio-degrade completely."

Corn-tainers: Versatile corn is not only showing up in your gas tank as ethanol, but also in corn-based polylactide polymer containers derived from cornstarch. Produced by Cargill Dow, these corn-tainers are ideal for the organic products market, for farmers seeking a new value-added option for their crops and for anyone interested in reducing the impact of our garbage crisis on the environment.

Cliona Reeves is the communications manager at the Guelph Food Technology Centre. Email: cmreeves@gftc.ca