



Some Things Get Better With Age

With this being our Top 10 Innovators issue I wanted to write about some of the new products and technology that are changing the way we view the food and beverage industry today.

And in fact I've seen quite a bit of impressive new concepts and technology in the last month, at Cologne, Germany's Anuga FoodTec. The triennial exhibition is the premier venue for Europe's top equipment manufacturers to launch new products. This year's selection did not disappoint the show's record number of attendees, with products designed to fit the demand for consumer-convenient packaging, hygienic processing systems to ensure highest-quality production and food safety, and automation and robotic systems designed to make production more efficient for manufacturers (*for more on the show, see p. 18*). On the food side, a quick look through our Top 10 Innovators section (*starting on p. 33*) gives some idea of the wide range of new food and beverages now hitting the grocery shelves, filling, and in some instances, creating consumer demand in all market segments.

But a number of other stories we feature this month made me think about the time-tested success of products that, after many years in the market, still make the cut. Look, for example, at St. Stephen, N.B.-based Ganong Bros. Ltd. After 133 years the family owned confectionery company is still delivering a delicious range of chocolates and candies. And while Ganong continues to develop new products, popular items such as its 121-year-old chicken bone candies, are still on the lineup. In Edmonton, Alta., Riddle Sweet Impressions Inc. also makes traditional candies the old-fashioned way, thanks to master candy maker Bill McCreedy, who began his career in the confectionery industry in 1916.

So what makes some products remain winners with consumers throughout the decades, despite the fact that trends and flavours continue to change? Manufactured food products that stand the test of time either meet an essential need, or while not always the healthiest of choices, appeal to our

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flavour cravings. These are the little indulgences that don't break the bank, while giving us a quick boost of whatever it is we crave – sugar, intense flavour, chocolate. It's for this reason that confectionery seems to be particularly immune to changes in consumer preferences. And while candy makers continue to prove themselves as innovators (*see our confectionery sector report on p. 44*), many of the same products our parents, and perhaps even our grandparents, bought are still on the shelves today.

There's usually a nostalgic appeal at work. For example, Frank O'Connor first introduced Laura Secord chocolates in 1913, when he produced the chocolate and candy recipes from his tiny Toronto store. While the company has gone through several ownership changes (it is now owned by two U.S. and Montreal-based capital groups), like Ganong Bros.' Delecto chocolate brand, Laura Secord chocolates are still Canadian family favourites.

And often it's the same sugary treats catering to young tastebuds that reappear in stores repackaged for new generations of kids to discover. Although my tastes have changed, Sweetarts, first introduced by the Sunmark Company in 1963, and now falling under the Nestlé SA umbrella, remains a favourite occasional indulgence. The sweet and sour ultra-sugary candies always remind me of walking to the corner store every Saturday with my sisters to spend our money on Pop Rocks, candy necklaces and Bubble Yum gum. I can't help smiling when my own kids now clamour for the so-sugary-it-hurts treats (I admit I do sneak a couple as well).

But it's more than memories that gives confectionery its staying power. Quality, along with a healthy dose of savvy marketing, is always a requirement. Visual appeal, colourful, well-targeted packaging and just old-fashioned yumminess, for want of a better word, are something confectioners know prove irresistible to kids of all ages, despite the complaints of parents and dentists everywhere. After all, great taste never goes out of style.

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