

# NEWS FILE

The Voice of the Canadian Food & Beverage Industry

## Spinach Safety a Priority

While American spinach producers are still reeling from the affects of a major outbreak of *E. coli* 0157:H7 bacteria, many Canadian producers are wondering what impact the crisis in the U.S. industry will have in Canada.

In September various pre-packaged spinach brands from California-based companies Natural Selection Foods LLC and River Ranch were pulled off grocery store shelves in the U.S., Canada and Mexico, following over 100 reports of illness and one death, thought to be related to consuming the products. By the end of the month five companies had voluntarily recalled their products, and the number of reported illnesses had climbed to 183. At press time there was just one reported case of illness in Canada, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) was warning people not to eat any pre-packaged fresh spinach or salad with a spinach blend from the U.S.



But while the contamination has only been found in spinach from certain growing areas of the U.S., the negative publicity may have an affect on the entire North American industry. "There are two issues here," says Heather Holland, senior technical manager, Food Safety and Government Relations for the Canadian Produce Marketing Association (CPMA). "One is the impact of voluntary recalls, and the other is consumers buying spinach. No one benefits from this type of tragic situation." While Holland says there has been an impact on Canadian sales, it's still too soon to gauge just how much has been lost due to the contamination.

"There has been an impact from the recall due to loss of product, but our industry takes this very seriously and will remove any potential product as a proactive measure, even if it may not be the source, to ensure that public health is protected," she says.

Holland stresses that Canadian-grown fresh spinach is safe to eat, something the CPMA is helping its members relay to consumers. "The interface between consumers and our industry is generally at the retail or foodservice level," she says. "So each individual business will be answering consumer concerns directly. CPMA is providing information to our members that may contribute to business decision-making and communications." The organization is also working with the CFIA to determine when the ban against U.S. spinach will be lifted. "The investigation is ongoing, (Continued on page 10)

## A HEALTHY TURNOUT

Judging by the crowds at this year's Canadian Health Food Association (CHFA) Expo East, health and nutrition now mean big business. The trade-only natural health products show and conference, which took place Sept. 7 to 10 in Toronto, was the association's largest yet, with 650 exhibitor booths and more than 3,000 attendees.

According to a CHFA survey of attendees, visitors were most interested in sports nutrition, organic

packaged foods and beverages, multivitamins and herbal and botanical supplements. This year also saw many U.S.

food and beverage producers entering the Canadian market, as well as numerous Canadian start-up companies testing the waters. The CHFA will host its next show, Expo Quebec, Feb. 15 to 18, 2007, in Montreal. (Left) Ontario Natural Food Co-op's Maxine Silberg serves up soup produced from the province's family farms.



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as the source of the contamination has not yet been determined,” says Holland. “This is the crux of the problem, as the industry needs to know how this contamination happened in spite of their participation in good agricultural and food safety practices. The next steps will be examining the situation and, based on those findings, implementing procedures to ensure that it doesn’t happen again.”

According to Agriculture Canada statistics, the majority of Canada’s

704 hectares of spinach is produced in Ontario and Quebec, with some production in B.C., Nova Scotia and Alberta. By comparison, based on statistics from the Agricultural Issues Center in California, the U.S. is the world’s second-largest spinach producer, with California, Arizona and Texas comprising the main spinach-growing states. The advent of pre-cut, washed and packaged produce has accounted for much of the recent growth in the North American spinach market.



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Canada Québec

## Wholesome Hemp Moves into Mainstream

Move over wheat and other grains – food products made with hemp are offering consumers a tasty alternative packed with outstanding nutrition.

Hemp seeds contain the recommended 3:1 ratio of essential omega-6 and omega-3 fatty acids, which reduce the risk of such conditions as cardiovascular disease, stroke, osteoporosis and diabetes. Hemp seeds are also rich in protein, calcium and iron, and are an excellent source of rare Gamma-Linoleic Acid, which lowers cholesterol and protects against degenerative conditions like arthritis.

For producers, hemp offers an opportunity to deliver impressive health benefits in a diverse variety of products. Hemp seeds can be ground for baked goods or pressed for their tasty oil, leaving behind a useful high-protein material. Already a number of companies have brought a variety of products to market. Killaloe, Ont.-based Cool Hemp Company markets a smooth frozen treat from ground hemp seeds in chocolate, maple and natural flavours (\$5.49 for 500 mL). Since 2003, it has been available in the Natural Value sections of 223 Loblaws stores in Ontario, Quebec and Atlantic Canada, Whole Foods Market and

other small chains and individual outlets. Cookies, protein powder and hempseeds are sold on-line and in health food stores.

According to Cool Hemp co-owner Rob Anderman, working with hemp seed is similar to working with any seeds and nuts – heat, oxygen and light must be mini-

mized to avoid rancidity.

“We had to develop a process and machine that would eliminate any bits of hull still remaining after de-hulling, so the Cool Hemp mix could easily pass through a dairy homogenizer without clogging up the pistons, and thus enabling our product to maintain a smooth texture,” he says, referring to the company’s frozen treat. To make the protein powder, the company grinds the cake remaining after the oil is



pressed out to a very fine texture. For the cookies, the company uses both the whole seed, which gives the cookie crunch, flavour and nutrition, and a small amount of hemp flour, used in a ratio of about 1:5 with wheat or spelt flour because hemp does not contain gluten.

Based on high sales and positive consumer feedback, Cool Hemp Company plans a major expansion in the next year, boosting production and sales by about 500 per cent.

— Treena Hein

CONSUMER PRODUCTS

- For consumers whose stomachs are sensitive to coffee, Toronto-based **Procter & Gamble** now offers **Folgers Simply Smooth**. The company describes it as the first nationally available stomach-friendly coffee. Simply Smooth was developed by carefully controlling the blend of beans and pre-

cise roasting, limiting the formation of certain compounds (phenols) that have been associated with stomach irritation. Folgers Simply Smooth will be available in a medium-roast flavour at grocery stores nationwide, with a suggested retail price of \$3.99 for a 326-g canister.

- Here's an easy way to help consumers add whole grains to their diet: with crackers. Toronto-based **Dare Foods**



**Limited** has launched **grainsfirst**, a line of whole grain crackers featuring 11 whole grains and seeds. The line has two flavours, Spring Harvest, with soy and sunflower; and Autumn Harvest, with black sesame and poppy seeds. Grainsfirst is considered a source of fibre, low in saturated fat and trans fat-free. The crackers, which come in two sizes (200 g and 250 g) and which retail for about \$3.69, are found in most major retail grocery chains. This winter General Mills Cheerios and Fiber One cereals will be carrying coupons for a free box of grainsfirst.

- Toronto-based **ConAgra Foods Inc.** has introduced **Egg Beaters**, egg whites in 500-g cartons. According to the company, by removing the yolks, all the fat, cholesterol and more than half the calories are also removed. Vitamins, such as B12 and E, and other nutrients, such as folic acid and riboflavin, have been added. Egg Beaters, which are available refrigerated and frozen in two varieties – Original and Cheddar & Chive – retail for \$2.99 to \$3.79 in grocery stores across Canada.



- Now you can drink your way to better digestive health. Rougemont, Que.-based **Lassonde Inc.** has added **Oasis Health Break with Probiotics**, a new juice cocktail with yogurt, to its Oasis Health Break line. Probiotics are live and active bacteria naturally found in the digestive system, but which can be lost due to the stomach's acidity, stress or antibiotic treatment. Oasis Health Break with Probiotics contains probiotics that can withstand the stomach's acidity. The Oasis Health Break line, which includes juices with omega-3, calcium and antioxidants, is available in 1.89-L sizes, and retails for between \$3.49 and \$3.99. The line is found in most major chains across Canada.

Melt Your Inhibitions



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