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Events

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Magazine

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[Ingredient Markets](#)
[Financial Performance](#)
[Food Service / Retail](#)
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Food tribes driving 'food revolution'

9/29/2015 - by Monica Watrous

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BALTIMORE — Don't ignore the Paleo crowd. Though a small portion of the population, those who follow the caveman-inspired diet — or a vegan or gluten-free diet, for that matter — are an important source of innovation and inspiration to food manufacturers.

"They're a relatively small group of people, but we think they are indicative of larger consumer values," said Jenna Blumenfeld, senior food editor for New Hope Natural Media, during a presentation at Natural Products Expo East. "A lot of retailers have special sections in their stores that cater just to gluten-free or vegan eaters. We love to research food tribes because it goes beyond what we eat. It's also about your identity."

A food tribe is a social group linked by a set of common values and beliefs that shape one's food and lifestyle choices, said Carlotta Mast, executive director of content and insights for New Hope Natural Media.

"These communities can be relatively mainstream, such as gluten-free, all the way to something very niche, like a Freegan community," Ms. Mast said during a separate presentation at Expo East, held Sept. 16-19 in Baltimore. "These communities tend to be very small, but we think they are so important to pay attention to, even if your brand or retailer carries lots of different types of products because these food tribe community members are driving changes. They're really driving the good food movement. They're driving the food revolution."

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Freegans, a lesser known food tribe, seek to reduce waste by consuming products with little or no packaging or food that has been discarded.

“(Food tribes) are so passionate about what they’re doing that they tend to be the biggest influencers around issues related to food and consumer packaged goods products,” Ms. Mast said. “The values that drive them to want to be dedicated to a vegan lifestyle or a Paleo lifestyle or a Freegan lifestyle really start to connect to values that the mainstream consumers have that will have big impact on driving real change in the marketplace.”



At Expo East, many new products were geared toward food tribes, with a growing focus on Paleo.

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“We’re seeing more companies call out their product as being a Paleo product,” Ms. Blumenfeld said. “This tribe prioritizes whole, unprocessed foods that really go back to our basics of eating 10,000 years ago.”

Examples include a Paleo pancake mix from Birch Benders Micro-Pancakery, Edgewater, Colo.; grass-fed meat-based trail mixes from The New Primal, Johns Island, S.C.; and grain-free pastas from Cappello’s Gluten Free, Denver.

Vegan claims abounded at the show, too, in such products as artisan nut cheeses from Treeline Cheese, Kingston, N.Y.; a coconut-based bacon substitute from Coconut Organics, Arden, N.C.; and marinated jackfruit from Upton’s Naturals, Chicago. Vegan products may appeal to mainstream consumers who share similar values, such as sustainability.

“People go vegan because of a wide variety of issues,” Ms. Blumenfeld noted. “It can be environmental, or it can be animal welfare.”

And then there’s Pegan, or Paleo-vegan, another driver of product development at Expo East.

"Some products are finding they are both Paleo and vegan, using things like nuts instead of grains, maple syrup instead of cane sugar, dairy alternatives like coconut milk," Ms. Blumenfeld said.



Paleo Scavenger granola, satisfies the dietary requirements of both Paleo and vegan lifestyles.

Paleo Scavenger granola, for example, is made with almonds, pecans, coconut oil and maple syrup, satisfying the dietary requirements of both Paleo and vegan lifestyles.

Even several personal care products at the show were positioned as vegan, Paleo or gluten-free. Fatface Skincare, Stateline, Nev., manufactures organic skin care products made with tallow from pastured, grass-fed cows.

"When it comes down to it, this is not a black and white situation in terms of the things that influence the consumer and the product choice that they make," Ms. Mast said. "There are so many different things that influence a consumer's product decisions, and a lot of that is driven by values."

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By **Chuck Busalacchi**

10/15/2015 11:57:21 AM

I do have to chuckle at "Paleo Pancakes". When the Paleo concept first arrived it was akin to eating like a caveman. Fresh vegetables fruits nuts meats and fish. Cavemen ate what was in-season and available. If food was scarce, Caveman moved to where food was more abundant. Paleo in essence is a move away from processed foods but if anything it is just as processed as the foods it competes with, sans some preservative, coloring or artificial flavor. Coconut Based Bacon Substitute, Come on man!

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By **Richard Turton**

9/30/2015 11:51:16 AM

Packaging is a big issue that needs to be addressed especially considering the use of sustainability by a number of our big consumer products companies. Notice on your next purchase of aspirin or a vitamin the size of both the bottle and the box the bottle comes in both are sized for advertising not to the volume needed for shipping across the globe. Come on lets be realistic cutting back on non recyclable packaging and in packaging as a whole would benefit us now in energy and product costs now and well into the future.

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