



Retail WATCH

NEWS & MARKETING IDEAS TO HELP SELL MORE CHEESE

Franklin Foods launches Greek cream cheese, prepares to open second plant

New Arizona facility to expand western U.S. distribution

By Kate Sander

DELRAY BEACH, Fla. —Franklin Foods Inc. is on a mission to re-invent cream cheese for today's consumer, and as the company begins to offer Greek cream cheese and prepares to open a new facility in Casa Grande, Ariz., it appears the mission is well underway and successful.

Franklin Foods currently produces more than 55 million pounds of cream cheese annually, with that amount expected to double with the opening of the company's new Arizona plant in the second quarter. Currently, Franklin Foods is the nation's third-

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Jon Gutknecht
FRANKLIN FOODS

largest cream cheese manufacturer, says Rocco Cardinale, who was recently promoted to vice president at Franklin Foods and is overseeing the new plant.

Franklin Foods, headquartered in Delray Beach, Fla., and with a plant in Enosburg Falls, Vt., has grown significantly since Nordahl Brue, company chairman, and business partner Michael Dressel purchased it in 1989 and Jon Gutknecht, president and CEO, came on board in 1999. However, one thing has remained the same: the executives believe that if you make a good, wholesome and innovative

product, there will be an audience for it, Cardinale says.

Gutknecht says he believes the company has experienced explosive growth over the past decade because it is constantly innovating and pushing the boundaries.

“We are a full line cream cheese company,” Gutknecht says. “We’ve annointed ourselves as the fastest-growing cream cheese company in the world, and we’re pretty confident in that statement.”

The company's product line includes cultured cream cheese, direct-set cream cheese, yogurt cream cheese, organic cream cheese, imitation cream cheese, mascarpone and bakers cheese. Ranging from sweet to savory, the company offers about 35 flavors of products — “I’m sure my plant manager would say too many flavors,” Gutknecht says with a laugh.

The company's Vermont plant is a Safe Quality Foods (SQF) Level 3 Certified manufacturer.

Presently, about 25 percent of the company's business is in retail, 30 percent is in foodservice, 35 percent is in ingredient uses and 10 percent of the cream cheese is exported. The export business continues to grow, Gutknecht says, with product sold throughout Asia, the Caribbean, Mexico and South America.

The company's cream cheese retail brands include Vermont Gourmet, Hahn's Cream Cheese, All Season's Kitchen, Lombardi's and Green Mountain Farms. The company also is the nation's second largest retail private label cream cheese supplier. The company has the ability to meet the needs of customers of all sizes.

Innovating for them remains one of Gutknecht's favorite parts of the business and an area that he directly oversees. The company doesn't have a formal R&D department, he says. Rather, it utilizes the strengths of the experts throughout the business.

“We can move projects and launch products and react to consumer trends quickly because our organization is very flat and we eliminate traditional bureaucracy found in larger companies,” Cardinale adds.



Photo courtesy of Franklin Foods Inc.

NEW CREAM CHEESE PLANT IN THE WEST — With growing demand for Greek cream cheese as well as its conventional cream cheese products, Franklin Foods is highly anticipating the opening of its new plant in Casa Grande, Ariz., later this year. The company's original plant continues to operate in Enosburg Falls, Vt.

The company currently holds eight product patents. One of its more recent inventions is Baking Cheeze Blend for foodservice. Baking Cheeze Blend is designed for industrial and home baking applications. It provides a rich and creamy texture to a wide variety of applications such as cheesecakes, frostings, fillings, pastries and sauces.

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Innovation consists of trial and error, Gutknecht says. The company's yogurt cream cheese is a good example of that. Although it took several attempts, the Franklin Foods team ultimately created a patented product combining the strengths of yogurt and cream cheese.

Franklin Foods' proprietary combi-

nation of the two dairy foods results in a tasty product that is easy to spread on bagels and fun to dip crackers or fruit, Cardinale says. With 33 percent less calories, 60 percent less fat, 55 percent less cholesterol and 30 percent less sodium than the leading cream cheese brand, yogurt cream cheese is the perfect “anytime” treat, he says.

Now, riding the wave of Greek yogurt popularity, Franklin Foods recently has launched its Greek cream cheese, the first of its kind in the industry.

Made with a combination of premium cream cheese and Greek Yogurt, Green Mountain Farms Greek Cream Cheese is produced with farm fresh milk and cream and satisfies consumer demand for foods that provide just the right balance of good nutrition and great taste.

The company's Greek cream cheese delivers twice the protein and 50 percent less fat than traditional cream cheese, and contains live and active cultures. The company says it's perfect for consumers who want to indulge a little more healthfully — think cheesecake with half the fat and twice the protein.

Last month, Franklin Foods announced that Green Mountain Farms Greek Cream Cheese now is available at more than 500 Walmart Stores in the eastern United States. In addition, Green Mountain Farms Greek Cream Cheese is available at nearly 1,000 retailers including Stop & Shop, Giant Food Stores, Giant and Giant Eagle in the Northeast, Midwest and mid-Atlantic regions.

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Franklin Foods' Greek cream cheese is available in an 8-ounce bar, 8-ounce and 12-ounce soft tubs and 8-ounce whipped tubs. It's located in the cream cheese section of the dairy case at retailers for a suggested retail price of \$2.29-\$3.29.

The product is available for foodservice and industrial applications as well, and it already is being used in select school districts.

With the growth in demand for Greek cream cheese as well as its conventional cream cheese products, Franklin Foods is highly anticipating this spring's opening of its new plant in Casa Grande, Ariz., where Greek cream cheese and other products will be made.

The company is retooling a 15-year-old 90,000-square-foot plant that was originally built for orange juice production but never really utilized.

The company's western expansion, which is expected to create 59 jobs in Arizona, will cut transportation costs for West

Coast customers, giving them a new, cost-effective product source, Cardinale says.

The company decided on the location after a methodical search.

"We came upon Arizona, and we were just blown away," Gutknecht says. "It's a modern plant, laid out perfectly."

In addition, there is a great milk source in Arizona. Franklin Foods has a rich tradition of supporting local New England dairy farmers by purchasing fresh milk and cream from nearby farms and suppliers. The company will continue this tradition in Arizona by purchasing local milk and cream from United Dairymen of Arizona (UDA), according to Gutknecht. Cream cheese requires more butterfat than cheese, and the West is a surplus area for milkfat with UDA being a massive skim power manufacturer. The relationship will be mutually beneficial for both businesses, Gutknecht says. **CMN**

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Bayless, Sargento partner for top food trends

PLYMOUTH, Wis. — Chef Rick Bayless of Frontera Grill and Topolobampo in Chicago has partnered with Sargento Cheese to create his "Top Flavor and Food Trends for 2013" to help educate home cooks.

"It's easier than most think to integrate flavor into your favorite dishes. And cheese is welcoming to all kinds of flavor," Bayless says. "Whether it's barbecue tacos topped with Cheddar cheese, or the bold use of bitter greens like sorrel and dandelions, I expect these foods and flavors to gain popularity and inspire everyday cooks."

Bayless' Flavor and Food Trends for 2013 include:

- **Cuisine Trends** — Achieve Peruvian flavors by combining quinoa and cheese with fresh herbs like mint and cilantro, or try Middle Eastern influences such as Sumac dry spice to add a complex, lemony flavor to any meal or snack.

- **Preparation Trends** — Experiment with fermenting Kimchi to add a sour kick to everyday recipes like tacos and burgers. Use a slow cooker to braise chicken or pork combined with Sargento Extra Sharp Cheddar Shreds for tender, hearty dishes.

- **Vegetable Trends** — Elevate staple dishes with habanero chiles and Sargento Pepper Jack cheese. Or throw in aromatic chanterelle mushrooms, which offer earthy and fruity tastes that complement Sargento Swiss natural cheese. Visit a local farmers' market and enliven dishes with bitter greens like sorrel and dandelion.

- **Ingredient Trends** — Use unique fillings in tacos such as barbecue pork and Sargento Chef Blends 4-State Cheddar Shredded cheese. Layer unexpected flavors into sweet desserts by adding herbs like cilantro, basil or lemongrass. Or bring the bold flavors of curbside street vendors into the kitchen by crafting a torta with black beans, avocado, pickles onions and one of the many Sargento cheese varieties, like Sargento Artisan Blends Authentic Mexican Shredded cheese.

"2013 is going to be an exciting year for home cooks everywhere who can easily experiment with these emerging trends," says Erin Price, core marketing director, Sargento.

To help home cooks learn how to use the trends in everyday cooking, Bayless will assign his predictions to six influential food bloggers. The "Flavor Journey Correspondents" will investigate and report on these trends

throughout the year and document their experiences on their social media channels and the Sargento Facebook page, sharing culinary insights and recipes.

For more information, visit www.sargento.com. **CMN**

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