Spanish manufacturers innovate in health and wellness food

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Forget Germany and the UK as Western Europe's key health and wellness markets. Where product innovation is concerned, the new top contender is Spain, propelled forward by its maverick manufacturing base.

Although Spain ranks a close third behind the two leaders in terms of total fortified/functional packaged food value sales, its per capita spend of EUR43 was far ahead of both the UK (EUR36) and Germany (EUR23) in 2006. Euromonitor International focuses on some key trends and developments in Spain's health and wellness market.

Omega-3 everything

Spanish food manufacturers are driving the trend towards omega-3 fortification. Over the last few years, Instituto Omega 3, a research think-tank founded by Puleva Foods, carried out an extensive campaign to promote the health benefits of omega-3 fatty acids. The institute's output was circulated widely through press releases and media promotions. Within fortified/functional milk, omega-3 enriched products play a key role, next to those fortified with calcium or multivitamins. Cheese, a previously neglected area in terms of fortified/functional developments, has also benefited from the omega-3 fortification boom. The wave of omega-3 fortified products also has hit other packaged food sectors, such as chocolate confectionery, biscuits, bread, pasta, spreadable oils and fats, vegetable oils, and has even found its way into stuffed olives.

High-fibre trend

Naturally healthy high-fibre products are hugely popular in Spain, with Euromonitor International's research showing value sales reaching EUR834 million in 2006, up by 7% on the previous year. Product fortification with fibre is spreading fast, and the dairy sector is rapidly catching on to this trend. The well-established Spanish manufacturer CorporaciÃ³n Alimentaria PeÃ±asanta (CAPSA) launched Central Lechera Asturiana Natur Fibra, a fortified/functional milk variant with added soluble fibre, targeted mainly at â€œirregularâ€• female consumers. The introduction of Danone's fibre-enriched Bio probiotic yoghurt range highlighted the point that probiotic credentials alone are no longer sufficient to draw an audience, especially with the onslaught of private label products.

Race for product differentiation

Branded product manufacturers are under a great deal of pressure in Spain (as they are elsewhere) to stay ahead of their private label rivals. To illustrate the point, French retail giant Carrefour added aloe vera to its probotic private label range of yoghurts. Spanish dairy firm Iparlat also introduced aloe vera to its yoghurt line, while CorporaciÃ³n Alimentaria PeÃ±asanta (CAPSA) went one step further by adding both aloe vera and royal jelly to its Natur milk range. Royal jelly is very popular in Spain, and Euromonitor International expects to see a lot of products fortified with this ingredient in the future, particularly in dairy.

Soy milk no longer niche

In the last few years, soy has gone from being virtually unknown to one of the most popularised health food ingredients in Spain. Naturally healthy soy milk is one of the most dynamic health and wellness categories in the Spanish packaged food market overall, managing to more than triple its value sales from EUR24 million in 2002 to EUR87 million in 2006. Its emergence from a tiny niche was chiefly driven by the outstanding efforts of Leche Pascual promoting its Vive Soy brand, which also helped boost the sales of other soy milk producers.

Soy's rise to fame led Spanish manufacturers to market a wide range of packaged food products, many of which were not strictly soy-based, but enriched with either soy proteins or with stanols extracted from soy. Despite this popularity, soy-based meat alternatives have not yet caught on in Spain, probably because vegetarianism is not widespread in the country.

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