Superfruits are Here to Stay!

A report produced for First Flavor, Inc.

Prepared by the David Michael & Co. Marketing Department

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Without a doubt, the biggest food trends of the moment revolve around an elite group of antioxidant heavy fruits, known as superfruits. A superfruit is defined as a fruit that is high in nutrients, has tons of antioxidants, and is reported to lower the risk of a disease.

With consumers focusing on healthier lifestyles, manufacturers are increasingly adding different varieties of superfruits to their foods, in order to provide a nutritional benefit. The usage of a superfruit flavor may also help to reinforce a functional product's healthy image to consumers, in which the function is not directly related to the fruit.

The use of superfruit flavors in products that contain puree also helps to extend the flavor impact of the fruit, which in many cases can be difficult and expensive to source.

In some cases, however, superfruit flavors are used in non-functional products. As consumers familiarize themselves with certain superfruits, they may be more, or equally, attracted to the flavor of the fruit than its benefits. Of course, their use in non-functional, indulgent products could also help to offset the guilt that consumers may feel when buying or consuming those products, such as with a pomegranate flavored ice cream.

When you look at a list of superfruits, it varies from the obvious (an apple a day really *does* keep the doctor away!) to the exotic. Blueberries were the first to take America by storm, when in 2004, according to Food Product Design Magazine, superfruits got a jumpstart with the publication of the book "Superfoods Rx" by Steven Pratt. The book highlighted the antioxidant levels and anti-aging properties of blueberries (Berry).

Other traditional fruits have gained attention as "superfruits," as well. Avocados are high in fiber, magnesium, potassium, vitamin E and folate. And oranges, long regarded for high levels of vitamin C, are also reported to contain anti-cancer agents (Superfoods Rx). Recently, Fox News reported that a study of more than 100 plum, peach and nectarine varieties showed that they either "matched or exceeded blueberries in antioxidants and phytonutrients that are associated with preventing diseases" (Fox News).

Cranberries and pomegranates have followed suit. Cranberries, which are a North American fruit, have grown in popularity globally. So much so, that in 2008, more cranberry flavored food and beverages were launched in Europe than in North America. Pomegranate has escalated from an "exotic" fruit to one of the most utilized flavors in new beverages (Mintel GNPD).

As "new" superfruits emerge each day, whether by media attention or manufacturer promotion, consumers find themselves puzzled by the sometimes mysterious fruits from far off locales.

While it is almost commonplace today, there was a time, not very long ago, when the Amazonian antioxidant powerhouse acai was a mystery. But, after some attention on the Oprah Winfrey Show, sales of acai products (including non-food)

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rose to $13.5 million in 2008, compared to just $435,000 in 2006 (ABC News).

To better familiarize consumers with this unusual berry, acai was paired with blueberry, pomegranate or chocolate to help establish some common ground. As consumers grew more accustomed to its taste, it could be found on its own.

Himalayan goji berry, also known as wolfberry, is generally sold without accompanying flavors in dried or supplement form (not counting the chocolate covered varieties!). But, in a number of products it has been blended with more familiar flavors such as mango, green tea, raspberry, passionfruit and pomegranate, as well as jujubes in China. Speaking of jujubes, this well known Asian superfruit, also known as Chinese red date, is a staple of Chinese medicine. We saw a bit of growth outside of Asia Pacific in 2008, mainly in Europe, and expect this to be a trend in the next few years.

One of this year's break-out stars is mangosteen, a delicious and powerful tropical Asian fruit, whose inedible purple rind, or pericarp, is very high in xanthones. (The pericarp is ground and used in supplements.) While it's been the focus of some "cure-all" supplements, along with acai, over the past few years, it is finally taking hold in new food and beverage products. And, while the flavor of a mangosteen is considered to be quite delicious, it too has been blended to help pave its way, most noticeably with pear, pomegranate, peach, tea, mango (which has no relation or taste similarities to the mangosteen) and kiwi. Kiwi also happens to be a superfruit - high in vitamin C, and as rich in potassium as bananas.

Plan to hear more about Yumberry this year, as well. "Yumberry" is simply a marketing name for the Yang Mei Berry, a southeast Chinese fruit that is high in antioxidants, and boasts a number of nutrients, including vitamin C, thiamine, riboflavin and carotene. It is still quite new to the world of packaged goods, in fact, a search on Mintel's Global New Products Database yielded results dating back only to October 2007. But, because of its flavor, healthy attributes, and, of course, name, it has great potential to become the next "it" superfruit.

There are some superfruits gaining popularity apart from their benefits, such as dragonfruit, which has popped up in everything from gum and drinkable yogurt to malternative beverages over the past three years. Yuzu, an Asian citrus fruit gaining attention in Japanese ponzu sauce, and as a flavor of the moment on many menus, has also been credited with "super powers."

Since the majority of new superfruits are native to Asia and South America, it is no surprise that the majority of new growth is taking place in North America and Europe. Looking into our crystal ball, we see a number of other superfruits that should appear more frequently in the near future. Acerola cherry is already on its way, having grown by leaps and bounds in Europe, from only 35 new product introductions in 2004 to over 200 in 2008. North American growth has been slightly less dramatic, but steady nonetheless.

The North American aronia berry, also known as chokeberry, is probably more well-known in Europe than its native continent. This antioxidant rich berry has found a niche in new products in Poland and Russia, but with increased attention over its superfruit status, that could change. The umbu, also known as the Brazil Plum, is native to northeast Brazil. It is high in vitamins B and C, and said to be a good source of energy. The interesting thing about umbu is how it varies

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in size, from as small as a cherry to as large as a lemon. It is traditionally eaten fresh, or made into a jam.

In Asia we find hawthorn, a staple in Chinese medicine for over 2,500 years. The list of this fruit's reported functions ranges from joint health to blood pressure. And longan, which according to Chinese medicine is a warm food that benefits the heart and spleen.

Finally, African baobab has grown throughout Central and Western Africa for thousands of years. It is naturally high in dietary fiber, contains essential amino acids, and is an excellent source of Vitamin C. With recent novel food approval in Europe, and American GRAS approval not far behind, the potential for this wildly grown fruit is tremendous.

Of course, this is merely a small selection of this ever growing market. New superfruits are "discovered" each day. From the North American grown bilberry and cloudberry, to the European lingonberry, and the Indian amla (also known as Indian gooseberry), the list is never-ending.

Fruit is just a small part of the entire superfoods phenomenon, which includes other healthy favorites, such as cinnamon, dark chocolate, soy, tea and quinoa.

Manufacturers must tread carefully, however, when it comes to superfruit claims. While noting the well established claims, such as antioxidant levels of a fruit, may be commonplace, other claims, such as "cancer prevention," could be difficult to prove and troublesome.

We expect to see superfruit introductions continue to grow, and new varieties catch consumers' interest. Expect to see superfruit flavors compete with traditional fruits in product categories where fruit flavors are prevalent, as well as in non-functional products.

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About David Michael & Co.:

Family-owned and operated since 1896, David Michael & Co. has been a leader and an innovator in the food flavor industry for more than one hundred years. In addition to complete product development assistance, David Michael offers a comprehensive line of over 40,000 flavors, stabilizers and natural colors, which can be custom-designed to meet the needs of virtually any food product. With its global headquarters in Philadelphia, PA, David Michael also has facilities in Northbrook, IL, San Bernardino, CA, and internationally in Lerma, Mexico (David Michael de Mexico SA de CV), Valence, France (David Michael Europe, S.A.S.) and Beijing, China (David Michael (Beijing) Flavor Co. Ltd.)

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