Luscious & Light desserts enter market

The stomach grumbles, the mouth waters, and yet the mind balks at eating the entire dessert. Many people feel this way after eating a meal and the sweet tooth starts to kick in.

For one woman, never being able to eat all of her dessert because of blood sugar problems and a lifelong struggle with dieting grew tiresome. So, Holli Vaughn of Washington, Okla. decided to do something about it; thus, Luscious & Light desserts were born.

Vaughn and Oklahoma State University graduate Carla Nikkel, owners of Recommended Foods Inc., started developing great tasting frozen desserts without the added carbohydrates, fat and calories. The two women balance each other well with Vaughn as the chef and Nikkel as the dietician.

After developing the recipes, the women spent months trying to find a company to package their product but were unsuccessful. As a result, Vaughn contacted Jim Brooks at the Food & Agricultural Products Center. Brooks, a business planning and marketing specialist, was able to locate a co-packer within one day.

“It was unbelievable, we had been trying for months, and he walked right in and knew just what to do,” Nikkel said. “He has been a wealth of information.”

Brooks was able to find a co-packer with a setup that would accommodate both Vaughn’s and Nikkel’s needs.

“There have been times when we have wanted to jump the gun on something, and he’s encouraged us to back up and make sure we’ve checked all our options,” Nikkel said.

When it came to spreading the word about the company and its products, the women hired a marketing firm out of Ft. Worth, Texas. The marketing firm helped to establish a brand for the Luscious & Light desserts.

The brand helps the women compete with Sara Lee and other big name dessert companies, Nikkel said. Both Nikkel and Vaughn want their company perceived as a brand name and not a “mom and pop” company.

“We want to be portrayed as a business to be reckoned with,” Nikkel said.

Vaughn and Nikkel have presented their products and marketing material to buyers at grocery stores, and the buyers have been complimentary of their work and do not consider the women’s business as a Luscious & Light, continued on page 4
A message from the director

A consumer retail food shopper study was released recently at the International Dairy-Deli Bake Show in Chicago indicating almost two thirds of the shoppers polled agreed that deli shops sell too many unhealthy foods.

The Grocery Manufacturers of America co-sponsored an announcement about the promotion of physical activity and limiting the intake of fats, sugars and salt to reduce obesity and certain types of nutrition-related diseases. Large national food companies such as Kraft Foods, Inc. have released information that they are implementing wide-ranging programs that they are implementing to improve the nutritional profile of their retail foods portfolio as well as providing their customers with more information to make informed food choices.

Another report this spring has shown that local and store food brands experienced significant growth in sales over national brands this past year. Retail food shoppers have realized the value, quality and nutritional strength available in local and store brands. Considering the trends of food purchases and the confidence of consumers in local and store brands, there is great opportunity for Oklahoma food manufacturers.

Essentially, the opportunity for Oklahoma food processors is to evaluate food sales and buying needs of your local area and determine the best way you can meet one or more of those needs. Certainly, it could be a specific low carbohydrate or low fat food. It may simply be a new package or label configuration that best delivers the “healthy” message of your product.

There is a need in Oklahoma for convenient and easily prepared healthful foods and the effective delivery of these foods to retail consumers in portioned units and attractive packages.

The Food & Agricultural Products Center is ready to help you develop and deliver these products to the retail market. We have a food processing pilot plant available for product development and a quality control and sensory center to help develop product labels for retail products. Call one of our business planning and marketing specialists to get started on that new product. Don’t hesitate to act on opportunities.

J. Roy Escoubas, Director

FAPC welcomes new Industry Advisory Committee member

The FAPC would like to welcome John Bailey, director of manufacturing for the Schwan’s Bakery Inc. facility in Stilwell, Okla., as a new member of the FAPC Industry Advisory Committee.

“It’s an honor to be asked to serve on the FAPC Industry Advisory Committee,” Bailey said. When asked what his reaction was to the FAPC, Bailey’s statement was “what a resource.”

Bailey is responsible for all plant functions and oversees between 500 and 800 employees at the Stilwell plant. The facility is a 610,000-square foot plant that includes high-speed, ready-to-bake fruit pie and cobbler lines and a frozen vegetable line.

Ramsey receives citation signed by governor

After numerous years of service to the FAPC, Don Ramsey, president and owner of Blue & Gold Sausage of Jones, Okla., has decided to retire from the FAPC Industry Advisory Committee. As a result of his support to the FAPC, Ramsey was awarded an official citation signed by Gov. Brad Henry for his meritorious service to the FAPC.

Ramsey said he was elated and happy to receive the citation.

“To see the process of the FAPC grow to what it is today gives me a great deal of pleasure,” he said. “The FAPC is a great contribution for Oklahoma.”

Ramsey served on the first Advisory Committee in 1989 when the planning was underway for the FAPC and was one of the first members named by the governor to the committee in 1996.
Financial workshop slated

The FAPC is hosting a workshop to discuss "How to Forecast and Analyze Your Financial Statements." The workshop will be held Aug. 12 from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the FAPC. The interactive workshop will help participants address business issues through financial management assistance, discussion of better accounting systems and strategies, and examples of proper accounting techniques and record keeping. The workshop will also include an interactive CD-ROM for home reference, a featured luncheon speaker and discussions with FAPC faculty and staff. The early bird registration fee is $75 and is due July 30. After July 30, registration is $95. To register, call Cecilia Brewer at (405) 744-6071 or register online at www.fapc.okstate.edu.

DASNR dean search

The search for a new OSU Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources dean is in its final stages as the candidates have completed the interview process. For more information, visit www1.dasnr.okstate.edu/candidates.shtml. The candidates include John Abernathy, Kirby Barrick, D.C. Coston and Keith Lusby.

FAPC hosts Research Symposium

The FAPC hosted its 3rd Research Symposium. The symposium highlighted food and agricultural products research conducted by FAPC and other Oklahoma State University researchers. Peter Muriana, FAPC food microbiologist and chair of the symposium, said the event included six oral presentations and 30 poster presentations.

The event provided an opportunity for graduate students and staff to make presentations of their work, to familiarize others in this field at OSU with what is being done in other labs and possibly foster future collaborations among colleagues,” Muriana said.

Some of the topics of the presentations included design of a watermelon pulp fruit and juice extraction machine, non-destructive methods for predicting beef tenderness, case study of selected economic impacts of services provided by the FAPC, reduction of *Listeria monocytogenes* on ready-to-eat meats using liquid smoke extracts and mineral extracts from peanut and pecan shell material for traditional soap making.

A special feature of this year’s symposium was a presentation by keynote speaker Juergen Richt, a veterinary medical officer with the National Animal Disease Center. Richt spoke about animal prion diseases in the United States.

“The occurrence of BSE in the USA would have far reaching consequences,” Muriana said. “We were glad to have Dr. Richt provide an update on BSE and his current research in this area that is of vital importance to a main economic commodity of Oklahoma.”

Symposium discusses food safety

The FAPC recently hosted a Food Safety Symposium to discuss prions and enterotoxins. Food safety is a major concern for producers, as well as consumers, said Stanley Gilliland, FAPC food microbiologist and Food Safety Symposium committee chair.

"From initial production practices on the farm, to the many multi-faceted processes food undergoes, the food industry continually searches to improve food safety practices,” Gilliland said. “The symposium provided the latest information on food safety to all who attended the symposium.”

The symposium also provided an opportunity for participants to interact with some of the experts in the area of food safety.

The speakers during the symposium included M. Susan Brewer, University of Illinois; Daniel Engeljohn, FSIS/USDA; Reginald W. Bennett, FDA; Garry McKee, FSIS-USDA; Leigh Ann Barnes, FoodProtech; and Christina DeWitt, OSU Department of Animal Science.

The FAPC was excited to offer some of the nation’s leading food safety scientists as speakers of the symposium, said J. Roy Escoubas, FAPC director.

“‘They provided expert information and discussions concerning prions and enterotoxins, reinforcing the need for food safety,” Escoubas said.

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“mom and pop” company. “That’s the highest compliment we could receive,” Nikkel said. “It’s a very competitive market, and I feel if you want to stay on the store shelves, you have to offer a complete package or you will get lost in the shuffle. That’s one of the things Jim Brooks promoted. He said you really have to get out there and promote your product.”

All of Vaughn’s and Nikkel’s work led to a launch demonstration in Crest Discount Foods in Edmond, Okla. During the demonstration, 118 cases of desserts were sold. Albertson’s and other Crest Discount Foods stores currently have the products available.

Nikkel also said that Kroger will be launching Luscious & Light Desserts in nine surrounding states in the fall.

A few examples of the products being carried are Baked Coconut Custard, Chocolate Decadence and Cream Cheese Brownies to name a few. These products have 50 percent less fat than regular desserts.

Nikkel said the products cost a little more than the competitions’ products, but the quality is there along with the nutritional information. Each box also includes a nutritional fact sheet titled “Sensible Solutions” and coupons for Luscious & Light products.

“Jim Brooks told us the areas of marketing our new products that are very important include emphasizing the quality of the desserts and nutritional benefits and offering a fair and competitive price to the consumer,” Nikkel said. “If the consumer believes they are buying quality, then price is not always the final reason for the purchase.”

Brooks said Vaughn and Nikkel have been very diligent in developing their frozen dessert recipes to accommodate those consumers who are looking for the low carbohydrate, less fat and reduced calorie products.

“They have researched and selected only quality ingredients that meet the nutritional values for their product line,” Brooks said.