

hormones. Breyers will be the first to go artificial hormone-free, followed by other Unilever ice cream brands. In addition, all Breyers vanilla will be made only with sustainably sourced, Rainforest Alliance Certified vanilla beans from Madagascar.

More and more, “Consumers want not just good for them, but good for the planet, too,” says Nancy Hytone Leb, chief strategy officer at Pasadena, Calif.-based Choctal (www.choctal.com), which has “direct trade” relationships with small farmers in Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic. Choctal offers eight flavors of super-premium “single-origin” chocolate and vanilla ice cream. So one variety of chocolate is made exclusively with beans from Costa Rica while another is made only with beans from Ghana — or Kalimantan or the Dominican Republic. Same thing for the four vanilla varieties. “So there’s really no such thing as ‘plain vanilla’ at Choctal,” quips Hytone Leb. The Specialty Foods Association’s designation of vanilla as one of five key trends for 2015 bodes well for the company, as does Starbucks’ promotion of single-origin coffee and chocolate pastries. Thanks to the chain, “A lot more people ‘get’ the single-origin concept now and want to try it out in other categories.”

Although Choctal’s eight flavors remain the same, the company recently added single-serve, 4-ounce cups to its lineup. A less expensive way to compare and contrast different chocolates and vanillas, the cups also provide the portion control many consumers crave. “They’ve done extraordinarily well for us so far,” says Hytone Leb.

BETTER-FOR-YOU, NOT DIET

Frozen novelties are another popular choice among calorie-conscious consumers looking for portion-control. Traditional “diet” novelties like Weight Watchers (-11.7%) and Skinny Cow (-14.8%) did not perform well during the most recent 12 weeks. But products naturally lower in fat and calories, particularly those with other better-for-you attributes (protein, vitamin C, etc.), are gaining ground. For example, Dreyer’s/Edy’s Outshine Fruit Bars, some of which contain vegetables, too, saw their sales jump 18.9%. And Boston-based Yasso

Choctal offers super-premium single-origin chocolate and vanilla, now in both pints and single-serve 4-ounce cups.

The Scoop on Commodity Prices

Wholesale dairy prices are down from last year’s record highs, freeing up more funds for promotional activity.

BY MONICA GELINAS & DENNIS COLLINS

After suffering through last year’s record high dairy prices, wholesale market prices going into this summer’s ice cream season should offer retailers opportunities for customer pricing incentives.

Last year’s extended spike in prices, which drove the cream producer price index to historically high levels, was triggered by a combination of unprecedented export demand and production that failed to keep pace.

While ice cream dairy component prices are now down, the cost of primary ice cream ingredients is, on average, higher relative to year-ago levels. For example, average sugar prices are ranging 20 to 30% higher. However, egg prices are mixed: whole liquid eggs are 10% lower while liquid yolks and other egg products are up by roughly the same amount.

Looking forward, we expect dairy prices to remain solid through mid-summer on increasing production and subdued global demand, including Russia’s ban on EU dairy products.

Egg production is forecast higher for 2015 on lower feed costs and expanding egg flocks, which should translate into lower prices — the exception being in California due to its new cage-size regulations.

For sugar, lower beginning domestic stocks and a forecast decline in global production are expected to support current higher prices. ■

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(www.yasso.com), which sells frozen Greek yogurt-based novelties, continues to post strong year-over-year gains, reports director of sales and marketing Mike Watts.

One of the keys to Yasso’s success is its introduction last year of five “indulgent” flavors more reminiscent of what they’d find in the ice cream category (think Chocolate Fudge and Peanut Butter Cup). In fact, the company’s new Mint Chocolate Chip variety was the No. 3 frozen novelty introduced in 2014. “Clearly, there was a gap in the category between diet and indulgence,” says Watts. The new indulgent flavors have been so successful, he adds, that Yasso is rolling out two more this year: Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough and Coffee Chocolate Chip, both 100 calories apiece. The company is also introducing two 150-calorie frozen “candy bars,” featuring Greek frozen yogurt, candy pieces and gooey caramel covered in chocolate. Available varieties include Sea Salt Caramel and Toffee Crunch. By keeping calories

low, “We hope to increase usage for a product that has historically been viewed as a ‘once-in-a-while’ treat,” says Watts. Another company known for ▶

