

Cocoa-derived Cirku launched for better circulation

By Jess Halliday, 12-Jun-2009

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Mars Botanical is launching a new flavanol-rich cocoa extract called Cirku for use in products aimed at maintaining healthy circulation.

Cocoa was consumed by ancient civilizations in the Americas centuries ago, but more attention has been paid to its healthy properties by modern scientist recently due to its high content of healthy antioxidants. Flavanols in particular are understood to aid circulation of oxygen and nutrients around the body.

After 20 years of research including human clinical trials, Mars Botanical – a division of Mars Corporation established in 2007 to focus on healthy botanicals – finally launched Cirku at the IFT meeting and expo in Anaheim this week.

The ingredient is made using a patented process called Cocoapro, which is said to accurately measure active compound levels and, by reducing exposure to high temperatures, helps protect the flavanols. The result is that it contains guaranteed consistently high levels – around 550mg of flavanols per gram.

At the same time as it is introducing the ingredient to the food industry, Mars Botanicals is also launching a supplement beverage powder mix called CirkuHealth, which is sold to consumers online at www.cirku.com in original and sweetened varieties.

Research and demand

At the IFT show, general manager and chief technology officer Dr Mary Wagner, PhD, gave a session entitled 'Plant flavanols and health: Learning from cocoa flavanols'.

"The body of research is impressive," she said. Mars has published or supported over 100 scientific publications on cocoa compounds and many others have been conducted by other experts in the field.

"In the world of science, it's rare to find a food or ingredient with such widespread health potential. From clinical studies to population research, we've begun to understand the future impact of these powerful compounds."

Moreover, flavanols and the umbrella group flavonoids are garnering more attention from consumers, who already appreciate cocoa as a treat food.

"The health potential of this fruit is essentially untapped," said Wagner. *"We're helping to unlock the nutritional power of an American favorite."*

The company says that although dark chocolate with a high cocoa content is commonly perceived to be healthier than sweetened confections with low cocoa levels, cocoa percentage is not actually a reliable measure of health benefits.

This is because fermentation, drying and roasting, all of which help develop the flavor of chocolate, may reduce the flavanol content.

Holistic team

Mars Botanical counts experts from a number of different areas in its team – from plant biologists to product developers. It also works closely with cocoa farmers, and is involved in initiatives like the Cocoa Sustainability Partnership in Southeast Asia, which educates and supports farmers and plants more trees.

Mars is aiming to have all its cocoa certified as sustainably sourced by 2020.

Mars Botanical is not just working with flavanols from cocoa. It is also investigating tea, wine, and other fruits and vegetables.

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