

Put Some Mambo in Your Milk



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What are the growth opportunities for dairy in Hispanic beverages?

In 2007, more than 45 million Hispanics lived in the U.S., accounting for 15% of the country's population. By 2020 that figure is expected to grow to 64 million or nearly 20% of the population. Immigrants and U.S.-born Hispanics have vastly different dairy preferences, perceptions and consumption patterns, with foreign-born U.S. Hispanics being both the largest group and the ripest target for the dairy industry. Understanding the distinct attitudes and taste perceptions of this group of foreign-born Hispanics can help dairy processors find new avenues for beverage growth.

Dairy is an integral part of the cuisines and daily customs of the Latino population in many other countries, so most foreign-born Hispanics already love dairy products, especially milk and drinkable yogurt. This group adds new American foods and flavors to its diet, but also has distinct taste and flavor preferences from the general population. As Hispanic immigrants acculturate, their lifestyles, tastes and health conditions begin to mirror those of their neighbors, and they may abandon deep-rooted cultural dairy traditions. However, by reinforcing Hispanics' dairy traditions before they begin to acculturate, the dairy industry can help maintain high dairy consumption among this group. Let's start by exploring some dairy beverages originating in Latin American cultures and cuisines.

Licuaos are the Mexican equivalent of smoothies or milkshakes, and people from the Caribbean call them batidos. They tend to be lighter in consistency and "more natural" tasting than the American versions. Reportedly 70% of foreign-born Hispanic kids and adults drink licuaos or batidos once a week, often at breakfast. In the Hispanic home or market, they are made in the blender and frequently start with milk. Additions include fresh fruits like bananas and berries; sometimes a sweetener, like sugar or honey; and various spices or flavors, including cinnamon or vanilla; and, in some cases, even yogurt or cereal.

Ready-to-drink (RTD) licuaos are perfect for the busier lifestyle of the acculturated Hispanic. This group also tends to have a higher incidence of obesity, diabetes and hypertension, so products with lower-fat milk, added protein powder, or alternative sweeteners may appeal to evolving Hispanic consumer needs. Lala Foods offers Yomi licuado, a RTD product designed especially for kids that is low in fat, calories and sugar, and fortified with essential vitamins and calcium. The new Starbucks Vivanno smoothies feature whey protein and fiber, and come in two Hispanic-friendly flavors Banana Chocolate and Orange Mango Banana. Juanita Foods recently introduced a retail powdered piña colada licuado mix with whey; and Yo Gusto smoothies feature Guava, Mango and Bananaberry flavors.

Atol de elote is a thick, restorative drink often consisting of milk, sugar, fresh corn and cinnamon. Originally from the Mayan culture, many Hispanics consider it to have natural curative properties and drink it routinely for comfort and preventive health.

Horchata is a popular beverage in Mexico, Puerto Rico, Nicaragua and Honduras. Although recipes vary, it is often made with rice, almonds, sugar and a dash of cinnamon or ground cocoa. Higher-end versions include fresh milk, nonfat dry milk or whole milk powder. Both RTD and powdered forms are sold in Mexican grocery stores. This beverage is becoming increasingly popular in foodservice establishments and available in U.S. grocery stores, especially in Hispanic neighborhoods.

There has been a significant increase in Latin American-inspired beverages in restaurants across the U.S. Hispanic beverage menu options include the offering of low-fat guava-, banana- and papaya-blended yogurt beverages at Einstein Bros.; a Mayan Mango Smoothie at Red Robin; Claim Jumpers' Mexican Coffee; and a Dulce de Leche latte offering at Caribou.

In addition to consuming these unique Hispanic beverages, many Latinos are heavy consumers of white milk. Hispanic moms cite the health benefits of milk as important reasons why they encourage their children to drink milk, and as a result, Hispanic children are big

milk drinkers. The average, less-acculturated Hispanic family purchases 2.3 gallons of milk on a typical shopping trip as compared with 1.3 gallons for U.S.-born Hispanics and 1.2 gallons for non-Hispanic families. Hispanics greatly prefer the creamier texture of whole or 2% milk, and Hispanic moms often purchase a variety of dairy products to make sure that everyone in the family is happy.

Recent research at Southeast Dairy Foods Research Center explored ethnic preferences for chocolate milk and strawberry drinkable yogurt. Professor MaryAnne Drake, Ph.D., notes, "For drinkable yogurts, most Hispanics were in the drinkable yogurt-lovers cluster. Drinkable yogurts with moderate/high intensities of fresh fruit flavor and sweet taste were liked but so were products with intense color, and other fruit flavors.¹ Chocolate was a clear favorite among Hispanic children, and high chocolate flavor and color were the most important factors driving the appeal within this group."²

Given the continued growth of the Hispanic population, and their strong propensity to consume dairy beverages, dairy processors across the country should consider developing more dairy beverages that appeal to the Hispanic population. As shown by the widespread popularity of salsa and tortillas, and the recent proliferation of ethnic-inspired dairy beverages on restaurant menus, products developed for the Hispanic market can have high mainstream appeal. For more insights into Hispanic beverage trends and for formulation assistance, contact techsupport@innovatewithdairy.com. ■

A complete list of suppliers of whey fractions and more information on whey ingredients may be found at www.innovatewithdairy.com. Technical Support Consultant Sharon Gerdes can be reached at 800/248-8829.

1. Thompson, J.L., Lopetcharat, K., Drake, M.A. 2007. Preferences for commercial strawberry drinkable yogurts among African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic consumers in the United States. *J. Dairy Sci.* 90:4974-4987.

2. Thompson, J.L., Gerard, P.D., and Drake, M.A. 2007. Chocolate milk and the Hispanic consumer. *J. Food Sci.* 72:S666-S675.