

# Fruit on the run

Thanks to health and wellness, produce has become the hottest aisle in snacks **BY RISHA GOTLIEB**



**I**s it too far fetched to envision a future in which consumers crave fruit and vegetables as much as potato chips and chocolate bars? Maybe not considering that fruit and vegetables have historically been known as a sinful treat; after all, Eve tempted Adam with a lowly apple, not a bag of Doritos.

Indeed, fruit and veggies are getting a fun makeover. Producers are adding decadent and fun flavours as well as ingredients that include everything from nuts and caramel to dried cranberries and yogurt. The growth of real fruit snacks is outpacing that of commercialized fruit snacks, according to Marion Chan of TrendSpotter Consulting. Even makers of processed snacks know that consumers increasingly prefer real ingredients to artificial ingredients in their fruit snacks, she explains.

Joel Gregoire, an industry analyst with NPD Group, says the number of Canadians consuming fruit and vegetables as a snack is on the rise. "Fruit is the No. 1 snack food that people carry from home, followed by granola bars and yogurt," he says.

Ron Lemaire, the president of the Canadian Produce Marketing Association, says the trend is getting a big push from the cultivation of baby veggies and baby fruit that can

be consumed without the need to cut them. Also, new packaging is extending the shelf life and freshness of produce.

Greg Wilson, vice-president of sales and marketing for Reichel Foods, based in Rochester, Minn., says his company's Dippin' Stix line is growing in popularity. It consists of 13 SKUs of single-serve snacking treats with such offerings as apples and caramel, and baby carrots and hummus.

Vancouver-based Sun Rich Fresh Foods has come out with a line of enticing and healthy salad kits. "Our Waldorf salad kit combines ready-to-serve apple chunks, grapes and walnuts with a low-fat vanilla-yogurt dressing," says Jeanette Weeks, the company's retail sales manager. Weeks adds that a tropical-themed "Sunshine" salad kit will soon hit the shelves. It features pineapple, oranges and apples combined with shredded coconut, dried cranberries and a creamy vanilla-yogurt dressing.

This infusion of creativity is showing up big-time in Europe. In the Netherlands, Zon Fruit and Vegetables launched Snoepmaatjes, three varieties of baby veggies in a handy 250 gram shaker with kid-friendly faces (see below). And Italy's Azienda Agroalimentare La Veneta offers pineapples and grapes in compact see-through packages called punnets. For those on the go, forks are included. **CG**

## SOME NICE LIGHT SNACKS



**REICHEL FOODS**  
The company's Dippin' Stix line includes Sliced Apples & Yogurt Fruit Dip, and Baby Carrots & Hummus



**ZON FRUIT**  
Packaging for the Dutch company's line of baby veggies features quirky faces to attract kids



**MOOV**  
Because fruit snacking can be indulgent, Moov has just launched strawberries covered in dark Belgian chocolate