



SUPERFRUITS

Superfruits = super growth . . . for some

This we know: superfruits are growing like nobody's business. What you may not know is that not every superfruit product is a guaranteed success, and some superfruits are falling off their pedestals.

Case in point: noni. Perhaps one of the first exotic superfruits, noni's sales are down in mainstream markets by about one third from their 2008 high, according to SPINS data. In the natural-market channel, while noni is currently holding steady over the past few months, sales are still down by about 20 per cent from 2008.

"I'm a firm believer that noni is not dead," says Steve Siegel, vice president at superfruit supplier Ecuadorian Rainforest. "It's more specialised than a superfruit. They'll discover some other benefit and it'll take on a new role."

We can't talk about superfruits without talking about açai. The purple fruit from the Amazon has reigned supreme, growing by a blockbuster 900 per cent in naturals between 2007 and 2009, and 1,400 per cent in mainstream markets during that time, according to SPINS data. And that's not even talking about the direct-to-consumer channel.

But can we talk? In March, açai took a hit on two fronts, with the common thread being irresponsible marketers. On the one hand, scurrilous billing practices filched consumers out of money. On the other hand, Oprah and Doctor Oz. Hint: don't mess with Oprah.

From a high at the end of March, açai's sales in retail channels were off by about 35 per cent in the next two months. Ouch!

The slide continued with another 12 per cent drop in sales from June to July —

but then sales stabilised in August, according to the latest SPINS data.

Still, açai remains atop the superfruits category. "In general, it's a category that isn't slowing down. Our No. 1-selling ingredient in 2008 is açai," Siegel says, "and by the end of 2009, it will still be at least in the top three."

Açai perfectly demonstrates the game of superfruits. On the one hand there is science — we can talk antioxidant ORAC values (açai's near the top of the leaderboard), or we can talk actual published research (pomegranate boasts some 133 studies). While most successful superfruits have science, many are so new to the world there hasn't been time to properly assay their chemical profiles and align them with consumer benefits. But what they may lack in science they make up for it in marketing. And this is where the game is played.

SUPERFRUITS: WHERE MONEY GROWS ON TREES

Sorted based on 52 weeks ending 5/16/2009	52 weeks ending 5/16/2009		52 weeks ending 5/17/2008		52 weeks ending 5/19/2007	
	Current dollars	Current units	Current dollars	Current units	Current dollars	Current units
Açai	\$9,025,639	428,553	\$2,379,809	117,996	\$1,122,456	54,952
Goji berry	\$3,221,101	129,104	\$3,906,868	164,771	\$3,027,296	130,275
Mangosteen	\$1,551,070	67,505	\$2,457,743	117,290	\$2,752,116	142,600
Noni	\$2,405,261	102,022	\$3,097,612	132,817	\$3,954,716	164,212
Pomegranate	\$1,119,259	81,232	\$1,290,808	108,064	\$1,236,840	115,131

Source: SPINScan Conventional

Sorted based on 52 weeks ending 5/16/2009	52 weeks ending 5/16/2009		52 weeks ending 5/17/2008		52 weeks ending 5/19/2007	
	Current dollars	Current units	Current dollars	Current units	Current dollars	Current units
Açai	\$2,510,027	249,331	\$786,071	73,244	\$328,262	17,893
Goji berry	\$508,636	45,045	\$612,898	53,977	\$270,764	11,562
Mangosteen	\$225,931	14,647	\$319,919	20,725	\$250,981	13,944
Noni	\$1,213,654	121,119	\$1,800,238	160,026	\$1,719,391	143,660
Pomegranate	\$1,607,338	208,414	\$1,287,276	148,346	\$804,806	92,471

Source: SPINScan Natural

And so pomegranate, with much science to vouch for it, continues its successful growth curve—at least in mainstream markets. However, in early-adopter natural markets pomegranate sales are down 25 per cent over 2008, according to SPINS.

One strategy is to mix it up. “Once the stand-alone product becomes stale, you’ll see formulations of various superfruits together,” offers Siegel. “There might be product cannibalisation, but no product or ingredient lasts forever.”

Mangosteen is another old-school superfruit whose fortunes have fallen off. “It’s always been overpriced,” suggests Brien Quirk, director of R&D at Draco Natural Products, which supplies a range of superfruits.

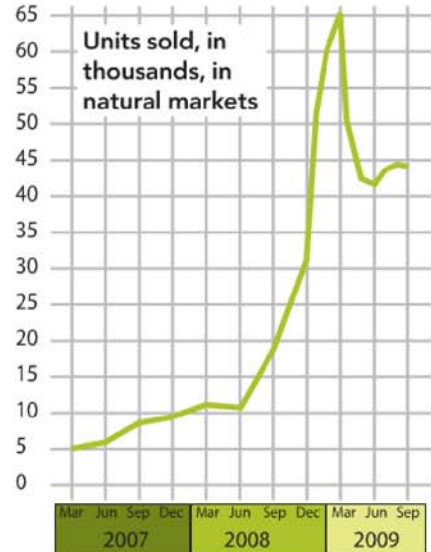
So what’s next? “If I had to pick the next four superfruits,” says Quirk, “it would be blue honey berry, which is supposed to be five times higher antioxidants than blueberries; euphoria, which is similar to lichi; cili; and yumberry.”

Siegel says maqui, deeper purple than even açai, is already gearing up – his company has been back-ordered in maqui since May.

Another contender is baobob, sourced from Africa and which Europe approved in June, the US in September. “For now, it’s maqui time,” says Siegel. “As interest in maqui declines, formulators will say, ‘Let’s take on a new ingredient.’”

—Todd Runestad

AÇAI BOOMS, THEN LEVELS AFTER MARCH SCANDALS



Source: SPINSscan Natural

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