

# NATURAL PRODUCTS EXPO WEST



## WHAT'S NEW AT THIS YEAR'S NATURAL PRODUCTS EXPO WEST 2017

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# CONVENTIONAL WISDOM WATCH

“It’s like déjà vu all over again.” - Yogi Berra



## THE CHANGE OVER

It appears that we have reached an inflection point, resulting from a new generation of rebels and freethinkers.

**CW:** The hippies have won.



## DIVERSITY



Bolder flavors and more culturally diverse foods are opening minds and palates, speaking to the broader idea of what is going on in the world right now.

**CW:** Go bold or go home.



## NATURAL ENERGY

For Millennials, the best part of waking up is “cold brew” in their cup. Their cold brew obsession presents an opportunity for Starbucks and start-ups alike.

**CW:** Get ready for coffee 4.0.



## THE COMPASSION EFFECT



Millennials are the most cause-centric generation yet, and they’ve opted to use their economic power to be a voice for social change.

**CW:** New mantra: Doing well by doing good, doing well by doing good...



## HERITAGE FOODS

Whole and ancient foods in their original form have a long history of supporting good health and are full of the essence of what they are.

**CW:** “It’s the real thing”.





## THE CHANGE OVER

There is a Chinese curse that says ‘May you live in interesting times.’ Like it or not, we live in interesting times.

The future can look frightening, depending on where you stand. A strategic inflection point is a time in the life of a business when its fundamentals are about to change. That change presents an opportunity to rise to new heights. But, it may also signal the beginning of the end. Inflection points in technology include the advent of the Internet and smart phones. Andy Grove, former Intel CEO and Silicon Valley icon who died last year, wrote in his widely read management book, *Only the Paranoid Survive*, “Strategic inflection points can be caused by technological change but they are more than technological change. They can be caused by competitors but they are more than just competition. They are full-scale changes in the way business is conducted, so that simply adopting new technology or fighting the competition as you used to may be insufficient. They build up force so insidiously that you may have a hard time even putting a finger on what has changed, yet you know that something has.”

I think many in the food industry would agree that something has changed. Millennials, 80 million strong (perhaps 100 million, including immigrant populations) are that change. They make up more of the world’s annual spending each year. They don’t conform to the status quo. They get up in the morning and decide: What am I going to consume or not consume today? Am I going to buy my food or grow my own? If I’m going to buy something, what’s the impact of that product on the environment? The Millennial is a consumer building her life journey, her own way, focused on being of service to the greater community or to future generations. The Millennials’ shared core values are disrupting to every industry, not just to the food business. If they can’t find a product or service they want, they’ll build it.

Grove’s words speak to many established companies struggling to find a way to stay relevant. Several major brands have launched organic and clean-label versions of their legacy products. It’s a start — but it’s not enough. Similar to their Baby Boomer parents, Millennials are searchers too, but they use different search terms. Their ability to instantly verify any product or marketing claim poses a daunting challenge to any manufacturer. Grove shares in his book his strategy for dealing with the nightmare moment every business leader dreads — when massive change occurs and a company must, almost overnight, adapt or fall by the wayside. You can read Grove’s book, or you can use this strategy: Always have two ways of doing things — the same way and a different way.

Many companies at Expo West reflected the constant reinvention of our age, showing how quickly things are changing. Here are a few of my favorites:



## NONA LIM

<https://www.nonalim.com>

No one has been more responsible for the recent explosion of interest in bone broth than New York City chef Marco Canora. After restoring and revitalizing his own health by integrating bone broth into his diet, he opened his first Brodo takeout window at Hearth, his East Village restaurant, selling nourishing bone broth in to-go cups. That was two years ago, and now bone broth is everywhere and finally, so are to-go cups. Nona Lim launched a new line of soup cups featuring their best-selling soups and broths in convenient 10 oz. heat-and-sip soup cups, available in Chicken Tumeric, Thai Curry & Lime, Vietnamese Pho, and Miso bone broths, and Tomato Thai Basil and Carrot Ginger soups

Nona Lim is a former professional athlete. Through her desire to find natural ways to be competitive, she designed a healing, nutrient-dense, anti-inflammatory meal program that she eventually sold locally around Oakland, CA. Today, Nona Lim offers a variety of prepared meals, soups, broths and noodles that consumers can customize.

Nona Lim's bone broths are best-in-class. Anyone who has made real bone broth knows that it takes a bit of skill and time to extract maximum flavor and nutrients. Nona Lim's broths are beautifully infused with Asian flavors and spices from her childhood in Singapore. Those who have taken up the cause of "broth-ing" know that it's the content of the bones— including collagen, amino acids and minerals— that provide the health benefits. These broths are designated for healing, not as a main dish soup. But they do make excellent soup bases if you want to use them that way. Consumers used to open a package of shelf-stable stock when making soups and stews, figuring that it was a good substitute for homemade stock. Figure again. It's time to convert to the real thing.



## HUMPHRY SLOCUMBE

<http://humphryslocombe.com>

Jake Godby has worked in several top San Francisco restaurants as pastry chef, but he is best known for San Francisco's most loved ice cream brand, Humphry Slocumbe. Godby explains that the name Humphry Slocumbe was borrowed from two characters in one of Britain's biggest TV exports, "Are You Being Served?." The hilarious and idiosyncratic characters Mr. Humphries and Mrs. Slocumbe, give reason to this small-batch, premium ice creamery's clever flavors. Secret Breakfast, a signature confection of bourbon ice cream with cornflake inclusions, was the flavor that launched a range of unusual flavors like cayenne cantaloupe, pink peppercorn poppy seed, and bacon peanut butter banana ice cream.

Godby announced at the Fancy Foods Show this past January that their retail line is set to go national in May. That's great news for adventurous ice cream lovers. Vanilla continues to be America's top-selling flavor — but for how long? I'll take a scoop of Machadoodle, please.



## QUINN POPCORN

[www.quinnsnacks.com](http://www.quinnsnacks.com)

A little history...In the late '90s, the FDA became a little worried. After conducting tests, FDA scientists discovered that just about everyone in the U.S. had some amount of the industrial chemical PFOA in their bloodstream. It should not have been there. It's not naturally occurring, it's a carcinogen, a liver toxicant, a developmental toxicant, and an immune system toxicant. But how did the entire country get exposed?! The FDA identified a few potential pathways, but toward the top of the list...microwave popcorn bags. It took several years before the medical community, and celebrities like Dr. Oz and Oprah, exposed the hidden dangers of this delicious treat. Microwave bags used to be lined with perfluorooctanoic acid, a synthetic chemical that functions to prevent the oil in the bag from wicking. Greasy bags? Not in America.

Kristy Lewis and her husband, Coulter, launched their "reimagined" microwave popcorn at Expo West in 2011. They had just had their first child, and after their son Quinn was born, Kristy decided to reinvent her favorite snack, starting from the outside in. "We wanted to take out everything bad," explains Lewis. They finally found a European company to supply a compostable, chemical-free paper. The product was first available in Lewis' hometown of Boston and is now a national success story. I was impressed then, and I'm still impressed now. Even though growth has stalled a bit, Quinn keeps reimagining the category. Quinn's newest product is microwave popcorn with real butter — grass-fed clarified butter, no less — in three delicious flavors: Butter & Sea Salt, Extra Butter and Truffle Butter. Now if they could only find a solution to the microwave...



## DIVERSITY

If you want to know who is creating the hippest, most boundary-pushing cuisine — it's the kids of immigrants. In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell writes about Jewish immigrants raising their children to be doctors or lawyers. But today, children of immigrants are more likely to be heading to the kitchen. These young chefs, cooks and restaurateurs are transforming the cuisines they grew up with into something uniquely American.

American cooking has become more diverse and is a reflection of our nation's diversity. Millennials are the most culturally diverse generation in U.S. history. Roughly 43% are non-white, due in large part to the waves of Latino and Asian immigration over the past few decades. As the arbiters of food culture today, Millennials are culinary adventurers seeking authentic, global food experiences. Local, unprocessed, grass-fed and fresh are menu magic words for Millennials; and you can make their day with new or unique foods and flavors.

Massimo Bottura, chef owner of Osteria Francescana, voted world's best restaurant in 2016, captured it best when he said: "The food trend for 2017 is not an ingredient but an attitude." For example, the phenomenal success of sriracha, a Millennial Top 10 food favorite, isn't just about the ingredient, it's about attitude. It's hard to imagine a fast food item that wouldn't be improved by the spicy sauce. Likewise for a bevy of other bold flavors. Spices like tumeric, ginger, cumin, horseradish and saffron have all seen major boosts recently. This stems from a desire for food to tell a story. These spices are also valued for their health properties, making them doubly attractive to consumers.

Manufacturers and restaurateurs need to start thinking about how their products or menus reflect diverse cultures and tastes. Here's a shout out to Best Foods for their Organic Mild Curry Mayonnaise Dressing. It's a bold move for a company that has been resting on its laurels, and the product is good — really good.

Authentic diversity is key to attracting the younger consumer. This generation is worldly and better travelled than their Boomer parents, and they were reared on diverse ethnic foods. An important note here: while Millennials gravitate to authentic tastes, they're not necessarily purists about form and function. Young people today have a soft spot for ethnic mash-ups, can you say Korean tacos? However, if a product is marketed as authentic in form, it had better be a very close approximation, because these consumers have probably eaten the real deal.

Many companies have demonstrated that going bold pays off. Here are a few of my favorites:



## BURMA LOVE FERMENTED TEA LEAF DRESSING

[www.burmasuperstar.com](http://www.burmasuperstar.com)

Burma Superstar is a small, well known San Francisco restaurant chain, offering diners a taste of the addictively savory and spiced food of Myanmar (formerly Burma). With influences from neighboring India and China, as well as Thailand and Laos, Burmese food is a unique blend of flavors. Burma Superstar's Tea Leaf Salad is legendary, as is the long wait to get into any of their four restaurants. Called *lahpet thoke* in Burmese, the tea leaf salad is an eclectic mix of flavors and textures. The tea leaves are the "dressing" for the salad. The flavor is earthy and tangy, the result of an elaborate process of fermenting the tea leaves. The remaining salad consists of lettuce, tomato, and a crunchy mix of fried garlic, sesame seeds, and peanuts.

Now anyone can make this classic salad at home with Burma Love's Fermented Tea Leaf Dressing and Traditional Burmese Crunchy Mix. They also just launched a Fermented Tea-Aioli that works as a spread, dressing or dip. As they say at Burma Superstar, "Eat your Tea." You'll be happy you did.



## JAPAN GOLD USA ORGANIC FURIKAKE

[www.japangoldusa.com](http://www.japangoldusa.com)

If you ask most Americans what they know about Japanese cuisine, they'll mention tofu and sushi. But in recent years, Japan has gone from being an important influencer in Western cuisine to white hot in significance. Tokyo has more Michelin star restaurants than any other city in the world, so I think the Japanese know a little something about food.

Japan Gold USA is a branch of MUSO Co., which focuses on exporting and distributing MUSO's delicious Japanese ingredients and foods such as Organic Craft Ramen, Organic Furikake, and Organic Smoked Shoyu (yes!) in the North American market.

MUSO was founded on the principles of macrobiotics 30 years ago by Shuzo Okada. Before establishing MUSO, Okada had been the director of the Macrobiotic Association in Sakai City, Osaka for 20 years.

Furikake (Fooree-ka-keh) is quietly becoming popular outside of Japan in unexpected ways. Furikake literally means "to sprinkle" and is commonly sprinkled over cooked white rice, vegetables and fish in Japan for a pop of flavor. Creative chefs and consumers are having a fling with furikake, topping a host of foods and snacks because it delivers an instant explosion of umami to anything.

Furikake was invented in the 20th century by Mr. Yoshimaru. Since then, furikake has gone through many iterations, but its foundation, consisting of sesame seeds and seaweed flakes, remains the same. I'm in love with MUSO's new line of organic furikake available in the following varieties: Yuzu, Umeboshi, Green Nori Seaweed, Sansho Pepper and Chili. Why eat plain white rice when you can sprinkle it with furikake?



## CHUNG JUNG ONE GOCHUJANG

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[www.chungjungoneusa.com](http://www.chungjungoneusa.com)

Experts have declared bold flavors to be one of the year's hottest trends, with sriracha leading the way. Renowned NYU Food Studies scholar Krishnendu Ray, who has written numerous books and papers on the subject of culture and food, claims that "People will play with the ingredients, but they cannot digest the entire cuisine." Here's one ingredient that is getting a lot of play these days — gochujang. Gochujang is a thick, crimson paste made from chili peppers, glutinous rice, fermented soybeans, and salt. The chili peppers provide a healthy amount of lingering heat, the sticky rice brings a touch of sweetness, and the fermented soybeans act as the miso-like ingredient that anchors gochujang's umami flavor. Gochujang is similar to sriracha, but more exotic, speaking to the broader idea of what is going on in the world right now, from globalization to multiculturalism, to diversity in America.

Gochujang isn't meant to be used as a finishing sauce like sriracha or Tabasco—it's too aggressive, which is where the problem starts. Gochujang is a cooking ingredient, so it must be cut with other ingredients for its sweet-hot-salty flavor to shine. Fortunately, gochujang benefits from one of this year's top food trends — home cooking. Millennials are discovering the joys of cooking together and we know they love trying new flavors.

Daesang Group, the manufacturer of Chung Jung One, was founded in 1956 in South Korea and claims to be one of the largest fermentation companies in the world. Their gochujang sauce is vegan, gluten free and authentically delicious. Their line of Korean Chili Sauce, Spicy Ketchup Sauce and Spicy Miso Sauce deserve an audition in your kitchen.



## NATURAL ENGERY

If there's one thing that brings individualistic Millennials together, it's their love of coffee. For many of us, the morning cup is a pick-me-up, an enabler for brushing the cobwebs out of the mental attic, so we can be more productive. For the Millennial, it's comfort, it's community, and maybe it's even a bit of self-identity. According to Bloomberg, the U.S. is consuming coffee at record levels, and Millennials account for 44% of this coffee consumption. Increased demand has driven coffee bean prices to an all-time high. Even though coffee behemoth Starbucks increased retail prices twice in the past year, that's not stopping crazy, coffee-loving Millennials from buying their daily cup of Joe. That's because Millennials value experience over price.

Millennials' love for coffee makes perfect sense when you think of the kid who was raised with the idea that soda was unhealthy. Coffee offers the same jolt (or bigger) without the social stigma of soda addiction. At the same time, this generation's adventurous spirit is driving the coffee industry to change rapidly. The U.S. market for packaged and refrigerated ready-to-drink (RTD) coffee was estimated at \$13.5 billion in 2015. By 2020, it's expected to reach \$18 billion.

Reinvention across the coffee industry is status quo these days, with new forms driving the next wave. Some retailers like Whole Foods are trying to get coffee drinkers back into the store by enticing them with nitrogen-infused coffee on tap. Think Guinness. The foamy, creamy texture allows brewers to rely less on sugar and milk to cut the coffee's bitter taste, appealing to health-conscious Millennials. It's self-serve and self-serving.

Hot coffee is considered by many to be the default brew of choice, but coffee's been enjoyed cold for at least four centuries. In Japan, cold brew has been popular since the 1600s. Dutch traders reputedly introduced cold-brew coffee to Japan from Indonesia, where it had been developed as a way of producing large quantities of portable coffee, ready-to-heat or serve cold. Naturally smooth, sweet, and cold from its very beginning, this is also the style of brew that translates most readily to a bottled RTD product.

While the merits of cold-brewing versus iced coffee are hotly debated among coffee connoisseurs, the variety of accepted methods and tastes in an ever-expanding coffee industry has allowed products of all kinds to proliferate - from Guinness-style cans pressurized with nitrogen gas to upscale jars of "elixir," whiskey-colored extractions massaged by sound waves. The sonication-assisted process was derived from research by a plant chemist in Japan, whose subjects exhibited different growth patterns when exposed to pleasant or emotionally positive sounds, as opposed to negative or harsh sounds. Sounds a little weird, but I'll take the batch massaged by Mozart; you can take the brew massaged by The White Stripes.

Expo West was filled to the brim with young companies founded by people following their passion, doing what they were driven to do rather than what was expected of them. In addition to coffee, there was a growing momentum around beverages that provided natural energy. Here are a few of my favorites.



## MATCHABAR

[www.matchabarnyc.com](http://www.matchabarnyc.com)

But, it took two brothers from New York City to open the first matcha bar. The visionary duo fell in love with matcha and began sourcing their tea directly from a single family farm in Nisho, Japan. In 2014, they opened their first MatchaBar in Brooklyn and quickly expanded to Manhattan in 2015. Shortly after, they created their own line of bottled matcha, initially available only in the New York area. Two months ago, they headed west and opened their newest location in Los Angeles.

Matcha is a centuries-old, Japanese, powdered green tea, historically used to enhance one's focus, energy and alertness. It must do something, because matcha madness has taken over the U.S. and we can't seem to get enough of this iridescent green stuff. Promoted as better energy, MatchaBar sells their line of RTD matcha in Original, Apple Ginger, Hint of Honey and Mint. They also use their labels as billboards and are constantly changing the message. Fun!



## CAVEMAN COFFEE NITRO COLD BREW

[www.cavemancoffeeco.com](http://www.cavemancoffeeco.com)

Caveman is an “up-and-comer” in the third wave specialty coffee market. Their coffee is hand-picked, wet-processed and small-batch roasted by their master coffee roaster in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The company focuses on single origin and single estate beans to better ensure high-end quality.

In 2014, they launched a line of cold-brew products that currently includes a 22 oz. cold-brew concentrate and an 8 oz. nitrogen cold-brew in a can. And now, consumers can get Caveman Nitro Cold-Brew on tap!

Nitrogen brew — nitro brew for short —is the new java du jour in brewed coffee and looks similar to a beer keg. The keg, filled with cold-brew coffee, is attached to a pressurized tap that infuses the brew with nitrogen gas, which makes the coffee bubble up, giving it a creamy, chocolaty taste that's been described as being similar to chocolate milk. And after trying copious amounts of cold-brew, I have to agree. Nitro brew tastes much smoother than traditional iced coffee. The foam at the top also adds a pleasing texture and seems to help cut through coffee's naturally bitter taste. I'm told the trick to a making a great cup of nitro brew is to give it a hard pour and voilà, a nice natural head.

The big bonus for consumers is that there's no sugar, milk or alcohol in nitro coffee, and it contains about 30 percent more caffeine per ounce than your good old cup of Joe.



## REBBL ELIXIR

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[www.rebbl.co](http://www.rebbl.co)

REBBL is an herb adaptogen beverage startup. REBBL is an acronym for Roots, Extracts, Bark, Berries and Leaves. It started out as just one drink, a tea made of the herb Cat's Claw, found in the Amazon. REBBL's purpose is threefold: To introduce the American market to adaptogen herbs; eradicate slavery and human trafficking; and prove once again that an ethical business can be a successful one.

Adaptogen herbs have been used in Eastern medicine for thousands of years, and now science is starting to back up the claims that these herbs bring your body back to homeostasis. To qualify as an adaptogen, an herb must be completely safe and non-toxic, it must have broad uses for health, and it must specifically reduce stress, both mental and physical. To put it simply: Adaptogens help you adapt.

REBBL is one of the first brands to have herbal adaptogens. Customer demand for these herbs is growing steadily. Why? Well, one theory is adrenal exhaustion from the constant bombardment of electrical and magnetic fields that surround us. How many ways can we Wi Fry? Our environment is filled with wireless devices — TVs, cars, cell phones, computers, laptops and printers — that stress our bodies. We've essentially been electronically overtaken and there's no end in sight.

Sheryl O'Loughlin, former CEO of Clif Bar and Plum Organics, is now the CEO of REBBL. Since her hire in 2015 the company has raised a significant amount of capital and experienced steady growth. Sales in the nutritional drink and tonic category have been declining since 2012, but REBBL, with its super creative, passionate, and smart team, is poised to be a standout. Currently, REBBL has nearly a dozen drinks, such as Matcha Latte, Reishi Chocolate, and Turmeric Golden-Milk. OMMMMMMM...!



## THE COMPASSION EFFECT

Doing well by doing good is now the go-to strategy for new and established companies alike. It's a transformative cultural trend that is reverberating across the natural foods landscape and relentlessly permeating the industry.

Compassion has never been the driving force behind the food industry. Rather, it's been profit. Until recently the most profitable ingredient in the food industry was image, followed closely by air, water, and a host of cheap ingredients like salt, sugar and fat. Today, compassion is one of the main ingredients in the industry's formula for appealing to younger consumers. Millennials want to buy from companies that share their values.

According to a Pew Research Center report, about one-third of Millennials — a higher percentage than those in the same age group in previous generations — said they bought a certain product or service because they liked the social or political values of the company that provided it. Young, purpose-driven start-ups are rocking the food world and are even having a go at Goliath companies like McDonald's. Already, McDonald's is changing its ingredient strategy to include cage-free eggs, and they're testing fresh ground beef and antibiotic-free chicken (if they can find enough on the planet). I was surprised to learn that just one out of five Millennials have ever tasted a Big Mac. It's a hard pill to swallow, but iconic products, like the Big Mac, are becoming less relevant over time.

A main problem for Big Food is a general distrust of their brands among younger consumers. Millennials associate these companies with factory farms, GMOs and chemicals and not with the sustainably grown or raised products that they demand. Big Food is racing to reformulate their legacy products, while scrambling to acquire smaller brands, hoping to reinvent themselves in time to win back the younger, health-conscious consumer. But as cautioned by the New York Times feature article, *A Seismic Shift in How People Eat*, food companies cannot merely tinker. Nor will acquisition-driven strategies be sufficient, because most acquisitions are too small to shift fortunes quickly. Recently acquired Big Food brands such as Annie's Homegrown, Happy Family and Honest Tea account for one percent or less of their buyers' revenues. Moreover, the missions and cultures of these brands tend to get lost quickly as they get absorbed into the industrial-size sales and marketing machines of the Big Food companies. It is easy for these smaller companies to get orphaned.

Millennials don't appreciate bolt-on sponsorships where companies attempt to borrow credibility from a nonprofit. Young consumers want assurance that their values are fundamental to a company's business practices and that its management is also living these values (and consumers' values).

We are at the beginning of the end of a way of understanding the world. Attempting to build on top of the old will not work. We don't build new houses on top of our old houses; we demolish the old or we build in a different place. The old must crumble, but you can find new places to build.

Here are a few of my compassionate favorite.



## MAISON LEGRAND SOUPS

[www.maisonlegrand.com](http://www.maisonlegrand.com)

“Let your food be your remedy and may it taste delicious!” After years of making real food with clean labels, LeGrand has updated its packaging and message to better reflect the core values of the French Canadian founders. The pharmacy cross, originally a symbol of the French Counsel of National Order of Pharmacists, is a reference to the Croix-Rouge, the international humanitarian movement set up in Geneva in 1864 with the goal of assisting those injured in wars and conflicts. While LeGrand makes the disclaimer that their products are not intended to diagnose, mitigate, treat, cure or prevent any disease, they are implying that food is as effective as medicine in maintaining overall health. Their new lines of soup and chili are true to the culinary quality of their predecessors. In seven amazing varieties: Chipotle Chili, Moroccan Spices Chili, Indian Dahl, Thai, Tuscan Vegetable, Tomato & Basmati Rice and Super Green.



## ETHICAL BEAN COFFEE

[www.ethicalbean.com](http://www.ethicalbean.com)

As far as the folks at Ethical Bean are concerned, doing something good for the world should be rewarded with something that tastes spectacular. In their own words: “From whispering-at-the-symphony mild to grab-you-by-the-lapels bold, each of our exceptional coffees is made from the world’s best fair trade certified organic beans. Artisan roasted in Vancouver, Canada, we test it, slurp it and stamp it with an “e” – so that you’ll love it with the same passion that went into creating it.” Ethical Bean emphasizes transparency, carbon credits, green building and green energy. Ethical Bean’s energy is supplied by Bullfrog Power, Canada’s leading green energy provider, and their facility is run on 100% Canadian green energy. They obviously walk their talk. Their new single serve coffee pods deliver the same flavor as their whole bean and ground coffee and are made from renewable resources.

Unlike K-cups, Ethical Bean single serve coffee pods are not only compatible with Keurig, but are certified fully compostable by the Biodegradable Products Institute (BPI), which is a not-for-profit association of key individuals and groups from government, industry and academia. The pods can be placed directly into the green composting bin for pick up by your local municipality. How’s that for no-compromise coffee?



## GREEN SHEEP WATER

[www.greensheepwater.com](http://www.greensheepwater.com)

When you explore Green Sheep's website, you'll see water in aluminum cans and a counter that is counting the number of plastic bottles used in the U.S. since you loaded the page. Just writing the last sentence, I've racked up 100,000 bottles. Yikes!

Green Sheep's mission is to create positive social and environmental change through business by giving consumers a greener option instead of adding to the heaps of plastic polluting our lands and seas. Green Sheep's website is a wealth of information regarding plastic. For instance, in the United States, every second of every day, 1,500 plastic bottles are discarded. Americans send more than 38 billion water bottles to landfills every year, the equivalent of 912 million gallons of oil.

I've read that there's a huge floating "garbage patch" in the Pacific Ocean estimated to be about the size of Texas. I don't know if this size is accurate, but there are many "garbage patches" in numerous parts of the Pacific and the rest of the ocean. Anyway you look at it, none of the debris should be there. Once a piece of plastic makes it to the ocean, it begins a process known as photodegradation, in which the sun's rays break down plastic into little pieces. These eventually become so small that they get ingested by marine life and enter the food chain. Yikes again!

The United States is the largest consumer market for bottled water in the world, followed by Mexico, China, and Brazil. Bottled water finally overtook carbonated soft drinks in retail sales last year as the largest beverage category in the U.S., as consumers continue to choose bottled water over carbonated soft drinks over health concerns about sugar and artificial sweeteners.

Green Sheep is a perfect storm because it's water from a glacial aquifer with natural electrolytes and balanced pH, is bottled in aluminum which is recycled more often and efficiently than plastic, glass or cartons, is made in the U.S., and 1% of each sale gets donated to water.org.

Bottled water, but waaaay better.



## ALTER ECO CHOCOLATE

[www.alterecofoods.com](http://www.alterecofoods.com)

I met Edouard and Mathieu, the founders of Alter Eco, a little over a year ago when they visited the Mattson offices. They came bearing chocolate bars and samples of their heirloom quinoa and rice. I was familiar with their products, but admittedly had never tasted them. Oh my! It must be their quality ingredients, blended and stirred with their values of "reliably delicious, environmentally responsible and socially just" that makes their chocolate so delicious. Their dark chocolate comes in 12 different flavors each and every one of which could have been made by the best Swiss chocolatier. Alter Eco is the epitome of doing well by doing good. Their mission is global transformation through ethical relationships with small-scale farmers, and an integral sustainability orientation at every point on the supply chain. Be the change.



## PITAYA PLUS SMOOTHIES

[www.pitayaplus.com](http://www.pitayaplus.com)

In 2016, acai bowls, or smoothie bowls, were a hit. Not only were they trending on social media, but these bowls inspired themed restaurant concepts. Stroll through the aisles of the supermarket, and it's clear that Americans are keen on broadening their fruit spectrum. Millennial globetrotters are constantly seeking nutritionally dense foods to introduce to the States. Sambazon's founders discovered acai on a trip to Brazil in 1999 and now employ over 20,000 locals in harvest, have preserved millions of acres of virgin rainforest, and reinvest in every community they call home. Do Good. Be Good. Create Change. Now there's a new star — or superstar — around the corner.

Chuck Casano is on a mission to do for pitaya, also known as dragon fruit, what Sambazon did for acai. Casano, co-founder of Pitaya Plus, spent seven months in Nicaragua with non-profit, Agora Partnerships, in 2008, when he came across the obscure pitaya fruit. Eating it every day, he fell in love with the fruit and how energized it made him feel. Casano has said that living in Nicaragua he saw firsthand the impoverished living conditions and the endless destruction due in



The Story of a Superfruit on a Social Mission

most part to a recent war and earthquake. Creating jobs in Nicaragua was his motivation behind starting Pitaya Plus. The main goal of Pitaya Plus is to support poverty-stricken communities in need and to show the world that you don't need sugar for food and beverages to taste good. Casano decided to work with a handful of farmers and build a factory. As part of his social mission he employs single mothers to scoop and blend the pulp. The pulp gets poured into smooth packs that are frozen and shipped to the states.

Pitaya has a surprising amount of phytonutrients, fiber and magnesium. In addition to its nutritional value and health promoting effects, the fruit is praised for its appetizing crunchy texture and refreshing, sweet flavor which is like a cross between kiwi and pear.

It remains to be seen whether pitaya will be the next big superfruit and rise to the level of pomegranate or acai, but I'm betting that if smoothie bowls remain popular, there could be a Pink Pitaya Coco Blend Bowl waiting for you at your local juicery.



## HERITAGE FOODS

We know that Millennials value freshness, authenticity, bold flavors and snacking. But what really makes them tick is an appealing origins story, mission or narrative, whether it's about the ingredients, the production process, or the people behind the brand. There's truth in the simple statement "You are what you eat." The food we choose to eat or drink is more than self-expression —it's our identity, it's our character.

Heritage foods are essentially traditional foods that have nourished our ancestors throughout history and are true to the essence of what they are. Take *skyr* for example (pronounced "skeer"), a fermented dairy food that's a central part of the Icelandic diet and closely tied to Icelandic culture.

Skyr dates back more than a thousand years, when it was first brought to Iceland by Viking explorers, but it's a relative newcomer to America's food shelves. Skyr is thick, high in protein with little or no fat or added sugar, and has greater bacterial diversity than industrial yogurts, because traditional fermentation is started by adding a bit of old skyr from a previous batch. With more and more information being disseminated about the microbiome, people are recognizing that this important biodiversity inside our bodies has diminished, and they seek foods to restore it.

I spoke with John Heath, CIO of Icelandic Provisions, the newest player in the U.S. skyr market. Icelandic Provisions was co-founded by MS Iceland Dairies, the largest and oldest dairy in Iceland that includes more than 600 Icelandic family farms and milk producers. John is a former Chobani executive and he knows a bit about cultured milk. He told me that he fell in love with the land and people of Iceland on a trip and he decided to move there and learn how to make skyr. I say, "Mission accomplished." Icelandic Provision's skyr is a pure and wholesome combination of milk with heirloom skyr cultures made in the authentic Icelandic tradition. It looks and tastes like yogurt, but it's actually a fresh, acid-set cheese.

It's always a conundrum as to how to best market these cultured dairy products in the U.S. Yogurt is big business and getting bigger. Companies must ask themselves, "Hmmm... Do I jump in that pool, since I look and taste like a yogurt? Or do I remain true to what I am and hope people get me?"

These old techniques, like making skyr, become new again once a deeper understanding of the essence of why and how they work comes into play. One thing we all know for certain, everything must change, but so does making old new again.

Here are a few of my Heritage Foods favorites.



## ICELANDIC PROVISIONS SKYR

[www.icelandicprovisions.com](http://www.icelandicprovisions.com)

Icelandic Provision's skyr uses authentic heirloom skyr cultures that have been treasured and preserved in Iceland for hundreds of years and are responsible for Icelandic Provision's distinctive flavor. Since skyr is a densely concentrated product, it takes four cups of milk to make a single cup of skyr. Icelandic Provisions makes a point to use only milk from family-owned dairy farms, where cattle are well taken care of, so every drop of milk is treated with respect. Many of their fruit flavors use berries that are indigenous to Iceland and its Scandinavian neighbors, which speaks to the relationship these nations have shared through the centuries. Available in Plain, Vanilla, Raspberry, Strawberry & Lingonberry, Peach & Cloudberry and Coconut.



## COLD MOUNTAIN KOJI

[www.coldmountainmiso.com](http://www.coldmountainmiso.com)

Amazake is amazing! Amazake (ah-mah-ZAH-kee) is a centuries-old Japanese drink made from fermented rice. Koji, a cultured rice also used to make miso, soy sauce and sake, is added to the whole grain and breaks the carbohydrates into simpler, unrefined sugars causing a sweetness to develop. It is used across a variety of applications as a natural sweetener: added to baking recipes, blended into fruit juice for a nutritious smoothie, or mixed into yogurt or milk and served plain or with eaten with muesli. In Japan, supermarkets and cafes sell ready-made amazake smoothies and puddings.

Increasingly popular among health foodies, amazake is packed full of nutritious ingredients and is said to promote brain function, boost energy and rehydrate the body. It is a Japanese ingredient worth knowing. Amazake is high in Vitamin B1, B2, B6, amino acid, pantothenic acid, inositol, biotin, dietary fiber and oligosaccharide.



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Mattson is North America's premier food and beverage design and development firm. We help companies fully realize their innovation potential with new concept development and optimization, prototype development, branding and package design, consumer research, and commercialization. We take clients from strategy to market readiness. We work for startups, mid-size companies, and billion dollar+ multinationals, across all channels, technologies, and need states.



**Barbara Brueckner Shpizner** is a professional food developer at Mattson—the country's most experienced independent developer of new food and beverage products for the retail foods industry, as well as food service and restaurant chains. Barbara's career in the food industry spans 38 years, with the last 15 years focused in the natural, healthy and functional food channels. Barbara's expertise at Mattson includes innovating and developing products for some of the nation's largest companies along with many mid-size companies, startups and international food companies. After more than three decades, her vast knowledge of the food industry has given her a better understanding for how the food we eat contributes to our basic quality of life—from our health to our happiness.

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