

MYTH NO MORE

Discovering
healthy options
at the NACS Show
expo is easy.

BY FRANK BEARD



There's a myth out there that healthy eating doesn't take place at convenience stores. It's not true, of course, and I spent one month eating exclusively at gas stations to prove otherwise. (See "#30daysofgasstationfood" in the October issue of *NACS Magazine* for details about my social experiment.) I came to the NACS Show this past October in Atlanta to share insights and stories from my myth-busting journey with attendees.

But I'm not alone in my efforts to combat this mistaken myth. While exploring the NACS Show exhibit halls, I encountered one company (and there are many more) that's actively dispelling this myth through its efforts to clarify and modernize the definition of exactly what healthy is.

Many people are familiar with **KIND**'s delicious fruit and nut bars—which blend almonds, cashews and other nuts with a variety of dried fruit. Onsite in Atlanta, I discovered that the company is challenging the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to update their requirements regarding the use of the word “healthy” on packaging.

It all began in March 2015. That spring, the FDA took issue when KIND used the word on four product wrappers and their website. According to requirements that were established more than two decades ago, healthy products can't have more than 3g of total fat or 1g of saturated fat per serving. Since the snack bars in question use nuts as their primary ingredients—and nuts contain healthy fats—they ran afoul of the requirements. But so would avocados. And if a company wanted to label low-fat, sugary snacks and toaster pastries as healthy—because they have less than 3g of total fat or 1g of saturated fat per serving—that would have been allowed.

That's when KIND fought back. According to a press release: “In December 2015, to help facilitate the delivery of clear and consistent dietary guidance to consumers, KIND—with the support of leading nutrition and public health experts—filed a Citizen Petition. The Petition urged the FDA to update its requirements related to the term healthy to emphasize the importance of eating real foods and nutrient-dense ingredients as part of healthy eating patterns.”

The FDA responded by granting a waiver earlier this year, but KIND continued to press onward. “While we've made strides toward positive change on the policy and consumer education fronts, our work remains far from done,” said Daniel Lubetzky, the company's founder and CEO. “A true success will come when the healthy standard is updated, empowering consumers to better identify the types of foods recommended as part of a healthy diet.”

And that is what's great about the NACS Show. Despite the myth that healthy eating doesn't take



#30daysofgasstationfood



♥ I love this stuff! It's just peanut butter, but 1) it's a single-ingredient product—only peanuts, 2) it's in a convenient-to-go package, and 3) peanut butter is awesome. It also made for a great post-workout snack. C-stores, you should consider selling this product next to your bananas. @crazyrichardspb #nacsshow #healthysnack



♥ good2grow offers 100% juice, fruit and veggie blends, or purified water infused with organic fruit juice—and no added sugar, artificial flavors or preservatives. And Captain America on the caps! #atlanta #marvelcomics



♥ These snack packs by Pro2snax mix produce and a healthy source of protein. Here's my favorite: baby carrots, white cheddar cheese and almonds. #pro2snax #nacsshow



♥ EPIC bars are high in protein, low in sugar and friendly to folks who follow low-carb diets. #epicbars #nacsshow

place on-the-go, I learned otherwise at the c-store industry's premier event.

Healthy Choices Abound

The importance of offering quality, healthful choices was a consistent theme at this year's NACS Show. It was mentioned in the 60 educational sessions, the general sessions and the impromptu conversations that I had with attendees from all around the world. There was a real buzz about healthy that simply couldn't be ignored.

I also found many healthful choices in the exhibit halls. Choices like **EPIC Bars**, for example. They're a mixture of 100% grass-fed animal products with various fruits and nuts, and each one is high in protein, low in sugar and friendly to folks who follow low-carb diets.

I frequently purchase EPIC Bars at stores like Sheetz, but I learned something new at the NACS Show. According to a company representative, EPIC uses 85% of the animals raised for their products as opposed to the 8% that is typical of some competitors. This means they also sell jerky-like bites, trail mix, animal oils, bone broth, and pork rinds and crackling—which, I must say, after trying some samples, were quite delicious.

Produce availability has been an occasional challenge during my c-store journeys, so you can imagine my excitement when I left the EPIC exhibit and discovered Quickies: a new product from **Wada Farms**. It's a single-serving portion of either red or gold potatoes sold in a microwavable container.

Not only is that appealing to me as an on-the-go consumer, but it's also perfect for when I'm home. I travel

often and don't require the large quantities of potatoes that are usually sold at grocery stores. I'd rather buy a few Quickies and avoid unnecessary waste.

When I'm on the road, it can also be a challenge to find quality, pre-packaged food. Unless stores prepare their own, the choices are often microwavable burgers, breakfast sandwiches and burritos.

Wakefield, Eby-Brown's signature sandwich brand, seems determined to fix this problem. They produce a 198-calorie, microwavable egg-white and veggie frittata. It's simple: garden veggie egg whites, Swiss cheese and 100% whole-wheat bread that, according to the Wakefield representative, they began using after determining that the original conception missed the mark by using a high-carb, high-calorie bread. It also microwaves in 45 seconds. I'd certainly purchase one of those if I was in a hurry.

I'd also purchase the 1.15-oz, squeezable packets of peanut butter from **Crazy Richard's**. I eat a lot of bananas on-the-go, but I sometimes wish I could make them a bit more interesting. Perhaps some peanut butter. The trouble, however, is that I don't require an entire container of it.

Fortunately, Crazy Richard's "natural line" of products are just the right size, sourced from a single ingredient—peanuts—and free of trans fat, palm oil, salt, sugar and cholesterol. If only I'd grabbed more samples!

Rather than get full on peanut butter, however, I walked the expo and saved room to sample other promising products. Take a look at what I found:

- **Bai** just released five new flavors of their sparkling beverages under the name Bai Black. They



♥ This afternoon, I discovered an awesome product by @wadafarms called Quickies. They've created a to-go, microwavable container of high-quality potatoes. Heat it up, add some seasonings and you're all set. If you're a c-store please call these guys and get it on your shelves! #nacsshow #healthyfood #atlanta



♥ That's It snack bars consist of two servings of compressed fruit. Try the apple and cinnamon version—it's delicious! #healthysnacks #simple #nacsshow

have no sugar, no artificial sweeteners and they're only five calories. Try the Columbia Cream flavor; you'll thank me later.

- **Perrier** has a new strawberry flavor of their sparkling water. Like Bai Black, it's a good alternative to sugary soda.
- **True Food Innovations** has figured out a way to sell microwavable entrees without requiring artificial preservatives, artificial flavors, artificial colors or freezing. And if that's not impressive enough, they have a 45-day shelf life.
- Parents who want quality juice for their children will like the products from **good2grow**. They offer 100% juice, fruit and veggie blends, or purified water infused with organic fruit juice—neither of which have added sugar, artificial flavors or preservatives. The caps also feature characters from Disney and Star Wars.
- But if adults don't want Darth Vader or Tinkerbell on their drinks, they should check out **Frutos de Vida**. The company offers 100% natural juice with no preservatives and no added sugar, and it comes directly from fields in Mexico.
- The snack bars from **That's It** consist of two servings of compressed fruit, and their new "zesty" flavors are fantastic. Try the apple and cinnamon version.
- **Del Monte** offers a fantastic line of fresh-cut fruit and vegetables, but I saw something new and exciting at the NACS Show: caprese tomatoes with mozzarella dollops and balsamic vinaigrette.
- **Pro2snax** offers great snack packs that mix produce and a healthy source of protein. My favorite includes baby carrots, white cheddar cheese and almonds.
- **KIND** offers a number of low-glycemic bars

that consist of only fruit, veggies and sometimes seeds—but no added sugar. I've long been a fan, but the new apricot, pear, carrot and beet version has just become my favorite.

The Standout

I'd be remiss, however, if I didn't mention one of my favorite products of the NACS Show: **Snacktops**.

These guys have created plastic food containers that attach to the tops of beverages. While most examples featured hot dogs and burgers in trays that snap on to tall-boys or sodas—something that is badly needed at sporting events—I also see potential for fruit, vegetables, low-sodium sandwiches, and healthy made-to-order food.

Snacktops also produces a straw that's just thin and wide enough to regulate the flow of hot drinks—thereby preventing folks from burning their mouths by sipping too much coffee or tea. I've certainly been guilty of making that mistake!

I've also spilled my share of food while on-the-go, and if convenience stores find a way to sell their products using containers from Snacktops, it would certainly make life more convenient.

The theme of this year's NACS Show was "Meet Your Future," and I must say, from what I encountered in the exhibit halls, the presentations and the numerous conversations I had over the course of that exciting week in Atlanta, it's a bright future indeed.

The convenient choice really can be the healthy choice. **NACS**



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