

Top 11 products from SFFS!

Cocoa-flavored dessert hummus, creative caramels and hippy truffles.

By Curtis Vreeland // CONTRIBUTOR

Cocoa-flavored dessert hummus, creative caramels and hippy truffles were some of the new trends in confectionery and snack products exhibited at the 2016 Summer Fancy Food Show in New York City.

For a veteran tread spotter, it is always exhilarating when one discovers a whole new product segment; in this case, dessert hummus. And even more endearing, it was created not in a sterile big food R&D lab, but whipped together by a creative millennial as a snack offering for a friend's Super Bowl party.

Cocoa-flavored dessert hummus was one of several chocolate/cocoa-flavored surprises at this year's the Summer Fancy Food Show. This discovery underscores consumers' unflagging desire for chocolatey confections and snacks.

It seems that chocolate's versatility and popularity has promoted the ingredient to become the Swiss-army knife of flavor applications. On the sweet side, in addition to Delighted by Hummus's *Dessert Hummus*, there was Epicurean Butter's cocoa-flavored finishing butter: *Organic Cocoa Coconut Butter*. And on the savory side, there was Josephine's Feast's *Chocolate Habanero Heirloom Tomato Catsup*, Moonstruck Chocolate's *Savory Truffle Collection* and Salad Girl Organic Salad Dressing Company's *Dark Cocoa & Sea Salt Vinaigrette*.

Also exhibited at the show were some creative riffs on caramel, such as a double-layer for double-flavor caramel (Béquet Confections), a caramel sweetened with honey rather than corn syrup (Droga Chocolates), and caramels spiked with incredibly adventurous savory flavors like basil cayenne (McCrea's Candies) and pineapple habanero (JulieAnn Caramels), or sprinkled with a 5-piece collection of artisan salt (Cocomels by JJ's Sweets).

Coconut continues to trend. Products ranged from the above mentioned Epicurean Butter's *Organic Cocoa Coconut Butter*, Hagensborg Chocolate's *Wild Boar Fairtrade Certified Organic Toasted Coconut and Banana bar*, Creative Snacks' *Organic Coconut Snacks*, Chuao Chocolatier's *Coconut Hibiscus Enamored bar*, and Primal Kitchen's *Cashew Coconut Bar*.

There were new faces in the cornucopia of ancient grains: sorghum (Pop I.Q. Snacks) and buckwheat (BuckWhat! Foods).

All this product development activity and ingenuity indicates a robust and confident specialty confectionery and snack industry. In fact, since 2013, the category's retail sales growth of specialty confectionery and snacks topped 21.4% to \$2.2 billion in 2015, according to the *State of the Specialty Food Industry 2016* published by the Specialty Food Association. The association attributes this growth to continued product innovation and wider product availability.

Enthusiasm for specialty food products ran deep at the 2016 Summer Fancy Food Show, which was held June 26-28 at the New York City Javits Convention Center.

"The show is the place to be to discover the latest in specialty food and what's next for stores and restaurants," says Laura Santella-Saccone, the association's chief marketing officer. And the exhibition space was the largest ever. "Record sales for specialty food have contributed to the strength of our show."

The summer show is when the association bestows its prestigious Specialty Outstanding Food Innovation (SOFI) awards, the food industry's equivalent of the Oscars. This year, the Association made some important changes to its judging criteria. Now, 70 percent of the points come from the quality of the product, including taste, texture, mouth feel; and 30 percent comes from ingredient profile and the creative use of ingredients. Price consideration was eliminated.

"So tastes good wins out, and that is what specialty food is all about," notes Robin Béquet, owner of Béquet Confections.

There were several other important changes: the products are tasted blind, to eliminate unintentional judging bias, and the awards were announced a month ahead of time.

"By giving them a month warning, [the winners] were able to promote, connect with their buyers, and enjoy the honor," explains Communications Director Louise Kramer.

The following pages contain a description of the 11 most noteworthy products from the show.





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Delighted by Hummus founder Makenzie Marzluff.

Delighted by Hummus

delightedbyhummus.com

S.R.P.: (8-oz. tub) \$5.49

Delighted by Hummus founder Makenzie Marzluff created this treat several years ago as a snack for a Super Bowl party. She swapped out the traditional garlic and lemon for ingredients such as cinnamon, cocoa and vanilla. Guests found her snack so tasty that they thought it was cookie dough. Encouraged to take the product to market, Marzluff started selling it at her local Phoenix farmers market. Again consumer acceptance of the rather unconventional product was conclusive: her supply would sell out in an hour. Her goal now is to be the first “dessert hummus” to hit national grocery shelves.

She is well on her way. This past May, she launched her line in Wegmans. Single-serve and snack packs are in development. Delighted by Hummus offers four flavors: *Chocolate Chip*, *Brownie Batter*, *Snickerdoodle*, and *Orange-Ginger*. As an example of product ingredients, the *Chocolate Chip* hummus contains garbanzo beans, coconut milk, tahini, coconut sugar, organic Turbinado sugar, semi-sweet chocolate chips, vanilla, and sea salt.

Epicurean Butter

www.epicureanbutter.com

S.R.P.: (3.5-oz. container) \$3.99

Savory herbed finishing butters have been around for eons. But leave it to the classically trained chef John



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Hubschman and his wife Janey, owners of Epicurean Butter that produces “chef-inspired” compound butters to help home cooks prepare restaurant quality meals at home, to extend the concept to the sweet side. Their *Organic Cocoa Coconut Butter* garnered a SOFI gold (in the dairy or dairy alternative category). It contains cream, coconut oil, honey, canola oil, cocoa powder and Himalayan pink salt. The product’s use of healthier (using on-trend coconut), organic, and more upscale ingredients should give those cocoa, hazelnut and palm oil spreads some deserved competition.

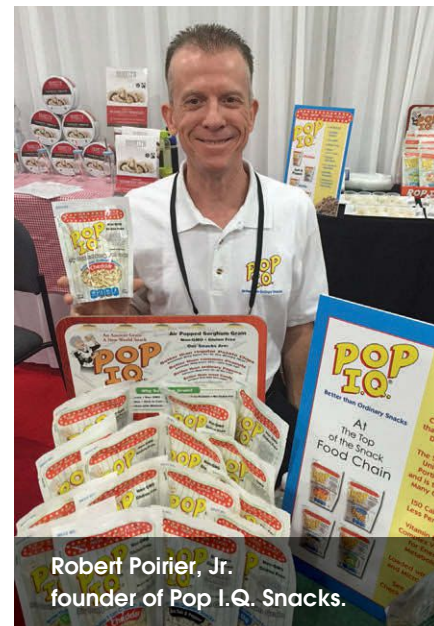
3

Pop I.Q. Snacks

www.popiqsnacks.com

S.R.P.: (1-oz.) \$1.99

The popularity of foods using ancient grains has grown exponentially over the past few years. Perhaps it’s the consumer’s yearning for alternative grain varieties that are not so over-exploited and genetically manipulated, like corn and wheat. At this year’s show I found two entrepreneurs using two



Robert Poirier, Jr.
founder of Pop I.Q. Snacks.

rather vintage “grains” — sorghum and buckwheat — to create some very innovative and healthy snacks.

Pop I.Q. Snacks is air popped, ready-to-eat sorghum. Founder Robert Poirier, Jr. thinks we should eat more of it, given that sorghum is naturally gluten-free, never been genetically modified, and packs a better nutritional punch than corn: higher calcium, protein, fiber and potassium and less sodium, calories and fat. And that explains his product’s tagline: “At the top of the snack-food chain.”

Here in the United States, the world’s largest producer, sorghum is better known as a field crop for producing cattle silage than as people food. But people around the globe depend upon it. It’s baked as roti and chapatti in India, white tortillas in Central America, and injera bread in Ethiopia.

Pop I.Q. Snacks are dainty-sized grains that pour easily from pouch to mouth, keeping the eater’s hands nice and clean; and there are no embarrassing hulls to stick in your teeth. *Pop I.Q.’s* packaging is a single-serve portion, grab-and-go pouches that are re-sealable. Available in four flavors, including: Kettle Mix, Sea Salt & Pepper, Tuscan and Cheddar.





4

BuckWhat! Foods

www.buckwhat.com

S.R.P.: (Nosh Bar and 3-piece Nosh bags, both 2 oz.) \$3.99

BuckWhat! Foods owner Leeann Rybakov was born in Ukraine where, like most of Eastern Europe, buckwheat is a staple food typically used for making a risotto-type dish. Like sorghum, buckwheat has a long resume of nutritional benefits. It's gluten-free (despite its name, it is not a grain), low-calorie and high in fiber and protein. The new start-up featured two snack products.

The first product is a square-shaped granola-type Nosh Bar filled with buckwheat, gluten-free oats, chia, almonds, dates, raisins and cinnamon. The second is a mound-shaped Nosh packaged three in a stand-up pouch and available in two flavors: Cocoa and Crunchy Peanut. It has just four base ingredients: buckwheat, dates, chia and cinnamon; then peanuts in the Crunchy Peanut Nosh or almonds and cocoa in the Cocoa Nosh. There is no added sugar. "I originally thought our typical customer would be a fitness junky, but it turns out to be a great mom-and-kid snack."



5

Béquet Confections

bequetconfections.com

S.R.P.: (Salted Mocha) \$0.40-\$0.50 each; (5-piece bag) \$3.95; (10-piece bag) \$5.95; (20-piece bag) \$9.95

Just when you thought that caramel product development had reached its limits of possibilities, two 2016 SOFI award winning confectioners thankfully proved us wrong.

Béquet Confections produces what might be the world's first two-layer caramel, the Salted Mocha caramel (SOFI silver in the confection category). It contains one layer of salt chocolate caramel and the other of espresso caramel. As owner/confectioner Robin Béquet explains, "Stacking the layers, rather than just blending the two flavors, gives a more distinct, richer flavor experience. It becomes a symphony of flavors." And much more difficult to execute, given that each layer must be hand-rolled to an exact 5/16 of an inch thick. This is Béquet Confections's fifth SOFI award.



Droga Chocolates

www.drogachocolates.com

S.R.P.: (Money on Honey 40-piece bag, 16 oz.) \$16

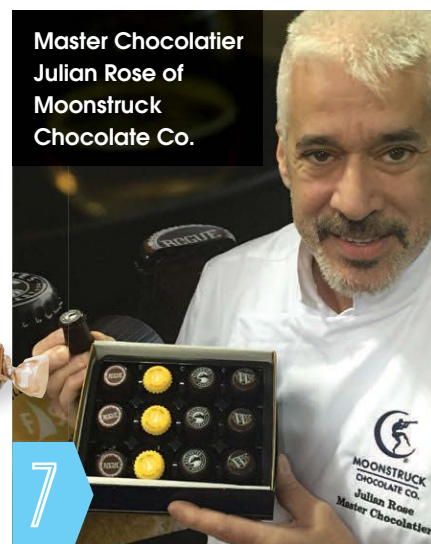
Droga Chocolates has shown that caramel can be made with honey rather than corn



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syrup. Winning a SOFI gold in the chocolate category, the Money on Honey caramel is made with wildflower honey, cream, butter, dark chocolate, and sea salt.

Master Chocolatier Julian Rose of Moonstruck Chocolate Co.



7

Moonstruck Chocolate's

www.moonstruckchocolate.com

S.R.P.: (Deschutes Brewery Black Butte Porter Truffle, 20-piece box) \$50

The last batch of confectionery and snack picks celebrates arresting product design concepts, such as, chocolate masquerading as beer bottles and hippy truffles and mushroom meringues.

Inspiration can come unexpectedly. In the case of Moonstruck Chocolate's Master Chocolatier Julian Rose, his inspiration came in the form of a case of beer. During a holiday party while opening a case of bottles of mixed beer,



he pondered whether he could create the same products using chocolate bottles and caps; in this case with caps tricked out with the brewery's brand. He approached several local breweries (Portland has a huge craft beer industry) and their responses were enthusiastic. He ended up working with four breweries: Widmer (using a hefeweizen), Rogue (brown ale), Full Sail (IPA) and Deschutes (porter). One of the flavors, the Deschutes Brewery Black Butte Porter Truffle, won a SOFI silver. It is a great pairing. "What we often associate with porters is their chocolatey roast notes, and that seemed a natural pick for pairing with our dark chocolate," explains Master Chocolatier Rose.



8

Thomas de Brun, Hands Off My Chocolate founder.

Hands Off My Chocolate

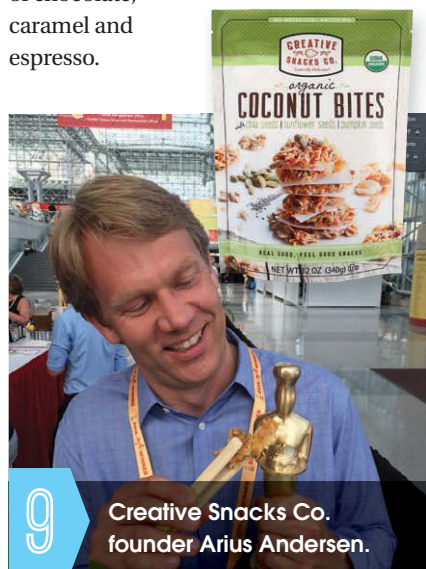
www.hands-off.com

S.R.P.: (3.5 oz.) \$4.99

Thomas de Brun had been working for a Dutch-based innovation agency working out ideas and concepts of products for big food companies, like Heineken. Then, he decided to use his skills to design his own product, a unique chocolate brand. He interviewed consumers in the streets and found that their biggest peeve was that chocolate is too hard to eat without making a mess.

Also, some 33 percent of respondents said that they hid their chocolate from their partner or their kids.

"Sometimes you need a moment for yourself. When you come home at the end of the day, you are done with sharing and just want a nice piece of chocolate," he philosophized. His solution: an easy to break apart chocolate bar, with each piece or "drop" decorated with the warning "mine." (Actually, one drop says "yours" but that word is crossed out.) Then, the bar is packaged in a re-sealable box and, to make the non-shareable message clear, the brand is called *Hands Off My Chocolate*. His brand now has seven flavors, with the latest flavor being Caramel Macchiato, a triple layer of chocolate, caramel and espresso.



9

Creative Snacks Co. founder Arius Andersen.

Creative Snacks Co.

creativesnacks.com

S.R.P.: (Organic Coconut Snacks, 4.0oz.) \$3.99

Creative Snacks Co. has taken coconut chips — a trendy ingredient — and layered them with healthy chia, pumpkin, and sunflower seeds. The resulting flapjack stack is stuck together with brown rice syrup. "Even folks who don't especially like coconut find that the mixture of seeds helps bridge their palette," says founder Arius Andersen. Winning a SOFI gold in the sweet snack category, Organic Coconut Snacks is a sweet and indulgent snack with only 6 grams of sugar.



10

Reach Organics' owner Sarah Khan.

Reach Organics

www.reachorganics.com

S.R.P.: (Cherry Almond Chunk, Raspberry Vanilla Burst and Ginger Cardamom Zest; 2.1-oz. 4-piece box) \$4.99; (12-piece, 8.4-oz. box) \$18

Reach Organics' owner Sarah Khan found her inspiration while creating healthy granola-based snacks for her daughter to eat while sailing competitively in high school. Reach is a sailing term meaning "on a reach" or heading into the wind. The nautical theme extends to packaging design, which won a prestigious bronze 2016 ADDY (American Advertising Award).

Each package contains three dark chocolate-enrobed chunks, each individually wrapped. The snack's base ingredients are dates, chia seeds, oats and 74 percent chocolate. With a wink to their granola genetics, Khan likes to call them "hippy truffles". As the package's tagline states, "Reach for one and you'll be reaching for more."






Brooklyn Cookie Co. President Cheryl Surana.

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cocoa and held together with a dab of dark chocolate.” Customers often tell Ms. Surana that seeing or smelling meringues reminds them of their grandmother. Her “Mushroom” Meringue Cookies are nostalgic, cute on their own or being used for decoration. They are tasty and naturally gluten-free. 

Brooklyn Cookie Co.’s

www.brooklyncookiecompany.com

S.R.P.: (Mushroom” Meringue Cookies 4.75-oz. tin with approximately 30 mushrooms) \$30; (7.9-oz. bucket with 50 mushrooms) \$45

Brooklyn Cookie Co.’s Cheryl Surana president, recalls that “growing up, I couldn’t wait for the holiday season when my mother pulled out her secret recipe for ‘mushroom cookies’ – two creamy sides of meringue dusted in

Curtis Vreeland, president of Vreeland & Associates (www.vreelandassociates.com), specializes in confectionery market research. He has been spotting trends in the premium confectionery sector for Candy Industry Magazine for eight years.

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