

Candy makers try to cater to health-conscious chocoholics

Elliot Minor
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ALBANY, Ga. — It's every chocolate lover's wish that their favorite indulgence could somehow be healthy for them. Now, chocolate makers claim they have granted that wish.

Mars Inc., maker of Milky Way, Snickers and M&M's candies, next month plans to launch nationwide a new line of products made with a dark chocolate the company claims has health benefits.

Called CocoaVia, the products are made with a kind of dark chocolate high in flavanols, an antioxidant found in cocoa beans that is thought to have a blood-thinning effect similar to

aspirin and may even lower blood pressure.

The snacks also are enriched with vitamins and injected with cholesterol-lowering plant sterols from soy.

But researchers are skeptical about using chocolate for its medicinal purposes and experts warn it's no substitute for a healthy diet.

"To suggest that chocolate is a health food is risky," said Bonnie Liebman, nutrition director for the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

Recent research has not established a link between flavanols and a reduced risk of cancer or heart disease, she said. And with obesity

already a serious health problem, "the last thing we need is for Americans to think they can eat more chocolate."

A paper published by the American Heart Association concluded that chocolate contains chemicals, including flavanols, that have the potential to reduce heart disease.

But it added researchers still don't know enough about flavanols to make dietary recommendations.

Other major chocolate companies also have started promoting the flavanol content of their dark chocolates, such as Hershey's Extra Dark, introduced last fall with highlights on its label touting its 60 percent

cocoa content and high level of flavanol.

Dark chocolate, which contains more flavanols than regular chocolate, is the fastest growing segment of the \$10 billion-a-year chocolate market. Hershey reports that its dark-chocolate sales have grown 11.2 percent over the past four years.

Last year, Hershey Co. acquired San Francisco-based Scharffen Berger Chocolate Maker Inc., known for its dark chocolate with high cocoa content and baking products, and plans to add new dark-chocolate products.

Mars created a new division, Mars Nutrition for Health & Well-Being,

to distribute CocoaVia. The company has sold the CocoaVia products online for a couple years. They are already available at retail stores in 34 states, selling for nearly \$1 a bar.

"Chocolate ... is the number one flavor ingredient in the world," said Jimmy Cass, Mars' vice president of marketing. "Heart health is the No. 1 concern of adults over the age of 40 in every civilized nation. Putting those two together is automatically a big idea."

With the growing number of baby boomers, the industry has been focusing on products that appeal to them, such as gourmet chocolates, organic

chocolates and "functional" chocolates, such as CocoaVia, that may provide health benefits.

Rachael Brandeis, a national spokeswoman for the American Dietetic Association in Atlanta, said dark chocolate is a good source of flavanols, but so are other foods such as fruits, vegetables and whole grains.

"Dark chocolate can fit into a healthy diet," she said. The fat in chocolate is a type that does not raise cholesterol levels, but it can add unwanted pounds if a person overindulges, she said.

"You always have to be conscious of how much you're eating," she said.

Bush administration moves to sell portions of national forest

Set Borenstein
KNIGHT RIDDER NEWSPAPERS

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration will unveil a proposal Friday to sell up to 200,000 acres of national forest land in "isolated parcels" ranging from a quarter of an acre to 200 acres, much of it in California.

The sale is part of a National Forest Service plan to raise \$800 million over the next five years to pay for rural schools in 41 states, offsetting shrinking revenues from sale of timber from national forests. The Bureau of Land Management also plans to sell federal lands to raise an estimated \$182 million over

five years.

Environmentalists charge that the short-term gain would be more than offset by the loss of public land. Congress would have to approve the land sales, but it has rejected similar recent proposals.

"I am outraged, and I don't think the public is going to stand for it for one minute," said Wilderness Society policy analyst Mike Anderson. "It's a scheme to raise money at the expense of the national forests, the wildlife, recreation and all the other values that Americans hold dear. It's the ultimate threat to the national forest."

Jerry Taylor of the Cato Institute, a libertarian think

tank, said the proposed land sales make sense.

"Private property will end up in the possession of those who value it the most," Taylor said. "That is an iron law of economics."

Details about what plots of land would be put up for sale are expected to be revealed at a noon press conference by Undersecretary of Agriculture Mark Rey, a former timber industry lobbyist. The Forest Service owns 193 million acres of land and plans to sell about 175,000 to 200,000 acres, according to Forest Service spokeswoman Heidi Valetkevitch.

"They could be theoretically from every

national forest," Valetkevitch said. "California has a lot on the list, I understand."

The lands in question aren't environmentally sensitive wilderness or protected scenic areas, Valetkevitch said. "It could be something that's in a neighborhood that people don't even know is forest land," she said.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., attacked the plan as "crazy," saying: "Here the administration wants to pass more tax cuts for the rich, and to pay the bill, they want to sell off public land — our nation's natural heritage."

The Forest Service owns 20 percent of California, including much of the

Sierra Nevada, Lake Tahoe, Big Sur and dense forests along the Oregon border. The Bureau of Land Management owns 15 percent of the Golden State.

Rural schools get 25 percent of federal forest timber sale proceeds, but those revenues have fallen, so the idea is to sell forest land to make up for that, Valetkevitch said.

Anderson of the Wilderness Society argued that money for rural schools could come from many sources and that the land sales are being proposed "so the budget deficit doesn't get worse." He noted that if forests are sold, future federal timber sales likely

would yield even less money for rural schools.

The president's new fiscal 2007 federal budget calls for the bureau to raise \$1 million in 2007 land sales, \$28 million in 2008, \$40 million in 2009, \$42 million in 2010 and \$71 million in 2011.

Dave Alberswerth, a Wilderness Society senior policy adviser, said that would be "way more than they have been selling in recent years."

From 2000 to 2004, the bureau sold 13,160 acres for an average price of \$320 an acre, he said. At that rate, the government would have to sell more than half a million acres to garner \$182 million.

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a new reality of "buyer beware" in both their stomachs and their wallets when it comes to ordering a cocktail.

Prices are up, while drink sizes are down from 1.7 ounces of booze to as little as 1 ounce. Some bars sell discernibly watery drinks; in others, it's a given that making friends with the bartender makes the shots more generous.

One of the biggest complaints is the loss of consistency from bar to bar — or from bartender to bartender. Among those in a stupor over the change is Savannah Williams of Mount Pleasant, who said going to a bar today is akin to playing a game of Russian roulette.

"My first vodka-cranberry was so weak, I questioned whether there was any vodka in it," she said last week on the deck at Red's Ice House. "Then, my second one took my breath away."

Williams said she fears the chance she could get overly drunk has increased because of the free-pour system — not decreased, as Statehouse advocates advertised.

That's because previously, everyone knew what to expect from a factory-sealed 1.7-ounce minibottle, she said.

South Carolina's switch to free-pour was approved by voters in 2004, causing a ripple effect across the state. Bars had to train bartenders on how to use a jigger. New multi-brand recipes had to be learned. Shelves to hold stock had to be reconfigured to hold the bigger bottles.

Whether the change will benefit or hurt the state's bank account is unclear. Gone is the easily tracked 25-cent tax that the state was guaranteed for each minibottle sold. The new

state tax is 5 percent of the cost of the drink, meaning a \$5 drink carries a 25-cent state sales tax.

Some insight to the tax benefits could come in the next few weeks. January business tax records for liquor sales aren't due to the state Department of Revenue until Monday. Then several weeks will be needed to calculate and match against last year's total, department spokeswoman Stephanie Jones said.

Tom Sponseller, executive director of the S.C. Hospitality Association, said the comments he's heard from bar owners have been mostly positive. But one of the drawbacks, he said, is that some sites are still serving drinks in 10-ounce glasses.

That was fine during the minibottle days, he said, when the ratio of mixer to liquor was 4-to-1. To correct the ratio, drinks need to be served in 8-ounce glasses, he said.

Some bars changed portion size without changing the size of glass, he said, which greatly affected the taste of the drinks they serve. "Everyone is in a learning curve right now."

Another problem has been in supply. Some

specialty or quality brand liquors haven't been able to keep up with demand, Sponseller said.

But more businesses have been receptive than not, he said.

Contrary to popular belief, the minibottle might never totally disappear from South Carolina bars. The law says bars can now sell free-pour liquor; it doesn't mandate it. Some bars have opted to keep the minibottles.

"We have not changed at all," said Steve Kish, a partner at 82 Queen. "We're one of the holdouts."

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