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Fancy Food 2009: Specialty products, from soup to nuts

Chronicle Food staff report
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If the 34th annual Winter Fancy Food Show is any indication, we'll be eating plenty of chocolate and cheese, swigging "nutritional" beverages and using more olive oil this year.

IMAGES



Erick Wong / The Chronicle

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More than 1,500 exhibitors from 35 countries displayed a total of 50,000 products at the mega trade show, which concluded its three-day run at Moscone Center on Tuesday. And while the economy has put a crimp in consumers' buying power, organizers say that specialty foods continue to fill the public's appetite for "small indulgences."

Many producers from foreign countries banded together under their national umbrellas, with the result that booths from Italy, France, Canada, Australia, Great Britain, Chile and even Tunisia

featured dozens of products.

Here are a few products that caught our eye. While some may already be in retail markets, most won't appear in stores for several months, although many can already be ordered online.

Vintage Cheddar cheese from Britain's Quicke's Traditional made by the Quicke family in the Devon hills, stood out for its shard-like texture and pronounced grassy flavor. Another British product, the **Isle of Man Mature Cheddar** from a dairy cooperative on the island was equally appealing.

Bovetti Artisan Chocolatier from France had eye-catching **pure-origin chocolate tablets** inlaid with nuts, candied fruit and spices. We liked the milk chocolate with dried banana.

From Italy, we also liked **dry-farmed Sicilian almonds** from Blanca (ItalFoods is the distributor), which are flatter than California almonds and have a distinctive taste - more like a bitter almond. They're the ones Sicilian pastry makers use for marzipan.

Pariani **Olio Nocciola delle Langhe**, hazelnut oil from the Langhe region of Piedmont, is cold-pressed from roasted hazelnuts. Manicaretto, the importer, suggests putting it on carpaccio, grilled meat or chocolate gelato.

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Real Foods, a company that promotes fair trade products that preserve local food heritage, offered Xoxoc's **dehydrated prickly pear with chile** that's sweet, sour, salty and hot. Produced in Hidalgo, Mexico, it's the essence of slightly chewy prickly pear, with a little savory-spicy hit.

From Spain, Matiz's light and rustic Andalusian **olive oil cakes** come in four flavors: garlic-parsley, sugared, cinnamon and original with anise.

We've written about Savory Choice in the past - gelled concentrates that blend with water for a finished broth that can be the base of soups or sauces. The newest product in the line to hit the shelves is **beef-flavored demi-glace**. Mix it with water or wine for a rich sauce.

Aloe drinks were everywhere this year, including a particularly nice one from T'best, with original and flavored drinks including lychee, mango and guava.

New York's Bee-Raw stood out among the many honeys at the show. The company makes **American single-varietal honey** from small, family-owned apiaries, including orange blossom from Florida, Basswood from New York and Sourwood from North Carolina. The thick and creamy Colorado star thistle was a favorite.

Snake River Farms from Boise, Idaho introducing hardwood-smoked **American Waygu beef hot dogs**. Fat, juicy and meaty, they take franks to a whole new level.

Chocolate Mochi Krunch, brown rice mochi crackers covered in chocolate, were crazy good. Flavors include milk chocolate and hot chocolate, which had a spicy kick. They're made by Impressions Fine Foods in Los Angeles.

And then there's this for a grand finale: J&D's, a company that produces smoked bacon salt and Baconnaise, and whose slogan is, "Everything should taste like bacon," handed out samples of **bacon-flavored lip gloss**. The product is vegetarian and, somehow, kosher.

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