

The Green Scene

Recent studies show that today's vegetables aren't as healthy as those of yesteryear. Now is the time for shoppers to fill this nutritional void with a green foods supplement.

B y M e l i s s a K v i d a h l

It used to be that simply eating vegetables gave people the nutrients they needed to attain good health. But according to a recent study coming out of the Biochemical Institute at the University of Texas, Austin, this is not the case today. In the study, which appeared in the February 2010 issue of the *Journal of HortScience*, author Donald R. Davis said that the average vegetable found in today's supermarket is anywhere

from five percent to 40 percent lower in minerals like magnesium, iron, calcium and zinc than those found approximately 50 years ago.

Citing what he calls the "dilution effect," Davis explained that while today's vegetables might be larger, they contain far fewer nutrients. According to Davis, these larger vegetables contain more "dry matter," thereby diluting mineral concentrations. Further, the "genetic dilution effect,"



What's more, Davis maintained that the increased use of fertilizers and pesticides causes crops to grow faster than ever and results in earlier harvests—thus limiting the amounts of nutrients that these crops can absorb from the soil.

This is not the first time that modern agriculture has come under attack for its lackluster nutrient profile. In 2007, The Organic Center, a nonprofit organization dedicated to understanding the health and environmental benefits of organic food and farming systems, released a report entitled "Still No Free Lunch: Nutrient levels in US food supply eroded by pursuit of high yields."

This report stated that it might not be just modern farming practices to blame—the cause might run deeper.

"Researchers have grown modern plant varieties side by side with historic, generally lower-yielding cultivars, using similar production practices and levels of inputs, like nitrogen fertilizer," said The Organic Center in a statement. "Several such studies have found that the modern-era varieties produce 10 to 25 percent lower levels of iron, zinc, protein, calcium, vitamin C and other essential nutrients per pound of produce or grain."

This is causing quite the challenge for well-meaning health seekers, who might not be able to enjoy the rich nutrient profile of rapidly changing greens.

Why Everyone Needs a Green Foods Supplement

"Green plant foods have served as the foundation for animal life from the very beginning," said Dr. Jonny Bowden, a board certified nutrition specialist, columnist and author, on behalf of Barlean's (Ferndale, WA), citing every animal from dinosaurs to the modern earth's inhabitants as dependent on green vegetation for nutrient needs such as micronutrient vitamins and minerals.

Yet when these foods in their raw form begin to fail those who eat them, health conscious shoppers need to turn to supplementation. Enter green foods and supplements.

"In today's hectic lifestyle, it is nearly impossible to eat enough vegetables, especially greens, to satisfy the body's needs," said Dawn Jarvis, director of product support and education for

Garden of Life LLC (West Palm Beach, FL).

"Study after study shows that most people (91 percent) do not consume five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables per day."

This 91 percent of people is just one reason why greens cast such a wide net in a natural products store. It's a simple fact that so many different people need it.

According to Andreas Koch, marketing director at Barlean's, greens have common appeal to both male and female health-minded adults. "Though due to its content value, the price point is normally much higher than most supplements; thus, typical greens shoppers are

Grab-and-Go Greens

Because green foods and drinks are ideal for those looking to pack a nutritional punch with minimal servings, convenience is the No. 1 trend in this category. According to Steve Dinneen, marketing, advertising and design representative for Pines International, many companies are now offering green products in newly designed single-serve packages, and even in seltzer-like large tablets to promote ease of use. "The new forms offer a new path for the uninitiated to be introduced to the benefits of greens, so it's all good for the category," he said.

One such company leading the way in green convenience is Greens+ (Vero Beach, FL), which markets the GREENS Plus® Original Stick Pack. Ideal for on-the-go students, busy moms and rushed workers, GREENS Plus Stick Packs are packed with an easy-mix powder that dissolves in water or juice. This nutritious, tasty pick-me-up is a healthy alternative to energy drinks, the company said.

Boasting a 100 percent natural blend of 29 nutrient-rich superfoods, sea vegetables and high-energy herbal extracts, one serving of GREENS Plus delivers more essential vitamins, trace minerals, live enzymes and high-ORAC antioxidants than five full servings of fresh fruits and vegetables, and provides every vibrant color in the dietary food spectrum, as recommended by the United States Department of Agriculture.

GREENS Plus can be taken more than once per day, with a minimum of eight glasses of pure water.

"Greens+ has changed to accommodate the busy consumer who doesn't have time to make a green drink in the morning by creating easy-to-use, on-the-go stick packs that can easily be used in any juice or water bottle," said Diane Kingsley, the company's office manager. "We also have nine SKUs of energy bars available, which are perfect as grab-and-go foods."

usually more affluent," he pointed out. And perhaps in addition to affluence, greens shoppers share a heightened dedication to supplementation—the value they place on health is reflected



in their willingness to spend more money at retail on these sometimes-pricey supplements.

On the other end of the spectrum, Paul Licata, president of World Organic Corp. (Huntington Beach, CA), maintained that the primary shopper of a green foods supplement is someone who does not have a traditionally healthy diet. According to Licata, those *not* as dedicated to a healthy lifestyle are just as powerful a category driver as those who are.

Paul Balabush, nutrition and body care buyer for The Cupboard Natural Foods and Café of Denton, TX, noticed a similar trend with his customers: interestingly, they were either extremely dedicated to healthy living, or were looking to supplement a not-so-great diet with a greens supplement. Balabush explained that it's perhaps the wide range of delivery options on the market that lends this category so well to two distinctly different sets of customers. "It seems like the people who choose the capsules are the ones who say, 'I don't eat many vegetables, so I'm looking to get more greens;' but the ones who choose the powders, the more adventurous ones, are the raw foodists and may be more dedicated," he said. "It's easy to swallow a pill, but the ones looking for the powders know what they're looking for. It really does fall into these two categories."

"It works for people of both lifestyles," agreed Carol Ketring, 20-year manager of Oklahoma City, OK-based The Health Food Center. "If you want to improve your health, green foods certainly do that, but if you don't get enough nutrition in your diet, of course green foods are great to add."

All in all, Jarvis noted that green foods shoppers can be male or female, anyone wanting more energy and better digestive health, those who do not consume enough greens and want to supplement their fruit and vegetable intake, those on low carbohydrate diets and those who want the benefits of juicing but can't find the time to do it on a regular basis.

"Retailers should stress two things," said Bowden. "That practically no one is getting the recommended nine servings of vegetables daily, and that green

drinks—while not a complete substitute for nine servings of vegetables—nevertheless go a long way toward closing many of the gaps left in our nutrition, and that there are things in green drinks that you don't commonly get in vegetables, like the phytochemicals in the grass extracts (unless you're downing a couple of shots of expensive wheatgrass juice every day). For that reason, even people like me, who eat a ton of vegetables, still benefit from the daily green drink."

In short, it seems like the target shop-

per for greens is practically every shopper walking through a natural products store's doors. But does every shopper know that greens are out there?

Growing Green Awareness

"As a nutritionist, I'd say there's room for growth in the awareness category," conceded Bowden. "I've listed green drinks as among my favorite superfoods in probably a dozen articles, yet editors and readers often ask, 'what are those?' There's an opportunity here."

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Reader Service #20

Manufacturers noted many different misconceptions related to the green foods category, and cited ways that retailers can help educate their customers on a category that doesn't get much coverage in the mainstream media. Unlike those for heart health or weight management, products in the green foods category are fairly specific to natural products outlets, so retailers will be met with opposite ends of the spectrum: new customers with lots of questions, and seasoned shoppers with specific concerns about ingredients and products. The first step is educating the staff to address these questions.

"We are continuously educating our retail partners about the 'per serving greens' value vs. other brands. This distilled information helps retailers consult with their customers in making right decisions," said Barlean's Koch.

"Consumers shopping for greens are serious about their health, and hence much more knowledgeable as opposed to the mass population looking only for that typical vitamin C or multivitamin."

Indeed, a greens supplementation program is much more complex than popping a multivitamin in the morning. According to Licata, newcomers to the category need to be made aware of this important difference. "One problem we see is people assuming that they can take wheatgrass or spirulina or chlorella alone and get all their nutrition or even all the chlorophyll they need," he said. "While these do contain chlorophyll, even chlorella only contains about 1.2 to two percent. This would mean that to get 100mg chlorophyll, one would have to take about 15 to 20 chlorella capsules."

Regardless of its perhaps shaky start, this seems to be a category that, like others before it, is experiencing growth—and perhaps faster than anticipated.

"Prevalence, in the last year especially, has really gone up," said Balabuch, crediting Dr. Oz and green foods' newfound "buzzword" status. "People come in and ask for it now."

"Consumers are becoming aware of the green food category at a very quick rate," agreed Allen Levine, director of sales at Pines International, Inc. (Lawrence, KS). "Most green foods companies that I am aware of are expe-

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riencing double-digit growth. Shelf space in stores has also grown over the past several years. It seems to me that retailers are already doing an excellent job of making people aware of the green food category, and of meeting their needs. They can always learn more about the products we offer by contacting us, and I'm sure the other companies in the category are also happy to share what they know with retailers, either through our websites, phones or meeting us at a show."

From Curiosity to Shopping Cart

Getting the facts is a critical first step in any retailer's plan. Merchandising these newfound products is a retailer's opportunity to get greens into the hands (and shopping carts) of customers.

In order to tap into those customers who are already health-minded, Todd Hamermehl, co-founder of Amazing

Grass (San Francisco, CA), suggested bringing displays into the produce section. "Most consumers don't step foot into the vitamin section [of a large store]," he noted. "By bringing green foods next to the kale and broccoli, shoppers can be introduced to more convenient ways to consume greens."

Lucky for retailers, now is a great time to feature greens. Besides the obvious correlations between spring-time and greens and sprouts, Ketring noted that as people prepare for summer, they want to look better and feel more energetic.

For Koch, the best way to boost awareness is by setting up a greens fountain in the store for customer sampling, and the best time to do so is during the spring seasons when detoxifiers are most requested.

Barlean's even offers a \$900 valued greens machine free with minimum purchase, so that customers can try the formula in the store before purchasing. "Every store taking this offer has had significant sales increases," he added.

Balabuch puts these practices into action at The Cupboard Natural Foods and Café. The store invites vendors in to perform demos in-store, and relies on these vendors to pass along savings to their customers. "We can do an endcap about green foods when we get the products on sale, to be honest," he said. "If it happens to coincide with a certain theme, then that's even better." **VR**

Extra! Extra!

Most shoppers are wary about taste when it comes to greens. Visit www.vitaminretailer.com to find out how some manufacturers are sweetening the deal for potential buyers.

***i* For More Information:**

- Amazing Grass, (415) 441-3326
- Barlean's, (800) 445-3529
- Garden of Life LLC, (800) 622-8986
- Greens+, (800) 643-1210
- Pines International, Inc., (800) 697-4637
- Sun Chlorella USA, (800) 829-2828
- World Organic Corp., (714) 893-0017