

Organic Products Retailer

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# Organic

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## THE Spices OF LIFE

ORGANIC SEASONINGS AND MARINADES  
MAKE MEALTIME MORE INTERESTING

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**A**rising tide lifts all boats" might be one way to explain the increasing popularity of organic spices and marinades. In other words, as organic sales in general are growing, it stands to reason that specific categories will share in that growth. However, manufacturers and suppliers cited a number of lifestyle factors that influence organic consumers to spice up their foods—and influence manufacturers to expand their selection.

"As consumers look for more convenient ways to prepare meals, they are drawn to products that eliminate the time and complexity of creating great-tasting dishes," said Brett Karminski, category manager—seasonings for Frontier Natural Products Co-op (Norway, IA), which markets the Simply Organic line. "Products that help save time and take the guesswork out of cooking tend to be

more successful than products that do not." As marketers recognize this, more 'convenience' seasonings products are being introduced.

Karminski said Simply Organic's new line of ethnic seasoning blends, "World of Taste," exceeded "all expectations" since its introduction last year. He attributed this to the line's combination of "authentic taste [and] quick, convenient preparation."



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BY PAUL BUBNY

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products" umbrella as vitamin and herb supplements, it's not surprising that there's a nutritional component here as well. Explained FitzHenry, "Spices can be the roots, seeds, [or] buds of plants, or in the case of cinnamon, a tree bark. Herbs are typically plant leaves. Spices and herbs get their flavor and often

their color from the oils in their cells. In addition, spices contain healthful antibacterial, anti-inflammatory or mild digestive properties.

"In India, for example, they tend to use a lot of turmeric, which is an anti-inflammatory and inhibits tumor growth," she continued. "It is also interesting that Indians have a very low incidence of Alzheimer's disease. Western medicine is just now beginning to recognize the healing benefits of spices."

### The More They Know

When it comes to successfully merchandising spices and marinades, retailers can rely on more than just a broad selection. "In the seasonings

category, education is a very useful tool in growing sales," Karminski said. "The more you can show consumers how to use seasonings, the more likely they are to experiment with new seasoning products."

Monroe commented, "Prominent displays and active or passive demos are very helpful. At FungusAmongUs, we also develop recipes that use our Melange Seasoning & Rub Marinade products in multiple ways such as dips, salad dressings as well as marinades. Recipe cards are available for each of our product lines."

Red Monkey's Treadaway cited "competitive pricing, recipe distribution, and perhaps co-marketing with other cooking and baking ingredients. Sometimes

# (Not So) PLAIN VANILLA

**A**long with spices and marinades, organic flavors, such as vanilla extract, are gaining in popularity. Not surprisingly, the quality considerations that go into the extracts are higher than the artificially flavored "extracts" sold at many supermarkets.

"The oil and vanillin content of a quality bean is absolutely essential," said Shawn Donille at Mountain Rose Herbs. He added that the beans "need to be oily to the touch, with a sheen that almost produces a reflection [and] with an aroma that is intoxicating. These are the attributes which have the ability to make one salivate from the delicious aroma of a good bean."

In addition to quality screening, Frontier Natural Products Co-op is "concerned about the social and ethical factors that growers are faced with," said Brett Kaminski. "That is why we recently converted Frontier branded vanilla to fair trade certified vanilla, and are currently the only brand to offer fair trade vanilla in the United States"

Although manufacturers and raw material suppliers expressed confidence that sup-

plies of organic vanilla are steady for now, Rick Brownell, vice president of vanilla products at Virginia Dare (Brooklyn, NY), cautioned that "Supply from a particular region could be a concern, especially for nationally or internationally distributed products. Fortunately, with the drop in vanilla bean prices, more and more growers are willing to add value by producing organic certified beans."

For manufacturers planning to market vanilla extracts, Brownell said, "The two keys to adequate coverage are first, to develop a well-thought-out forecast prior to product introduction. Second, contract annually for the full anticipated requirement and insist that the extractor cover with a matching contract for beans as well."

For storeowners, "The key to retailing vanilla is to cross merchandise with other ingredients or hard goods (i.e. ice cream makers, mixers, bowls)," said Matt Nielsen, COO of Nielsen-Massey Vanillas (Waukegan, IL). "Retailers should also focus on key holidays during the year, such as Valentine's Day and Mother's Day as well as seasons, such as summer when it is a perfect time to

make homemade ice cream."

Brownell commented, "Actually, now that prices have come down it is a lot easier to keep interest in vanilla year round! Chefs are particularly enthusiastic about using real vanilla again. And, typically they set the trends for future menu and product development."

Vanilla might be more typically associated with sweet (e.g. cakes and ice cream) than with savory, but the latter application constitutes "a very active area for vanilla—used in savory products like soups, stews, sauces, and marinades," Brownell said. We have just developed a Pure Vanilla Sea Salt specifically for savory applications."

While Donille pointed out that "extracts are primarily for food and baking purposes,"

Karminski offered consumer-oriented tips on expanding vanilla's uses beyond holiday baking season. They included:

- Room deodorizer/freshener. "Vanilla is a popular fragrance



in candles, which can help freshen the air in your house.

Or, you can make your own room freshener by adding vanilla to a pan of simmering water on top of the stove. Real estate agents often suggest doing this to make your house more attractive to prospective buyers."

- Spider repellent. "Spiders apparently don't like the smell, so by

adding one or two vanilla beans to your furniture polish and using it on the top and underside of your furniture, you can help keep them at bay."

- Hot food relief. "Some people find that after burning your tongue on a too-hot cup of coffee or pizza, or eating hot, spicy foods like chilies, a few drops of vanilla placed on the tongue provides a soothing remedy."

And just as vanilla's uses aren't limited to culinary applications, neither is vanilla the only extract drawing customers. "Almond is a tremendously popular flavor with year-round appeal," said Karminski. "To our surprise, maple flavor is becoming one of our fastest growing flavor SKUs."