

## Daily-dose cookies offer immunity benefits from beta glucans

Biscuits Leclerc may be 105 years old but it's not afraid to take risks at the cutting edge of functional food. The family-owned Canadian company, which has been making biscuits and other snacks since 1905, has recently launched a range of cookies, called Praeventia, that offer benefits to the digestive and immune systems. By RICHARD CLARKE.

Quebec City-based Biscuits Leclerc, which has sales of about C\$225 million (\$216 million/€174 million) a year, styles itself as a company which places healthfulness at the centre of its offer. "At the beginning of the year 2000 we were the first Canadian manufacturer to eliminate trans fats from most of its products," says Frédéric Langlois, the company's vice-president for R&D. "Even though we're a cookie manufacturer, we had the conscience to make better products."

That step was followed up with the launch of Vital, a range of oat bran-based cookies formulated to offer higher levels of fibre and lower levels of sugar than other products on the market. This proved successful and prompted the company's management to push the boundaries further, says Langlois.

"Our president told us Vital was good but he wanted something more, so he asked the R&D department to find something that would be in advance of everyone else and could have some kind of functional claim attached to it. After months of research and brainstorming we came up with the product concept."

That concept, launched in 2008, was Praeventia, a cookie and cereal bar range enriched with prebiotic inulin, supplied by Beneo, to deliver a digestive health benefit. There are two different inulin-enriched Praeventia bar products available, both coated with 70% cocoa dark chocolate:

- Cranberry & Pomegranate with Red Wine Extract (the extract in question is resveratrol)
- Almond & Apple with Green Tea Extract

In each case, a 175g pack contains seven pouches holding a serving of two 12.5g bars. On the front of the pack, it states: "Source of prebiotic fibre (2g of inulin per serving)" and "70g of polyphenols per serving (antioxidants)". A silhouette of a woman in the Lotus position is pictured, with the words 'Digestive Health' printed in large letters

across the middle of the image.

Similarly, there are also two variants of the Praeventia inulin-enriched cookie product:

- Orange Zest with Green Tea Extract
- Dark Chocolate Chip with Red Wine Extract

In each case a 210g pack contains seven pouches of cookies, with each pouch providing 2g of inulin.

The front of the pack carries the same message regarding polyphenols as the bars, as well as the text: "Inulin, a prebiotic dietary fibre, promotes digestive health". A silhouette of a woman exercising is featured, with the words "Lunch Solution" printed across her waist.

A third variant – Praeventia Junior Cookies – is aimed at kids. There are two chocolate varieties – Dark Chocolate Chip and Double Chocolate. There are seven pouches of Junior

Cookies in a 210g pack, with each pouch providing 1g of inulin.

### NEW WELLMUNE COOKIES CARRY IMMUNITY CLAIM

Pleased with the performance of the inulin cookies and bars the company took a bolder step and launched, in December 2009, an extension to the range fortified with Wellmune WGP, a beta glucan said to boost the immune system.

Each 210g box contains seven cookies, for one-a-day consumption. Praeventia Wellmune cookies have only 140 calories per 30g serve and come in two varieties: Ginger, and Dark Chocolate Chip 70% cocoa & Cranberry. The products are described as whole grain, with whole oat and whole wheat, trans-fat free and low in saturated fat.

Each individually-wrapped heart-shaped 30g cookie provides 100 mg of beta-glucans



from Wellmune WGP, which is described in Leclerc communications as a “natural ingredient derived from the cell walls of baker’s yeast” (see pages 15 and 16 of this edition of *NMB* for a Case Study on Wellmune).

Leclerc explains that each biscuit provides a daily dose:

*“Consuming 100 to 200 mg of β-glucans a day activates key immune cells (neutrophils).”*

Leclerc had been impressed by the science behind Wellmune WGP and approached Biothera, the supplier of the ingredient, with a view to enlisting its help in persuading Health Canada, the country’s food industry regulator, to agree to an immunity claim. “Together with Biothera we worked with Health Canada to come to an agreement on what type of claim we could make,” says Langlois.

That agreement led to the claim: “Beta-glucan activates key immune cells (neutrophils).” The front of the pack also carries the Wellmune WGP logo.

## TASTE KEY TO RISING SALES

Though he declines to disclose any specific figures, Langlois says sales of Praeventia are rising and distribution is increasing. The product is sold across Canada and in the eastern US in a range of outlets, including Wal-Mart and CostCo. In-store the cookies and bars are sold alongside similar products, rather than in the dietary supplements aisle. “We wanted people to see it,” Langlois explains.

The target market for Praeventia, says

Langlois, is “people who care about what they eat”. But he also says the company chose a cookie as a delivery format because Leclerc wanted to “get the mass consumer to try it and enjoy it.” It is not always easy to persuade people to try a treat product marketed as functional, he admits – laying the blame for this on previous attempts to develop such concepts. “In the past a lot of products have been launched that did not taste very good,” he claims. “That’s why we do a lot of sampling of the item, to make sure people try it.”

A pack of Praeventia costs CA\$3.39-3.99 (\$3.25-\$3.82/€2.62-€3.08) in-store, which Langlois says is on a par with premium products in the biscuit and cookie category. He admits that the cost of the product is driven upwards by the ingredients in them, but insists consumer tolerance of the price point is high. “The balance seems right because the repeat purchase rate on the product is growing every day and it’s getting more and more distribution every week. So we know we have a good balance between quality, benefit and price.”

Leclerc plans to expand the Praeventia range further, but Langlois says the company will be restricted in its options by the relative severity with which Health Canada controls the use of health claims. “Now we have digestive health and Wellmune, what’s next?” he says. “Is it the mind? Is it the eyes? We are getting to the point where we are quite limited on the claims we can make. [Health Canada] is very strict, but the good thing is they don’t want to stop the industry. If you produce the right back-up [to a claim] and you collaborate with them they will collaborate with you.”

## CLAIMS FOR INULIN COOKIES

Praeventia cookies with inulin are described as providing, per 30g serve:

- 3g to 4g of dietary fibre or 12% to 16% of your daily fibre requirements (recommended daily intake: 25g)
- 2g of inulin or 40% of the recommended daily dose of prebiotic fibre
- 140 to 150 calories, which make it a source of the energy you need to perform your daily activities
- 6% to 8% of your body’s daily iron requirements
- 70 mg of polyphenols (antioxidants) per serving

## NUTRITION FACTS FOR PRAEVENTIA WELLMUNE COOKIES

| Nutrition Facts<br>Valeur nutritive  |                                       |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Per pouch (30 g) / par sachet (30 g) |                                       |
| Amount<br>Teneur                     | % Daily Value<br>% valeur quotidienne |
| <b>Calories / Calories</b> 140       |                                       |
| <b>Fat / Lipides</b> 5g              | 8%                                    |
| Saturated / saturés 1g               | 5%                                    |
| + Trans / trans 0g                   |                                       |
| <b>Cholesterol / Cholestérol</b> 0mg |                                       |
| <b>Sodium / Sodium</b> 90mg          | 4%                                    |
| <b>Carbohydrate / Glucides</b> 20g   | 7%                                    |
| Fibre / Fibres 2g                    | 8%                                    |
| Sugars / Sucres 8g                   |                                       |
| <b>Protein / Protéines</b> 3g        |                                       |
| Vitamin A / Vitamine A               | 0%                                    |
| Vitamin C / Vitamine C               | 0%                                    |
| Calcium / Calcium                    | 2%                                    |
| Iron / Fer                           | 8%                                    |

INGREDIENTS: WHOLE ROLLED OAT, BROWN SUGAR, ENRICHED WHEAT FLOUR, WHOLE OAT FLOUR, CANOLA AND/OR SOYA OIL, DARK CHOCOLATE CHIPS 70% COCOA (CHOCOLATE LIQUOR, SUGAR, DEXTROSE, MILK INGREDIENTS, SOYA, LECITHIN, NATURAL FLAVOUR), DEHYDRATED CRANBERRIES (CRANBERRIES, SUGAR, SUNFLOWER OIL), COCOA POWDER, SODIUM BICARBONATE, SALT, β-GLUCAN (WELLMUNE WGP®), NATURAL FLAVOUR.  
ALLERGY INFORMATION: THIS PRODUCT MAY CONTAIN EGGS

