Tropicana Calls On Carrots To Squeeze Juice Sales

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NEW YORK (AP) — Tropicana wants more people to drink its juice, so it's extending a carrot — and a bushel of other vegetables.

As sugar-conscious Americans continue to shy away from fruit juices, Tropicana is using vegetables for the first time in recent history with a new drink called "Farmstand" set to hit shelves next month. By marketing the juice as a way for moms to sneak some veggies into their kids' diets, the division of PepsiCo Inc. is betting that carrots and beets can give it a new avenue for growth.

The foray into the fruit-and-vegetable category comes after Tropicana executives watched Campbell Soup find success with V-8 V-Fusion drinks, which also found a sweet spot in making vegetables more palatable by mixing them with fruit. Since its rollout in 2006, Campbell has grown V-Fusion sales with multiple new flavors and varieties.

But Tropicana executives say Farmstand's potential is far greater because it will be sold in the refrigerated sections of supermarkets. Shelf-stable juices such as V-Fusion, by contrast, are exposed to higher temperatures in the pasteurization process so they don't have to be kept chilled.

Although the nutritional benefits don't differ, Tropicana's chief marketing officer Memo Maquivar said the refrigerated aspect of Farmstand will be a critical differentiator.

"Chilled is very important — it signals high quality, it signals premium, it signals freshness," he said.

The rollout of Tropicana Farmstand comes as consumption of pure fruit juice has declined 6 percent over the past five years, according to the market research firm Euromonitor International. And Tropicana's share of the category is down to 16 percent from 21 percent five years ago.

Now Tropicana is betting on Farmstand, its biggest product launch since the rollout of Trop50 in 2009. That drink has about half the calories of regular orange juice and is targeted toward people who are watching their weight.

By contrast, Farmstand's calories are roughly the same as that of regular orange juice; an 8-ounce glass has about 120 calories and 28 grams of sugar. Since Farmstand is primarily targeting moms who want to get their kids to eat some vegetables, Maquivar says those stats shouldn't be a concern.

The juice will be available at Wal-Mart Stores Inc. later this month before expanding to supermarkets and other retailers early next year. In the first half of 2013,

Tropicana plans to spend between $20 million and $30 million on advertising for Farmstand, with tag lines such as "Turn Your Kids Into Veggie Lovers."

As integral as the promise of vegetables may be to its success, however, Tropicana is being careful not to play up the beets and carrots too much. Jeff Miller, a senior marketing manager for Tropicana, said consumer surveys showed moms didn't want to be caught by their kids serving hidden vegetables.

So the first three Farmstand flavors emphasize the fruit content — strawberry banana, peach mango and pomegranate blueberry. The bottles prominently feature images of fruit, while the vegetables are tucked behind the logo.

As for the taste, it took about eight months to come up with the right blend of juices that "hide the vegetables as much as possible," said Kathy Timperman, product development manager at PepsiCo Inc.

Early on, Timperman said Tropicana tested a variety of vegetables, including cucumbers, zucchinis, tomatoes and purple carrots. She noted those could still turn up in future flavors but that the company is sticking with beets, sweet potatoes and yellow and orange carrots for now.

Tropicana Farmstand will also have a thinner consistency more akin to regular orange juice, unlike the thicker, premium fruit-and-vegetable juices such as Naked and Bolthouse Farms, which are marketed to health-conscious adults on the go.

But as hard as Tropicana worked to make Farmstand taste like regular juice, Timperman said most people will still find it to be "a little bit of a different experience."

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