**Heinz unveils new blue ketchup**

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Blue cheese, blueberries and chicken cordon bleu, but blue ketchup?

The H.J. Heinz Co., which has sold the condiment in red, green, purple, pink, orange and teal, is adding blue to its palette of crazy-colored ketchup. The Pittsburgh company unveiled Heinz EZ Squirt "Stellar Blue" this week, just in time for spring and summer — hot seasons for condiments.

Based on the success of the other colors, the food giant expects the new color to provide a boost to all ketchup sales, not just the oddly tinted ones, said Heinz spokesman Robin Teets.

Since Heinz introduced its first shade, "Blastin' Green," in October 2000, the company sold more than 25 million bottles of colored ketchup. Last year, Heinz controlled 60% of the American ketchup market, an all-time high for the company, Teets said.

Every time the company introduces a color, its share of the market bumps up a bit, Teets said.

"It's the time of year when overall sales goes up. There's a nice bump in volume from EZ Squirt products, but we tend to have a halo over ketchup, overall," Teets said.

Christine McCracken, an analyst with Midwest Research, said she is not surprised Heinz would introduce a new color, based on the other colors' incremental success.

"There's probably some cannibalization of existing products. If you're going to buy blue ketchup, you might not buy traditional ketchup," McCracken said.

The condiment maker stopped producing "Blastin' Green" and "Funky Purple," but consumers can still find it on some grocers' shelves. Of course, EZ Squirt still comes in traditional red.

Like the company's "Mystery Color," which was rolled out in April 2002, Heinz will produce a limited supply of 500,000 blue bottles.

Heinz produced 1 million rainbow-colored, mystery bottles last year. Consumers who bought the ketchup didn't know, until they squirted it on a burger or fries, whether they got pink, orange or teal.

The company hoped customers' reactions would help it decide its next hue, but no one color became a front runner. Instead, customers called for blue, Teets said.

EZ Squirt is a strong product for Heinz because it keeps young consumers' tastes in mind, Teets said.

"The insight behind EZ Squirt wasn't about color at all, it was about the bottle," which was designed with kids' hands in mind, he said.

There's no telling what shade ketchup will take next, but the company keeps an eye on ideas from customers — especially those who get a kick out of weird-colored food.

"It's not mom and dad's ketchup," Teets said. "If parents think it's a little strange, that's all the better for kids."

http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/money/industries/food/2003-04-07-blue-ketchup\_x.htm#