**Greek yogurt stirs up the food industry**

**Its sudden rise in fortune is one of the most stunning in recent history, with sales rising 100% in each of the last three years. Now, even Ben & Jerry's is getting in on the act.**

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Greek yogurt is the Jeremy Lin of food products, launching out of nowhere into a stunning and sudden rise in fortune. Now comes the latest, and likely coldest, product — Ben & Jerry's Frozen Greek Yogurt.

The Vermont company debuted four flavors this week: Strawberry Shortcake, Raspberry Fudge Chunk, Banana Peanut Butter and Blueberry Vanilla Graham.

"Our flavor gurus," said Ben & Jerry's spokesman Sean Greenwood, "who try to keep on top of trends and tastes, were well aware of Greek yogurt completely owning the refrigerated aisle."



Greek yogurt, overall, has had one of the fastest growth spurts the food and beverage industry has seen in recent history. In each of the last three years, sales of Greek yogurt have boomed more than 100%, while non-Greek yogurt has crept along at single-digit speeds, according to consumer data tracker Nielsen.

Sales at yogurt maker Chobani Inc. — which claims nearly half of the Greek yogurt market share in the U.S. — soared 2,812% in 2008 alone, according to a report from UBS Investment Research. Greek yogurt now hauls in more than $1 billion in revenue a year in the U.S. — about a quarter of total yogurt sales.

Yogurt of all types is the food trend of the decade, according to research firm NPD Group. Not only is it popular with young adults because it's perceived as being healthful, it's also a prominent ingredient in some ethnic cuisines that are increasingly gaining a foothold in the U.S.

Greek-yogurt makers have marketed themselves effectively, analysts said. Danone's Oikos brand featured actor John Stamos in its Super Bowl ads. Voskos ran print advertisements featuring the rippling, yogurt-slathered muscles of fitness expert Stefan Pinto.

"The rise of Greek yogurt is remarkable," said Jenny Anderson, director of research and consulting for Technomic, in an August industry note. Aside from effective advertising, she said, the product boosted its profile "with new formats such as tubes that don't require a spoon, drinkable smoothies and parfaits that have a heartier appeal thanks to the inclusion of granola and other ingredients."

Greek yogurt isn't known for being particularly tasty and is sometimes 90% more expensive than other yogurts, according to the UBS report.

But those downsides hardly dent Greek yogurt's appeal. Customers — mostly educated, high-income women, according to the report — are devoted to the product because it is perceived to be filling without having too many calories.

Ben & Jerry's can't, however, make a claim that its new product is less fattening than what it already has in supermarket freezer cases. Its new raspberry fudge Greek frozen yogurt has 200 calories and 6 grams of fat per serving, while its regular Cherry Garcia frozen yogurt has 200 calories and 3 grams of fat.

But when riding the Greek yogurt wave of popularity, a few extra grams of fat might not matter. Now if only the struggling Greek government could get royalties.

http://articles.latimes.com/2012/feb/24/business/la-fi-greek-yogurt-20120225