

Hindustan Times - Made in India



Hindustan Times - Made in India



After two years of research, T.S.R. 'Doc' Murali, Frito Lay's R&D head in India, introduced Aliva in four distinct Indian flavours. RONJOI GODOI / HT PHOTO

Carb curb

With baking lessons from a subsidiary in Mexico, an Indian R&D team whipped together masala and local spices into a made-for-India snack, aimed at consumers trying to avoid a growing obesity-diabetes-heart-disease trap. The cracker has now caught the fancy of PepsiCo's global headquarters



Samar Srivastava
samar.s@livenint.com

Executives at Frito Lay India, PepsiCo India Holdings Pvt. Ltd.'s snacks division, had some years ago come to a realization after a market survey: Indians in their mid-30s crave snacks with local flavours. No surprise there.

The US beverage and food company had long understood the pull of indigenous flavours in India — spicy, tangy, with some strong masala coaxed out of traditional ingredients. Such localisation was a rite of passage for all global foods — burgers, pizzas, Chinese.

But three years ago, as it was looking to develop a new snack for India, the maker of the Pepsi and 7UP aerated drinks, Lays chips and Kurkure was keen on offering a healthier option in a population growing conscious of its bulges.

India's obesity problem has been increasing in line with economic growth, disposable incomes and the adoption of urban lifestyles in increasing numbers, along with the attendant bad food habits. Diabetes and heart disease rates are surging as the population, heavier and more sedentary than before, loads up on junk food that's high in sugar and fat.

The brief to Frito Lay's innovation team in India was clear: Cook up a health snack that wouldn't put off the taste buds. Keep the spices but dump the oil.

yeswecan

PepsiCo Holding India Pvt. Ltd.

Started operations in: 1990

Made in India: Aliva, a healthy biscuit-snack in distinct local flavours; Kurkure, a finger snack; Nimbooz, packaged lemon juice

Kurkure was Frito Lay's first big hit in India and succeeded by making a host of Indian flavours possible and popular in a finger snack. But Kurkure was tagged an unhealthy addiction although the company argued the snack was made with rice bran oil, high in good fats and low in saturated one.

Developing a snack from scratch posed a challenge, especially if it couldn't be fried. Frito Lay India tapped PepsiCo's global research and development (R&D) teams for help. The first task was to do some mind search.

One way to understand customer needs, says T.S.R. Murali, Frito Lay's R&D head in India, is to use a survey method developed by Eaton George of PepsiCo's research team in Dallas. So rather than ask direct questions — "What do you like?" — the team would have indirect posers — "What don't you like?" That led to the second brief: Make a biscuit-snack.

Having no expertise in making biscuits, the India team consulted PepsiCo's Mexican subsidiary, Ganesha Biscuits helped Frito Lay India learn how to bake. It's never been easy to add hard flavours in baked foods, but the team, with Ganesha's help, got around this by adding the flavours after the baking.

After some two years of R&D, Frito Lay India in mid 2009 introduced Aliva — its 'chatpate' cracker with wheat and dal, in four distinct Indian flavours — pindi musala, tomato and roasted spices, mint with herbs, and salted.

"Getting the waves of flavour in the biscuit was the key for us," says Murali, known as 'Doc' to his team.

Frito Lay's marketing efforts for Aliva have so far centered on the triangular biscuit-snack's taste and uniqueness but its USP could well turn out to be its health card. As PepsiCo aims to triple revenues from nutritious products to

about \$30 billion, it will have to rely largely on innovations like Aliva.

Vikar Vyas, vice-president, marketing, at Frito Lay India, already has an ambitious target for Aliva: "To grow bigger than Kurkure in a shorter period of time."

Vyas's ambition may not be a stretch — India's Rs 10,000 crore snacks market offers a huge opportunity — but Aliva could see stiff rivalry from some very similar biscuit-snacks. Mumbai's Parle Products Pvt. Ltd.'s Monaco Smart Chips — also 'baked, not fried' — too comes in four flavours: masala, tomato, chat and salted. It, too, plays the health card.

Another Mumbai firm Parle Agro Pvt. Ltd, also a beverage and food company, launched its Hippo snack around the same time as Aliva last year. It, too, is made from wheat, is baked, and comes in five flavours, including 'Chinese Manchurian', 'Italian pizza' and 'Thai chilli' in addition to tomato and yoghurt mint chutney.

Still, Frito Lay India's third innovation for the local market after Kurkure and Nimbooz, its non-seared lemon juice, has caught the fancy of the group's global headquarters. Recently, Indra Nooyi, PepsiCo Inc.'s chief executive, challenged the firm's subsidiaries with this: "Why can't you build a product like Aliva?"

MADE FROM WHEAT AND DAL, ALIVA CRACKERS CHALLENGE THE HEGEMONY OF THE INDIAN FRIED CHIP

Aliva marks Frito-Lay India's creation of a new baked savoury cracker. RONJOI GODOI / HT PHOTO