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Chapman Cookie Scores in National Food Competition

Food/Nutrition Science Students Take Third Place in IFT National Competition for Best New Product for the Schookie

ORANGE, Calif., July 19, 2005 While several states are banning fatty snacks from K-12 schools, two graduate students at Chapman University in Southern California believe they may have found a healthier solution in the Schookie.

It seems that the judges in the Institute of Food Technologists (IFT) national competition for best new product in the student category agree with them. Masters degree candidates Brent Cross and Lavanya Thiagarajan took their low-fat, low-sugar and milk-friendly chocolate-chip cookie to New Orleans where they won third place and \$1,000 in IFT's annual bake- and taste-off.

This is a huge win for us, said Cross, especially considering that our team was so small compared to the large teams from the other universities, and that it was the first time we competed at the national level. The team won the IFT regional competition last June.

The University of Wisconsin won first prize (\$4,000), followed by Cornell, Chapman, Rutgers, Washington State and Michigan State.

Schookies meet the increasing demand for healthier school snacks, the students state in their 23-page research paper. School food-service personnel are often pressured to provide nutritious, delicious meals while continually lowering costs, they add, citing a new California law requiring non-nutritious foods to be reviewed in public hearings and setting new nutrition standards for school foods, including a la carte and vending items.

Designed as frozen pre-formed dough to be baked on site in a school kitchen for same-or next-day consumption, the Schookie contains no trans-fatty acids, only three grams of total fat, a lower sugar content than a regular cookie, and whole grains. Other health benefits include calcium fortification and added long-chain omega-3 fatty acids that help boost cardiovascular health and brain-cell metabolism.

Both students put together a formal business plan for the Schookie, which was developed as a science project in the Chapman laboratories as a real life food development challenge with the encouragement of Nancy Kirksey, co-founder of Sweet Life, Inc. in Santa Ana, Calif.

Consumers are not willing to give up fun foods like cookies despite well-publicized dietary concerns regarding obesity and cardiovascular health, but they are opening up to the idea of fun foods with additional health benefits, the students add.

Perhaps the most exciting part of the Schookie marketing effort lies in promotional opportunities with school children directly, write Cross and Thiagarajan. Because Schookies are baked fresh

on-site, they will have fresh baked appeal.

After thorough evaluation and testing by an eight-member trained sensory panel, who judged the product based on color, texture, volume of chips, aroma, crispness, chewiness, moistness and richness, the Schookie was put through its ultimate paces with consumer focus groups, including a boys and girls club, elementary and middle schools. In every case, the cookies garnered near-perfect scores by the young product testers, who consistently commented that they were super good or delicious.

Each cookie will be packaged in a glassine bag printed with both the Schookie and Got Milk logos. Jeff Manning, executive director of the California Milk Processors Board, who approved the use of the logo, was impressed with the Schookie shape rectangular, not round because it encourages dunking in milk.

According to the students paper, the market potential for Schookies is expected to grow within the next three years beyond the states identified as leaders in school food nutrition (California, Texas, Arizona, West Virginia). The plans call for an initial launch of the Schookie in the Los Angeles-Orange County school districts free lunch programs with more than one million school children, expand throughout California in the second year and target the rest of the country in the third year.

Both Cross and Thiagarajan are following in the footsteps of other innovative food science students from Chapman. Two years ago a team of students developed the Pizza Popper for use by astronauts. It won first prize in the NASA Food Technology competition and is now being marketed as the Pizzetto chip by a company, Xengaru Fun Foods, founded by one of the originators who has since graduated.