

## **US Coffee Roasters Target Health Market**

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By Susan Buchanan  
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NEW YORK (Dow Jones)-- DJ FOCUS: US Coffee Roasters Target Health Market

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NEW YORK (Dow Jones)--Coffee roasters, eyeing heartburn-afflicted consumers ordered by doctors to cut out coffee and other acidic foods, have rolled out new "healthy" beans that allow these deprived drinkers to have their daily cup of joe.

California-based Puroast Coffee for years has been selling its low-acid beans, now served at Sloane Kettering Hospital in New York, after the roaster recently began promoting the product's healthful aspects. Folgers rolled out its stomach-friendly coffee this spring.

About 44% of U.S. adults suffer from heartburn at least once a month, while 14% have weekly troubles, according to journal American Family Physician. Heartburn occurs when stomach acids back up to the esophagus, sometimes causing acid-reflux disease.

Puroast coffee - processed with a method that company co-founder Kerry Sachs discovered working on a crop-drying project in South America - tastes like regular coffee with less than half the acid and no added chemicals, he said.

Sachs liked the coffee he tried in western Venezuela in 1990 and found a local expert who explained the region's small-scale roasting techniques - which Puroast then "engineered" on a larger scale and patented. While coffee in the U.S. is commercially roasted through a convection process, Puroast uses a conduction method - roasting beans "by transferring heat across a hot surface," Sachs said. "The conduction process, along with other trade-secret elements, produces a less-acidic coffee, without a bitter aftertaste."

The chemistry of roasted coffee depends on how heat is delivered to beans during the roast, Sachs explained. Green coffee has no taste but when beans are roasted, "major changes take place in taste and aroma." The coffee's pH, or acid level, is affected by altering the roasting method.

"We've rediscovered a type of coffee that's been around for a long time," Sachs said.

Puroast started selling its beans in 1998 through Kroger Co.'s (KR) Cala Bell Stores in San Francisco. "The stores got so many questions from customers

asking 'What is it about your coffee that it doesn't bother my stomach?' that we decided to explore its properties," Sachs said.

In late 2004, Puroast asked University of California at Davis to test its beans for acidity. Chemist Taka Shibamoto, in the university's Department of Environmental Toxicology, found that Puroast coffee has a low level of acid compounds. Green coffee beans, the fruit's seed, contain quinic acid and diCQA, a bitter substance thought to cause acid reflux, Shibamoto said. He determined that Puroast coffee has over 50% less diCQA than major U.S. coffee brands.

Shibamoto said he later looked at Folgers' new healthful product and found it has the same acid levels as Folgers regular coffee.

Cincinnati-based Procter & Gamble Co (PG) in May introduced its Simply Smooth version of Folgers, calling it "stomach-friendly" and saying it was targeting 35 million to 40 million U.S. adults who had reduced or eliminated their coffee intake because of stomach discomfort.

"Folgers is using stronger, bolder beans for Simply Smooth that don't have to be roasted for that long and don't lose their taste and richness," said P&G spokesman Lars Atorf. "Beans we select for the product, along with the roasting process, are intended to eliminate the formation of compounds like certain phenols associated with stomach discomfort."

"It's not a low-acid product or a treatment, and we don't make any medical claims," Atorf continued. "But we've had favorable results from in-house, consumer research." Folgers didn't need Food and Drug Administration approval for these new beans, he said.

Reasons for coffee-induced heartburn and dyspepsia remain poorly understood because of complex human physiology, both Sachs and Shibamoto said. But the general thinking is that the way consumers' digestive tracts react to a coffee is affected by variations in processing.

Folgers coffee is sold in supermarkets, and costs about 50 cents a pound more than the company's regular, ground roasted beans, with a price structure similar to the firm's decaffeinated-coffee line, Atorf said. The new stomach-easy java is sold in medium-roast and decaffeinated varieties.

Puroast Low Acid Coffee is sold at supermarkets, health food stores, over the Internet, and is now being marketed to institutions.

National Coffee Association president Robert Nelson said the number of U.S. consumers who feel that coffee is good for their health jumped to 40% in 2006 from 26% last year, citing the group's annual drinking survey released this spring. Coffee consumed in moderation can reduce chances of colon, liver, hereditary-breast and other cancers, and wards off Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease, he said. Results released this month by researchers Kaiser Permanente showed coffee helps protect against alcoholic cirrhosis, Nelson noted.

Java lovers warned against coffee by doctors sometimes drink Postum, a grain-based coffee substitute sold by Kraft Foods Inc. (KFT), or Kava, coffee with a buffer compound sold by Eagle Family Foods, Sachs said. Antacids are often swallowed to calm sour stomachs after adverse reactions to coffee, and doctors prescribe longer-lasting heartburn medications.

Sachs is encouraged by strong U.S. sales of low-acid orange juice, which was introduced by processors a few years ago and tastes like regular orange juice. More consumers will turn to low-acid and stomach friendly coffee if it tastes good, he believes. Puroast and Folgers officers, meanwhile, feel their healthy products taste like regular coffee.

Sloane Kettering Hospital this month started selling Puroast in its cafeteria under the company's red, South American-bird logo, and is setting up carts to make the rounds to patients. And universities - hotbeds of coffee drinkers - will be future Puroast customers, Sachs hopes.

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