
Food Allergies Cause Food Manufacturers to React, Multi-Billion Dollar Market Emerges

Alisa Fleming, www.GoDairyFree.org ~ Thanks to growing demand, food allergies are triggering more than allergic reactions, they are also causing a surge in the specialty food industry. According to Packaged Facts, a New York research firm, the market for food allergy and intolerance products in the U.S. is expected to reach \$3.9 billion this year. Yes, billion. The gluten-free food and beverage sector alone is expected to hit \$1.3 billion by 2010, up from \$700 million in 2006, according to another research firm, Mintel ...

Ten years ago, the "free-from" market consisted of small food manufacturers whose products were placed on a few designated shelves in natural / health food stores. But today, this industry includes countless start-up companies and industry giants (i.e. General Mills), with prime placement in mainstream grocers, such as Safeway and Giant Foods. To give you an idea of the scope, The National Association for the Specialty Food Trade estimates that 300 of its 2,800 members currently offer more than 7,000 no-allergenic products, in contrast to five years ago, when about 50 members did.

This growing trend is due in part to the rapid increase in diagnosis of food allergies, intolerances, and autoimmune disorders such as Celiac Disease, but it was also seeded by new food labeling legislation in 2006. The federal government passed a regulation requiring all food labels to disclose if they contain any of the top eight food allergens – milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, soy and wheat. Gluten, a protein found in grains such as wheat, is not on this list, but many manufacturers began disclosing it due to the large demand for gluten-free foods.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that roughly 12 million people in the U.S. have food allergies, while another 2 million live with celiac disease, requiring them to forsake all gluten, and in many cases dairy. Many expect these numbers to continue rising.