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## BeetNPath to offer New York college students a healthier fast-food option

By Aaron Munzer •Correspondent • May 25, 2010, 9:55 am

ITHACA -- PrOats isn't an everyday, microwaveable, fast-food meal with a long list of unpronounceable ingredients: it has only four ingredients, and two are organic.

The product is a new frozen oatmeal made by the Ithaca-based company BeetNPath, and it couldn't have a simpler ingredients list: organic steel cut oats, water, organic flax seeds and egg whites.

"It's a better oatmeal," said Jeannine Sacco, BeetNPath's president and head chef and recipe tester.

Though its taste is unabashedly bland, and the package it comes in is only half-filled, Sacco said the 10-ounce portion contains 20 grams of protein and 7 grams of fiber, and is smaller to help students control portion sizes. They also suggest using the extra space in the package to add toppings such as fruit or vegetables to make PrOats a complete meal.

Sacco hopes the product, which will cost \$2.99, will answer an "unmet need" for healthier, more local food on college campuses. They hope to have it for sale on college campuses by August, she said.

"There is no affordable, easily accessible fresh food for people on the go. It's all fast food," she said. "So what we're trying to do is provide them easy access to foods that are healthy, sustainable, natural and organic, and also operationally efficient."

The company is also developing a line of microwaveable meals such as Mac N' Jack, a combination meal of macaroni and cheese and turkey chili, made with organic cheese and whole-wheat pasta and turkey raised without antibiotics. Sacco said the recipes were all tested on students at college campuses and changed dramatically based on their tastes.

Whenever possible, ingredients will be sourced from local or regional farms, such as Empire Organics, an association of 22 organic dairies in

New York, Sacco said. In addition, the label printing was done locally, and the product will be packed and shipped from Watkins Glen and other nearby areas.

"We're trying to be realistic," said Erika Eckstrom, the company's brand manager. "If we did every single element local, we probably wouldn't be able to sell it at the price we're trying to sell it at -- our goal is to be accessible to a youth generation who might not be able to pay 10 dollars for a meal."

But Eckstrom said the quality of the meals will be noticeable, given that they use simple, wholesome ingredients, and they will be shipped in modified atmosphere packaging that will preserve the fresh meals for about two weeks. After that time they'll be frozen and donated to local food pantries.

"It's basically going to be mom's home cooking from the refrigerator," she said.

The company, which is being funded by KensaGroup LLC, a local venture capital firm, is also receiving distribution help from F&T Distributing Company, which already has contracts at a number of regional colleges.

Vice President of F&T Tony Prudence, who has nurtured BeetNPath extensively, said because he has business relationships with 60 campuses, it was easy to see the logistical hurdles for them to offer local, organic products.

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"What we started to see here is there was a lot of activity around local," Prudence said. "But these food service companies are slow moving animals, and so us bundling these things into a prepackaged environment, makes it easily saleable, and it confines it and defines it."



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BeetNPath's president, Jeannine Sacco, and Brand Manager Erika Eckstrom, show off the company's first product, PrOats. (AARON MUNZER / Staff Photo)

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