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New Med diet symbol to flag up healthy goods

By Lorraine Heller

6/5/2007- **A new Mediterranean diet packaging symbol was today launched in the US, and is set to enjoy significant success from food manufacturers keen to flag up products that meet the nutrition criteria of the diet.**

Launched by nutrition group Oldways, the Med Mark can be used to promote the scientifically-backed healthfulness of a number of foods, such as traditional pastas, fish and olive oil.

The easy-to-identify symbol comes at a time of heightened industry and consumer awareness of the positive health effects of the traditional Mediterranean way of eating.

The diet, which promotes foods rich in cereals, fruits and vegetables, is increasingly recognized by the scientific community as being linked to longer life, less heart disease and protection against some cancers.

Just a few weeks ago, new research from Harvard linked the Mediterranean diet to a decreased risk of lung disease, and in April it was also found to help prevent the development of asthma in children.

According to the president of Oldways Dun Gifford, the new wave of study results is starting to trickle into the public consciousness through extensive press attention, and people are starting to seek out products that meet Mediterranean diet criteria.

Common foods of the eating plan include bread, pasta, rice, couscous and potatoes; olives, avocados and grapes; eggplant, tomatoes, peppers, nuts and beans; and cheese and yogurt. Moderate consumption of fish and poultry is also encouraged, whereas consumption of red meat is advised only a few times a month.

Setting out clear nutrition criteria for products that qualify was a significant challenge faced by Oldways, which said it wanted to keep the guidelines as simple as possible.

These first require that foods form part of the Mediterranean diet pyramid (click [here](#) to view), and also set limits on the amount of processing a product undergoes, as well as its levels of trans fats, saturated fats, sodium and sugars.

"It shouldn't surprise anyone that the Mediterranean diet is a healthful way of eating, really. It's what nutritionists dream of, and now we've figured out a way to get it to people," said Gifford.

"What's really important to keep in mind is that this is a diet pattern, it's not a single food but a variety of foods. That's the key concept that people need to understand," he told FoodNavigator-USA.com.

The Med Mark, a postage-stamp-sized symbol, portrays an image of an amphora, the jug used 3,000 years ago by Mediterranean cultures to store and ship their foods and drinks. It guides consumers to a Mediterranean Mark website that provides simple information on the health benefits of the diet pattern.

Oldways, which is also behind the popular Whole Grains Stamp, said it has already had significant interest in its Med Mark from manufacturers of products such as olive oil, pasta and grain goods.

The group said that, based on experience with its other nutrition initiatives Whole Grains Council

and Latino Nutrition Coalition, it expects the new symbol to take off immediately. The first products featuring the symbol could appear as early as next month, and within a year Oldways expects to see the Med Mark on "thousands" of products.

More information on the symbol, including a listing of participation criteria and fees, can be found on MediterraneanMark.org. To access the site, click [here](#).

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