

ON



BY
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THE SHELF

Lassi could be about to hit the big time. Not the lovable shaggy collie that we are all familiar with, you understand, but Lassi - a milky Indian drink.

Most of us who regularly visit our local Star of India, Day of the Raj, Tandoori nights or whatever tend to skip over Lassi on the menu (well, you don't like to ask, do you?). However, London supermarket chain Europa Foods is determined to make Lassi as popular as...well, as Lassie.

Hament Kotadia, Europa's buying controller, reckons his company is the first major chain to take on the product, which is being made by Suncrest of Wembley.

Europa is selling it in salted and sweet varieties, although in the longer term Kotadia is keen to introduce other flavours.

Lassi is being tested in 30 of Europa's 50 stores. None of its Harts the Grocers stores will initially stock it.

"The product will be very popular in another five years," says Kotadia, who is not too enamoured of the plastic container it comes in. "Long term, we want a glass container," he says.

Lassi comes in 1-litre packs priced at 99p. Shelf barkers will explain to those who think they are staring at a bottle of liquidised collie, and will also explain what it should be drunk with.

Kotadia is keen to run a promotion next year which links the product with an ethnic meal, such as buy a Chicken Jalfrezi and get a Lassi at half price, or some such mechanism.

The last time I wrote an On The Shelf ethnic special was

when Yaohan, the Japanese supermarket chain, opened in Colindale, north west London. I said at the time that this would inevitably turn many others onto the delights of Japanese food such as Yakitori and Tempura.

You can still be a bit hard pressed to find a good selection of Japanese foods in supermarkets, but Harts the Grocers has cottoned on to the trend and sells Sushi.

Kotadia says that Japanese and Thai are expanding at

hot pepper sauces, cod fish, guava jelly, creamed coconut and various types of fruits and vegetables.

However, buyers are starting to turn on to products made Jerk-style. An expanding area for Caribbean foods is in the chilled ready meals sector where Safeway and Tesco have launched several private label products. Safeway, for example, sells Jamaican Jerk Prawn sandwiches.

Enco Products has launched a range of chilled ready meals,

supermarkets are facing up to the fact that the Afro-Caribbean population tend to shop at their own specialist outlets, and the supermarkets are now trying to attract these customers.

"They want to supply that market and they are becoming increasingly experimental with their food," he comments.

Some of the latest launches from the multiples, recorded by Leatherhead Food RA, show that Indian and Chinese dishes are walking away with all the ethnic trophies. They include Chicken Tikka Breast Fillets (M&S), Chinese Selection (M&S), Beef with Ginger (Safeway), Chicken Saag (Safeway), Curry & Mango Dip (M&S), Sweet & Sour Chicken Rice Salad Rings (Asda), Chicken Saag Masala (Sainsbury), and Chicken Dansak & Rice (Tesco). A new Thai dish is Fresh Vegetable Thai Curry with Fragrant Rice (M&S). Nasi Goreng and Thai Red Beef Curry crept into Sainsbury in July.

Tesco recently introduced a range of mix & match frozen Indian dishes for the microwave or oven. Tesco based its choice on the most popular dishes in Indian restaurants. Customers can create what Tesco calls an authentic menu at home by choosing Chicken Tikka Masala or Chicken Dhansak with Mushroom Dopiaza and Pilau Rice.

One buyer described Bombay Egg, which was presented to him recently from Savoury Kitchen.

He had trouble containing his laughter. "It's a Scotch Egg but in an onion bhajee type coating. I'm not sure it's going to take the market by storm," he says.

No yolk!

Phil Punter, Budgens' senior buyer for bread, cakes and morning goods, distributed through the chilled chain, says supermarkets are facing up to the fact that the Afro-Caribbean population tend to shop at their own specialist outlets, and the supermarkets are now trying to attract these customers.

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great speed. "A lot of manufacturers are coming up with innovative products."

Kibun's Oriental Parcels and surimi products and the new Sanchi range from Western Isle Foods, launched onto the market last year could help fuel the growth of Japanese foods.

Kotadia has identified Caribbean foods as the next big area where people who want those foods currently seek out specialist shops. Supermarket offerings are mostly limited to the likes of

patties and condiments under the Encona brand. These are listed in Safeway.

CRS senior chilled foods buyer Hilary Scott says that suppliers are looking cautiously at Jamaican meals, African meals, ethnic snacks and filled pitta breads. CWS has recently launched one or two interesting lines, such as Chinese Burgers and Cajun Meatballs.

Phil Punter, Budgens' senior buyer for bread, cakes and morning goods, distributed through the chilled chain, says