

YEAR IN REVIEW:

2017

BY JENNIFER HARRIS

IT HAS BEEN A BANNER YEAR for gluten-free products and the gluten-free diet. Once again, the term “gluten free” has been batted about by the media as a “fad diet” with magical powers to augment weight loss and increase energy. But we are used to taking the good with the bad, right?

Gluten-free product development continues to expand, with an emphasis on innovation, fewer allergens and increased textural appeal. Gluten-free bread and buns are appearing on more fast-food chain and restaurant menus. And now we have a wide gluten-free bread (without holes) that can stand up to toppings, condiments and spreads for a proper and filling sandwich.

Gluten-free snacks have made their way to the friendly skies and coffee chains. Technology has come full circle with a portable testing unit, and colleges across the country continue to increase options and open dedicated gf dining halls.

Here are some of the most notable developments for the gluten-free community in 2017.



JANUARY

- **Shake Shack** began offering Bellyrite Foods, Inc., hamburger buns for a \$1 up-charge nationwide (except in stadiums) toward the end of December 2016. We include the news here because the buns were hard to find until 2017.
- **Cornell University** formally launched a gluten-free dining hall, Risley Dining Room, in January. Cornell brought in alumna Amy Fothergill to train the kitchen staff and develop a grand-opening menu comprised of gluten-free recipes from her cookbook, *The Warm Kitchen*. Risley's official changeover to its dedicated gluten-free status coincided with a formal certification from Kitchens With Confidence. The dining hall is also entirely peanut and tree-nut free.
- **Canyon Bakehouse** introduced gluten-free Heritage loaves in two flavors (honey white and whole grain). These wide loaves are the width of an average hand, making them large enough to create a filling sandwich on their whole-grain goodness.

FEBRUARY

- **Nima Sensor's** portable gluten sensor became available for purchase at the end of January. The pocket-sized device allows people to test their food for gluten in a few minutes. Simply place the food into a one-time-use capsule and screw on the cap, insert the capsule into the device, and press the power button. In minutes, Nima will display the results—a wheat symbol if gluten is detected or a smile emoticon if the sample has fewer than 20 parts per million of gluten.
- **A University of Illinois study** found people following a gluten-free diet had almost twice the concentration of arsenic in their urine and 70 percent higher mercury levels in their blood compared to people who were not gluten free. Unfortunately, the study size was small and did not address whether rice was the main source of the metals in people's diets. There is no need to panic, however, because the amounts of arsenic and mercury found were much

lower than those associated with arsenic toxicity or mercury poisoning. (For more on heavy metals and the gluten-free diet, see Study Sessions, page 60.)

MARCH

- **Starbucks** added gluten-free items to its menu. Goodie Girl Cookies' mint slims in new grab-and-go packaging, Country Archer Jerky's Hickory Smoke Turkey Jerky and Original Beef Jerky, and Bissinger's Dark Chocolate Sea Salt Mini Chocolates became available at 7,900 stores nationwide. The coffee chain also added gluten-free smoked Canadian bacon breakfast sandwiches to its offerings nationwide on March 21. The sandwich features cherrywood-smoked Canadian bacon, a peppered egg patty and reduced-fat white cheddar cheese on a gluten-free roll. It is prepared in a certified gluten-free environment and sealed in an oven-safe parchment bag for heating.

APRIL

- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) began allowing direct marketing of **23andMe Personal Genome Service Genetic Health Risk (GHR)** tests to consumers. These are the first direct-to-consumer tests authorized by the FDA that provide information on an individual's genetic predisposition to certain medical diseases. The 23andMe GHR tests work by isolating DNA from a saliva sample, which is then tested for more than 500,000 genetic variants. The presence or absence of some of these variants is associated with an increased risk for developing one of 10 diseases or conditions, including celiac.

MAY

- **Gluten Free**, a documentary by **Bailey Pryor**, aired on Public Broadcasting System with the goal of changing public perception of those who need to omit gluten from their diet for the better. The documentary gives much-needed credibility to non-celiac gluten sensitivity, addresses the importance of preventing cross-contamination at home

and in restaurants, discusses medical advances on the horizon and delves into some good old-fashioned myth-busting.

- **Julia König, PhD**, a postdoctoral research fellow at the School of Medical Sciences at University of Örebro, Sweden, studied a gluten-destroying enzyme known as AN-PEP. In a study, 18 participants with gluten sensitivities ate a meal of porridge and other foods, including gluten-containing wheat cookies. Participants took either AN-PEP or a placebo. Researchers then examined the gluten levels in the participants' bodies over a three-hour span. The enzyme broke down gluten in the stomach and the first section of the small intestine, known as the duodenum. Gluten levels in the stomachs of patients who took AN-PEP were 85 percent lower than in those who took a placebo. However, no research was done on patients with celiac.

JUNE

- After successful tests in Washington, Idaho and Mississippi in 2016, **Chick-fil-A** added gluten-free buns to its menu nationwide on June 19. Made with a blend of ancient grains like quinoa, sorghum, amaranth, millet and teff, the certified gluten-free bun costs an additional \$1.15 and is enriched with vitamins and minerals. The buns are individually wrapped and stored frozen. Once thawed, each bun is served sealed alongside a container with grilled chicken and condiments for guests to assemble.
- **Delta Air Lines** added three new gluten-free snack options: Squirrel Brand almonds, Pretzel Perfection olive oil and sea salt pretzels, and Kind Healthy Grains oats and honey with toasted coconut bars.
- **Pope Frances** reminded bishops and priests that the wafers Catholics consume as the Body of Christ must contain at least some gluten. He added that low-gluten hosts can be used, "provided they contain a sufficient amount of gluten to obtain the confection of bread without the addition of foreign materials and without the use of procedures that would alter the nature of bread." This thinking isn't helpful for Catholics who follow a



strict gluten-free diet and can't tolerate even small amounts of gluten, nor is it the first time the pope has come down against low-gluten wafers.

JULY

- **Johnny Rockets** started serving its certified Angus beef burgers on Udi's Gluten Free hamburger buns.
- **Papa John's** added gluten-free crust made with ancient grains to its menu but warns it isn't safe for those with celiac because of cross-contamination with wheat during preparation.
- **Subway** added made-without-gluten bread to 12 pilot locations in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. The bread is roughly the size of a 6-inch sub, costs an extra \$1 and tests below 20 parts per million of gluten. It arrives frozen, pre-sliced and individually wrapped. It goes into the freezer and is thawed in the cooler for 12 hours before serving. However, shared ingredients are used to prepare sandwiches, making cross-contamination a possibility.

AUGUST

- Research to develop a gluten-free children's snack made of sprouted millet and quinoa earned doctoral student **Gabriela John Swamy** the Gerber Endowment in Pediatric Nutrition Graduate Scholarship. Out of a group of 500 applicants, Swamy won by determining the optimum sprouting time for millet and quinoa. She then ground them into flour to produce a protein-rich and easier-to-digest puffed cereal without added sugar.
- **ImmusanT** was nominated for a BIO Buzz award as a Late Stage Leader. It is developing a peptide-based vaccine for the treatment of celiac and the first personalized diagnostic toolkit for celiac. Clinical data in over 150 celiac patients have been positive—relevant bioactivity and target engagement was seen in three separate phase 1b studies. Its diagnostic/therapeutic platform is being leveraged for related autoimmune indications, such as type 1 diabetes.

SEPTEMBER

- **Canyon Bakehouse's** new blueberry and cinnamon raisin bagels rolled out to retailers nationwide. The blueberry bagel is a first for national distribution, making this gluten-free bakehouse's second hit of notable developments for 2017.
- **Enjoy Life Foods** announced a rebrand of its entire product portfolio to eye-catching teal, the color associated with food allergy awareness and free-from products.
- The **Institute for Sustainable Agriculture** in Cordoba, Spain, began making genetically modified wheat sans 90 percent of the gliadins traditionally found in wheat. It is attempting to prevent the gliadin genes from reproducing, but because they remain intact, the wheat could start producing the proteins again. Small trials of the genetically modified wheat involving 10 and 20 people with celiac are being conducted in Mexico and Spain.

OCTOBER

- **Enjoy Life Foods** debuted mini versions of its vegan dark chocolate bars in Halloween-themed bags of rice milk minis, dark chocolate minis, rice milk crunch minis and a variety pack.
- The scientific journal **Gastroenterology** published the results of an international study coordinated by the Dr. von Hauner Children's Hospital, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, Germany. This study showed that more than 50 percent of affected children can be diagnosed with celiac without an endoscopy. This could mean that the risk and cost associated with an endoscopy aren't necessary for an accurate diagnosis.
- **DoubleTree by Hilton** hotels began offering Homefree Chocolate Chip Mini Cookies at guest check-in as a nut-free alternative to its iconic chocolate chip cookies. Homefree's cookies are free from peanuts, tree nuts, eggs, dairy, wheat and gluten.
- The **Gluten Intolerance Group of North America** sued celebrity chef Jamie Oliver for "federal certification mark infringement, counterfeiting and unfair competi-

tion under federal statutes, with pendent claims for trademark infringement and unfair competition" because of his use of a gluten-free symbol that is similar to the group's signature gluten-free certification label (the letters "GF" in a circle with the phrase "Certified Gluten Free").

- Actress **Mandy Moore** was diagnosed with celiac and shared her upper endoscopy journey on social media. "Just had an upper endoscopy to officially see whether or not I have celiac (only way to diagnose) ...things are looking (good)," said Moore.

NOVEMBER

- Grain & Seed bars from **Enjoy Life Foods** debuted in stores in four sweet flavors: banana caramel, cranberry orange, chocolate marshmallow and maple sweet potato. Made with three types of sorghum, including popped, and gluten-free oats, the bars are free from 14 allergens and produced in a dedicated nut-free and gluten-free facility.
- **Canyon Bakehouse's** new stay-fresh packaging first appeared on three new products available at Walmart nationwide: Ancient Grain and Country White loaves as well as Deli White Bagels. The stay-fresh packaging is airtight and keeps goods fresh for up to 90 days. Once the package is opened, the bread needs to be consumed within five days.

DECEMBER

- After receiving encouraging reviews in test markets in California, Colorado and Florida, sandwich chain **Jersey Mike's Subs** planned to introduce gluten-free sub rolls at all 1,300-plus U.S. locations beginning Dec. 4 (see page 9). The individually wrapped rolls arrive at each store fully baked. Employees use new gloves and clean utensils when assembling sandwiches on fresh parchment paper instead of the counter to avoid cross-contamination.

I wonder what 2018 holds for the gluten-free community... **GF**

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