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**Business**

**Milk drink with fizz expected to woo youngsters**

**Knight Ridder News**

MILFORD, N.Y. — Scientists at Cornell University and a Massachusetts company may have j answered a question no milk drinker has ever asked: What do you get when you cross milk w fizzle of a cola?

The answer is E-Moo and RPM, two lines of carbonated, flavored milk that Mac Farms Inc., t Burlington, Mass., began making Wednesday near Cooperstown. Kids in about 1,000 school out West, will see the 8- and 12-ounce bottles in their cafeterias next week.

And if milk drinkers are a little leery, that's OK.

Mac Farms owners George and Mary Ann Clark are marketing their new drink as a healthy alternative to the sodas and other sugar-laden beverages most kids reach for today.

"These days, kids are bombarded with beer ads. They're bombarded with soda ads, so getting them to drink milk is tough," said George Clark. "So we'll sell the milk idea to the parents."

To the kids, we'll sell the fun, and then watch the calories come down."

The drinks have about 90 calories per eight-ounce serving, on par with skim milk, the main ingredient. It has the same nutritional content as standard milk, but the carbonation adds weeks to the time it can last on the shelf, with proper refrigeration.

The taste? "Different" is a common response, Clark said.

E-Moo, in smaller eight-ounce bottles, was developed a few years ago and had been available few test markets. It's geared toward younger kids and comes in flavors such as cookies and fudge brownie and orange cremecicle.

The RPM line (for Refreshing Power Milk) is aimed at older kids and young adults. There's a cappuccino, Brazilian chocolate and chocolate raspberry.

The Clarks started dabbling with healthy drinks about 20 years ago. Mary Ann was a school i concerned with the nutrition of her son and other students. George was a biochemist.

Then in the late 1990s, George Clark said his wife decided that their kitchen hobby should hit shelves. They created Mac Farms, and went for technical help to Cornell, in Ithaca, where fo researchers had long worked on a method to carbonate dairy products to extend shelf life.

New York state and the St. Albans Cooperative Creamery in Vermont provided some startup research and the small Milford production facility.

The company has four employees working the bottling line but expects to hire more as sales grow. The company said it can right now pump out 5,000 gallons a day, and there's room for expansion.

Mac Farms expects \$2 million in sales this year, with \$80 million a year by 2008, said George Clark.

With child obesity a hot topic, beverage giants such as Coca-Cola have been offering their lines with milk or other healthy ingredients. And there are some carbonated drinks that have been marketed as healthy. But the Clarks said their drink is the only one that is virtually all milk. They have patents on the carbonation process and products.

And they have U.S. Department of Agriculture approval to sell it in schools. If it takes off there, the company hopes parents will look for it at supermarkets and convenience stores.

Supermarket shelves are coveted space, said Mike Berger, editor of The Griffin Report of Food Marketing, a supermarket trade paper based in Massachusetts. New products such as RPM need to build a base of drinkers first before they'll see many stores take a chance on it, he said.

But the market is willing to try, said Donna Berry, an editor and consultant with Dairy Foods Magazine, a trade publication in Illinois.

"These are the generation of kids who grew up with SoBe, Snapple and juice boxes," she said. "Even though much as soda was a part of their diet, they had all of these other convenient products to choose from. They're not so eager for the boring cola anymore. They want variety."

Just don't call it milk. Mac Farms uses "carbonated dairy-based beverage." It seems that the Food and Drug Administration frowns on a company's using the "m" word for products with additives.

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