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FOOD AND BEVERAGE

## Energy drinks all the buzz at food and beverage show

Energy drinks were front and center at this year's Americas Food and Beverage Show in Miami Beach.

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Call it Red Bull for kids. That's how Ilie Ioncescu described Kool Cow, his "vitamin-enriched carbonated milk drink," one of the products on display at the Americas Food and Beverage Show, held this week at the Miami Beach Convention Center.

"It's an energy drink for children," said Ioncescu, vice president of Pompano Beach-based Global Beverage Enterprises, which makes Kool Cow.

About 250 companies from around the world came to the Americas Food and Beverage show to introduce new products and look for distributors. At this, the 11th annual show, energy drinks were all the buzz.

Energy-drink consumption is up 20 percent this year, with sales expected to top \$9 billion in three

years, according to Beverage Marketing Corp. As well as targeting children, the 30 energy drink companies in attendance went after niches as specific as video-gamers and lovers.

A Toyota pickup truck was emblazoned with the logo of Cuba Herbal Energy Juice, a drink featuring ginseng, yerba mate, guarana and green tea. "Cuban people are very vibrant and fun," said C.J. Johnson, president of Cuba Beverage Company of San Diego, Calif. "We took that name and promoted it."

Nearby, Ray Lequerique offered samples of Latin Lover Energy Drink. "It's an emotional drink," he said. "It definitely gives you the appearance of an aphrodisiac." Latin Lover, which includes taurine and ginseng, is popular in Europe, and available at some corner markets in Miami.

Game Juice, a new Miami company, makes a neon-green ginseng-apple drink aimed at video-game players. "It's not designed to be mixed with alcohol," said Matt Rosenberg, the company founder.

Several unusual Florida companies also hoped to get noticed. At Vanna's Tropical Fruits and Vegetables booth, Carole Culverhouse showed off bulbous sugar apples, spiky star fruit and bright pink dragon fruit. Vanna's, based in Doral, grows these and other exotic fruits in Homestead, then sells them to Publix and Asian markets. "The general American public doesn't know these fruits," Culverhouse said. "But once they do, they keep looking for them."

Manny Wang, CEO of Fullei Fresh of Miami, handed out free shots of wheatgrass juice, which he said has health benefits. "Instead of popping pills to lower your blood pressure, you can drink some wheatgrass," he said. Fullei Fresh grows sprouts and wheatgrass at a hydroponic facility in Miami.

Ron Shouse, marketing director for Florida Orange Groves and Winery, manned a colorful display of wines made not from grapes, but from fermented mangoes, key limes and peaches. The St. Petersburg company already has \$20 million in sales, but is looking to further expand nationally. "We're after that 40 percent of the market that doesn't like wine," Shouse said.

Brazil had the largest international presence at the show. Christian Katopodis found a Florida buyer for his line of Bottarga, a Brazilian caviar, and will soon be sending 800 kilograms a month to a distributor on Doral. "The U.S.A. has the largest immigrant community in the world," he said. "This is a tradition of many different cultures."

Near the Brazilian pavilion, scantily clad girls passed out condoms and samples of another energy drink, Cocaine. The Cocaine brand was pulled from the shelves last year after the FDA determined the company was "illegally marketing their drink as an alternative to street drugs." Cocaine has tweaked its marketing now and is back in business. "There's 500 energy drinks out there," said vice president of sales Jeff Jefferies. "But if you see one called Cocaine, you've got to try it."

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