

Cool innovation: Singapore firm and academics create probiotic ice cubes

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Singapore ice supplier Uni-Tat Ice & Marketing has launched a probiotic ice cube product in several supermarkets across the island-state.

Made from filtered water, each ice cube weighing 26g contains *Bifidobacterium lactis* at a CFU count of 2.8bn.

The innovation is a result of its collaboration with Nanyang Technological University (NTU) via a project partially funded by government agency Enterprise Singapore.

Speaking to *NutraIngredients-Asia*, Andy Goh, general manager at Uni-Tat Ice & Marketing said the initial idea was to create functional foods – something that is entirely new for the company since it has previously specialised purely in ice products.

The focus eventually shifted back to ice products but giving them an added function.

Doing so also meant the company need not start its innovation from the scratch.

“Since the company is already very famous for making ice cubes in Singapore for the past 20 odd years, instead of breaking away totally from ice cubes and moving into the food space as a new player, why not extend the business and make functional ice cubes?” lead scientist of the project Professor William Chen, also the director at NTU Food Science and Technology Programme said.

The two parties spent over a year developing the probiotic ice cube and about another year in preparing and scaling up production.

On its labelling, the product is said to contain active probiotics *“for immunity support”*.

According to the company’s website, the product is also associated with improving digestion, better oral health, and cholesterol management.

Cost wise, the production cost of probiotic ice cubes has increased by at least five folds as compared to the typical ice cubes, Goh said.

However, he believes that the retail price was nonetheless competitive when compared to other probiotic food and beverages currently sold in the market.

Each pack of 12 probiotic ice cubes, sold under the brand Iceman, costs SGD\$2.40 (USD\$1.81).

At the moment, the company is studying the market response and is planning to develop more functional ice products.

"We have gained new capability via this project and am more confident in launching new functional products," Goh said.

The product is currently sold in 11 NTUC Finest outlets and there are plans to introduce it into more supermarkets. The company is also in discussions in launching the product in Europe.

Shelf life

Under proper storage conditions – without removing the ice cubes from the freezer – the probiotic can remain viable inside the ice cubes for up to six months, Prof Chen said.

He declined to reveal details of the production process but said that keeping the probiotic microbes alive in ice was key.

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