

Will Food Cleaners Be the Next Meal Ticket?

By David Gill

NEW YORK—High-tech food-cleaning products are ready for their closeup.

The new product segment is already getting lots of attention. With numerous introductions and consumers being increasingly aware of what they eat, conditions may be right for the next big thing.

Last year, Vesture of Asheboro, N.C., introduced the CuisineClean countertop food-cleaning appliance. Two weeks ago, Atlanta-based Creative Culinary Marketing Solutions came out with the CulinaryPrep appliance, also a countertop product for cleaning food. Tersano, based in the Toronto area, launched the Lotus food sanitizing system about four years ago.

Tersano's Lotus has received much media play in the past year. It was named one of Time magazine's Best Inventions for 2006. This year, Steve Hengsperger, Tersano's president and founder, has appeared twice on "The Big Idea," the CNBC program hosted by Donnie Deutsch, which spotlights new ideas in business; Deutsch named the new product the "Big Idea of the Month."

Both the Lotus and the Cuisine-

Continued on page 8

top story

Going for the Next Meal Ticket

Continued from page one

Clean use technologies that involve ozone to clean impurities from bacteria, toxins and pesticides from fruits and vegetables. The Lotus uses water that is combined with oxygen from the air by way of a high-voltage generator, which converts the oxygen element in the water to the ozone molecule. The CuisineClean creates the same molecule by bubbling water through a device similar to that found in aquariums.

The CulinaryPrep uses a patented process called Grovac, which alternately exposes food to a vacuum environment and a specially formulated all-natural solution. As described by Jim Hime, chief executive officer of Grovac Systems, the owner of the patent, and Jeff Schroeder, CEO at Creative Culinary Marketing Solutions, the Grovac process entails putting food in a drum filled with a special solution that flows into the cell membrane of the bacteria, then exposing the drum to a strong vacuum, which ruptures the cell membrane.

In testing by Microvac of Wilson, N.C., (the results of which were provided to HFN by Vesture), the CuisineClean killed from 80 percent to more than 99 percent of e.coli bacteria in a variety of vegetables.

Jason Baldwin, vice president of consumer sales for Vesture, said, "Ozone cleans all strains of bacteria by attacking the structure of the cell membrane. You fill the CuisineClean with water and put the fruits and vegetables in. The water bubbles up, submerges the food and the ozone then kills the bacteria."

The Lotus carries a retail price of \$149.99, the CuisineClean is priced at \$199 and the CulinaryPrep carries a price tag of \$399. These products are expected to appeal to "people who are health-conscious and for whom cooking is part of their life," Schroeder said. "We've also targeted early adopters, those who have to have the latest and greatest, and outdoorsmen. Hunters, in particular, will want to reduce the bacteria and impurities in the animals they catch."

In interviews with HFN, sources inside and outside the housewares industry expressed some skepticism about these products. Marion Nestle, a nutrition expert, author and professor at New York University, said, "I'm sure [manufacturers] will want to make money on this concept, but I'd like to see independent agency tests of these products before I would support them. Washing and cooking food has been shown to help clean food, without consumers having to spend on an appliance like this."

Even while expressing her skepticism about this category, Nestle made an observation that could point to a strong future for it. Clean food "is something consumers should be worried about," she said. "The burden should be on food producers to make sure food is safe, but producers aren't required by law to follow standard food-safety procedures. Some producers are ensuring safety and some aren't."

Andrew Hill, president of Jarden Consumer Solutions, said he was familiar with the food cleaning products. "It's an interesting idea, but where there's a need for it is unclear. I haven't seen a real groundswell of interest in food cleaning among consumers, and it hasn't shown up in our consumer research. There have been issues with food poisoning, but these incidents have been intermittent."



Both the CuisineClean, pictured above, and the Lotus, left, use ozone to clean nearly all of the impurities found on fruits and vegetables. The Lotus sanitizing system was cited as one of the Best Inventions of 2006 by Time magazine.

Steve Fox, director of consumer products for Bosch and Siemens Home Appliance Group, sees potential for the products. "At first blush, it looks like a good category," Fox said. "We haven't developed anything to date, but it makes a lot of sense. There are problems with food purity all over. One more food-purity issue from anywhere, one more mad-cow scare, could bring momentum to this concept."

According to data on the Vesture Web site's CuisineClean page, nearly 33 million cases of microbial food-borne diseases are reported each year in the United States, including more than 9,000 deaths related to such diseases. These ailments cost Americans about \$37.1 billion per year and involve 325,000 hospitalizations of Americans.

For the fiscal year ended in November 2006, Ter-

Steve Hengsperger, Tersano, with Donnie Deutsch, host of "The Big Idea"



sano posted revenues of \$5 million. Hengsperger said the Lotus could propel the company to annual revenues of \$25 million in the next two to three years. "The product is now featured on Costco.com and Target.com," Hengsperger said, "and we're working to get placement with brick-and-mortar retailers. We're also signing up with dealers and distributors internationally, including one in Beijing."

Regarding the CuisineClean, Baldwin said, "We're close to getting it into national retailers, and we're really working to get it into both Linens 'n Things and Bed Bath & Beyond. We're also in production on an infomercial. Our big goal is to get this into every U.S. household."

Hime and Schroeder predicted that the CulinaryPrep would be on retail shelves in September. The company is in discussions with premium retailers—brick-and-mortar, catalog and online—for future placements. ■

Food-cleaning products are gaining attention as the urge for healthier living grows