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Fruit, protein fuels athletes

Sports nutrition company FRS believes it has attained the beverage industry's ideal – a “natural energy” drink, fuelled by a compound, called quercetin, which is found naturally in fruits and vegetables. The next addition to the celebrity-endorsed range is a protein recovery drink. By DALE BUSS.

FRS Co. has muscled its way into the \$9 billion (£6 billion) US sports nutrition market on the back of a single ingredient, quercetin (see box), which is at the core of all of its products. And now the California-based company – minority-owned by former professional road-racing cyclist Lance Armstrong – is about to try to extend its franchise from the original FRS Healthy Energy product line.

“Our brand vision really is to perfect the performance of the human body,” Deepak Masand, FRS’s chief marketing officer, said broadly. “Our job and our focus is around healthy performance products. We are trying to mainstream healthy performance and nutrition products.”

And at the core of FRS’s approach is quercetin, a natural, highly concentrated antioxidant that is derived from fruits and vegetables. This is the ingredient upon which FRS has hung its past, current and future hopes. A product such as FRS Concentrate drink delivers a dose of 250mg per 2 fl. oz. (60 ml) serve and some products, such as FRS Cans, also contain a small amount of caffeine.

“To the best of my knowledge, we’re one of the few – if there are any others – mainstream-scale products that have quercetin at our very core.”

Healthy Energy has been aimed at giving athletes pre-workout energy that also is released during a workout or performance. It comes in four forms:

- Ready-to-drink beverage
- Chews
- Powder
- Concentrate

Now, FRS also will introduce Healthy Protein, which will join the industry’s growing number of beverages aimed at post-workout recovery. It’s also fueled by quercetin – though it includes 25g per serving of protein, mostly from whey. Upon launch, the only form of Healthy Protein will be a resealable 12oz (355 ml) bottle.

FRS attributes a variety of benefits to quercetin. The company says it not only enhances athletes’ energy levels but also their endurance and capacity, that it delays

fatigue and battles muscle inflammation. “It mimics the efforts of exercise by inherently enhancing the body’s production of mitochondria, the energy-producing units in cells,” Masand explained.

Masand also noted that FRS uses “only QU-995, the purest form of quercetin available”. FRS also includes a patented mix of vitamins, antioxidants and metabolic enhancers.

BRINGING IN NEW SPORTS NUTRITION CONSUMERS

Even with this heavyweight ingredient in its arsenal, however, FRS tends to pursue new consumers who currently don’t use sports nutrition products rather than attempt to poach existing consumers in the segment from rivals. One reason is that there are still so many Americans who are active athletically, in some form, who don’t participate in the sports beverage market. Masand said that tap water still dominates their consumption: It represents about 50% of liquid consumption by athletes before workouts, 70% during workouts, and 40% after workouts, FRS research showed.

“So there’s a huge segment there for us to educate, because there are certain things water can’t do for them, scientifically,” Masand said. “So rather than going after [competitors] we’re educating consumers

about what FRS is, and why we are efficacious and healthy, and allow them to choose us before other options. Our goal is to bring people into the FRS franchise largely from water drinkers rather than switching them from other segments.”

Another portion of FRS consumers, Masand said, come from drinkers of enhanced waters like Vitaminwater and SoBe Life Water – often consumed by individuals in the course of an athletic performance or workout, but not really in the same category with sports nutrition products per se.

PROTEIN THE NEXT MOVE

FRS is adding Healthy Protein as its second product “because we increasingly heard from our core consumers that, post-workout, they need something to help recover, to build lean muscles, and to reduce inflammation. So this was a very logical extension on the performance continuum. It has antioxidants to fight free radicals and carbohydrates to fuel the body”.

Masand dismissed the growing popularity of dairy-based and dairy-oriented competitors such as Muscle Milk. “We anchor FRS in fruits and vegetables,” he said. “We make it simple for people to understand, and they get it. And as quercetin becomes even more mainstream, showing up in the vitamin section of the store, for instance, it will



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become less scary to people.”

But what about the fact that whey is the source of most of the protein in Healthy Protein?

“We haven’t heard a lot of consumers talking about the source of the protein,” Masand insisted. “It’s more about how much is in there – that’s what people want to know generally. And it has to taste great. It’s the fact that it’s a fruit-anchored product that helps it taste-wise. That makes it comfortable and accessible to people.” Healthy Protein will be available in Blackberry-Acai and Orange-Cream flavours.

Masand attributed the success of Muscle Milk – taking a radically different approach to positioning from that adopted by FRS – “to being first movers in the segment, to some extent. That probably has helped them. They moved to mainstream protein faster than most other folks. Their approach to going after protein segments, and colleges, has worked for them.”

FRS AIMING AT PEOPLE “ALMOST WORKING OUT”

FRS likely won’t be introducing a pre-workout product because Healthy Energy largely serves the purposes of its customers in that regard. “A lot of people drink it about 45 minutes before a workout, then the efficacy really kicks in during the workout,” Masand explained. “Then often they pop a chew during a workout.”

However, he said that FRS “probably will move further upstream on the performance continuum” – meaning that it will skip past pre-workout products and diversify into products that are meant for people who are “almost” working out.

“There are other ways to help improve performance that won’t be as deeply anchored in sports and nutrition,” he said. “We have two primary audiences. Performance athletes, from the elite all the way to workout warriors, are our core target. But there’s also the occupational athlete where their work is a ‘workout’. Police or emergency medical technicians, or military – they are huge consumers of our product. Even healthy moms.”

FRS’s already-broadening demographic target is indicated by its newest celebrity brand endorser – Christine Rampone, the captain of the US women’s soccer team, and a mother. “She talks to that segment of healthy moms for us, and Healthy Energy fits into their world really well – and so will



Healthy Protein, when they’re looking for meal replacements.”

CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT

Rampone joins a list of affiliated celebrity athletes for FRS that already was impressive – and even more so, Masand would offer, because each of them began as a consumer of FRS long before they became endorsers. “Authenticity is very important to our brand identity,” Masand said.

World biking champion Armstrong consumed FRS several years ago as part of his regimen to recover from cancer and to give him workout energy. Then he bought a piece of the company and serves on its board of directors as well as an endorser.

Denver Broncos Quarterback Tim Tebow has become one of the highest-profile players in the National Football League even after just one season. He just signed an endorsement deal with FRS last year. But he began using it in college, as leader of the twice-national-champion University of Florida football team. And again, when he practiced for league officials before the draft last spring, Tebow used FRS and talked about it – and then went out and staged one of the most impressive workouts the league had seen from someone at his position.

Another new endorser for FRS is Jordan Romero, a 14-year-old mountaineer who’s on a quest to climb the tallest peaks on every continent – fast – and was the youngest person to reach the summit of Mt. Everest. The only things in his pockets as he was approaching the peak, Romero has said, were FRS concentrates and chews. The chews froze, so he ended up drinking raw FRS concentrate on the way to his conquest. “He,” Masand said, “is an authentic user.”

Orange Cream FRS Healthy Protein

Supplement Facts

Serving Size 1 Bottle (12 fl oz)

Amount Per Serving	% Daily Value
Calories 190	
Calories from Fat 20	
Total Fat 2.5g	4%**
Monounsaturated Fat 2.0g	↑
Total Carbohydrate 11g	4%**
Dietary Fiber 7g	28%**
Sugars 9g	↑
Protein 25g	50%**
Vitamin C 156mg	260%
Vitamin E 39IU	130%
Thiamin 2.0mg	130%
Riboflavin 2.2mg	130%
Niacin 26mg	130%
Vitamin B6 2.6mg	130%
Vitamin B12 8mcg	130%
Quercetin 325mg	↑
Catechins 85mg	↑

**Percent Daily Values based on a 2,000 cal. diet.
† Daily Values not established.

INGREDIENTS: Water, Whey Protein, Organic Sugar, White Grape Juice Concentrate, Maltodextrin, Olive Oil, Inulin, Natural Flavors, Quercetin (QU995), Citric Acid, D-Ribose, Stevia Rebaudiana Leaf Extract, Lecithin, Green Tea Leaf Extract, Pectin, Alpha Tocopherol Acetate (Vit E), Xanthan Gum, Niacinamide (B3), Cyanocobalamin (B12), Pyridoxine Hydrochloride (B6), Thiamine Hydrochloride (B1), Riboflavin (B2).
Contains Milk and Soy.

WHAT IS QUERCETIN?

Quercetin is a plant-derived flavonoid found naturally in many fruits, vegetables, leaves and grains.

Foods with a high content of quercetin include black and green tea, cranberry, onions (especially red onions), red grapes, citrus fruit, tomato, broccoli, raspberry, lingonberry and to a much lesser degree, apples.

Quercetin has been shown to increase energy expenditure in rats, though not humans.

A product such as FRS Concentrate drink delivers a dose of 250mg per 2 fl. oz. (60 ml) serve.