

FANCY FOOD & CULINARY PRODUCTS

THE GOURMET PRODUCTS MAGAZINE FOR RETAILERS

By Jessica Goldbogen Harlan

PB&J^{the} Gourmet Way

America's favorite sandwich-filling duo is getting fun and fancy.

Skip the Skippy and ditch the grape jelly. The peanut butter and jelly sandwich is in the midst of a makeover. From PB&J-only restaurants to upscale nut spreads, there are far more options for this humble sandwich than there were in the days of "Dukes of Hazzard" lunchboxes.

Fancy Food polled some of the innovators in the nut butter and fruit spread categories to get their feedback on what's hot, what's new, and what would be their ultimate PB&J sandwich.

Earth Balance

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What's the most interesting thing about your company? "The most noteworthy thing about our

company is that we produce the best-selling natural trans fat-free butter alternative on the market, Earth

Balance Buttery Spreads," says Rickard Werner, general manager and vice presi-



dent of Earth Balance Foods. The company also produces crunchy and creamy peanut butters and an almond butter.

What is your best seller? Werner says the creamy peanut butter is the best seller in terms of units, but the more-expensive almond butter is a better seller in terms of dollars.

Any new introductions? The entire nut butter line is brand-new, and has only been shipping since last August. "The Earth Balance brand is built around healthy fat, and this was a great way for us to incorporate that spirit of nutrition and outstanding taste that we built in the butter-alternative business into another product area," says Werner.

What are the latest trends in the peanut butter and jelly category? "I think natural in general has been a trend," says Werner. "You've got the name brands of your childhood coming out with 'natural' products." Within the nut butter category, Werner believes that there is a big trend toward "no-stir" products. "Nobody likes the 'jackhammer' issue that the products you have to stir necessitate," he says. Earth Balance products are sweetened with agave and have added flax for more nutritional value. The company strives to produce a very smooth and creamy butter that is similar to the more mainstream varieties, and the flax is milled with a special process that keeps it from being gritty. The company's past experience in oils enabled it to develop a nut butter that doesn't separate.

What's your ultimate peanut butter and jelly sandwich? "For me personally, it would be farmer's market plum jam, our peanut or almond butter, on either toasted Ezekiel bread for an open-faced sandwich or on Whole Wheat sandwich bread from Rudi's Organic Bakery for a 'closed' sandwich," says Werner. "That's the pinnacle for me." ©