

Time for an oil change?

Catherine Watkins

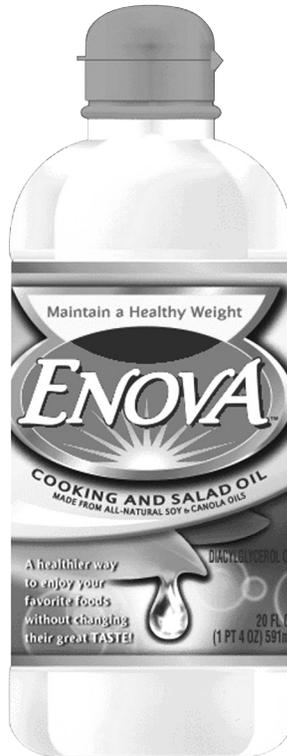
“Don’t change the way you eat, change your oil” is the tag line of television and print advertisements that began running in Chicago, Illinois, and Atlanta, Georgia, in January for Archer Daniels Midland (ADM) Kao LLC’s Enova™ cooking oil. After about nine months of test marketing in those cities, the company will know whether consumers in the United States are likely to be moved to do just that.

Enova is made from a combination of soy and canola oils through a patented process that significantly increases the level of diglycerides, which are found naturally in all oils. Based on about 15 years of research, it appears that diacylglycerol (DAG) oil is metabolized differently from oil composed primarily of triglycerides, leading to the hypothesis that DAG is oxidized directly by the body as energy rather than stored as fat (*inform* 13:245, 550, 631, 790, 943, 2002).

Research also suggests DAG oil is less likely to be stored in adipose tissue, especially around the internal organs. A recent study by the Chicago Center for Clinical Research, says ADM Kao, showed that, over a 24-week period, people who incorporated Enova oil into a calorie-controlled diet reduced their weight by an average of 3.6% and their body fat mass by 8.3% (*Am. J. Clin. Nutr.* 76:1230–1236, 2002).

Kao Corp. began selling DAG oil in Japan in 1999 as Healthy Econa Cooking Oil, where it has become the best-selling oil on the market. The line has been extended to include a DAG oil–phytosterol combination, a mayonnaise, and salad dressings. Should Enova pass its test marketing in the United States, ADM Kao estimates the long-term U.S. industrial sales potential at more than \$150 million per year in a full range of products including salad dressings, mayonnaise, margarine, and cookies.

The test marketing of ADM Kao’s Enova oil in the United States will also be watched closely by major food manufacturers. Tony DeLio, ADM’s corporate vice president for marketing and external affairs, says, “The ADM Kao joint venture has been working for some time with packaged food producers on potential



products but decided to move ahead on its own to establish the brand credentials in the minds of U.S. consumers.”

After conducting extensive market research, ADM Kao is convinced the market for Enova exists in the United States, DeLio says. Unlike other lipid-based functional foods—such as Raisio’s Benecol and Unilever’s Take Control—that have struggled to find a market, DeLio thinks ADM Kao’s market research has developed a marketing campaign that communicates Enova’s benefits “succinctly and in a motivating way.”

ADM Kao’s research also finds that consumers will pay a premium for Enova, he says. Sold in 20-ounce double-layered bottles at a suggested retail price of \$4.79, the oil is priced slightly under the cost of olive oil. The double-layered packaging system with an oxygen barrier will ensure the oil remains in the best possible condition, DeLio says, noting that consumers in Japan prefer DAG oil to traditional cooking oils because of its light color and taste.

The company is continuing to work on getting regulatory approvals for Enova in other markets, DeLio says, including

Europe, South America, Australia, and New Zealand. ADM Kao does not anticipate any challenges similar to those mounted against Procter & Gamble’s olestra, noting that company officials have met with the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), a self-described nutrition advocacy organization based in Washington, D.C., that challenged the use of olestra.

“We are not supportive of or opposed to Enova,” says Michael Jacobson, CSPI’s executive director, adding that CSPI does not have any questions about Enova’s safety at this time.

DeLio points to the roughly three years Econa oil has been sold in Japan as instructive, noting that close to 80 million bottles have been sold with few complaints. The oil also has undergone “all kinds of safety tests in adults, children, people with renal problems, and diabetics,” he adds.

Wahida Karmally, director of nutrition at the Irving Center for Clinical Research at Columbia University in New York and a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association (ADA), says she personally enjoyed the taste of Enova salad dressing distributed at a recent meeting but voices other concerns, including the desire to review safety data before sanctioning the oil.

“The claim that Enova oil is metabolized directly without being stored as fat would be wonderful if we use it on lots of vegetables rather than using it to consume more calories, as in the preparation of cakes and cookies that provide loads of carbohydrate. A calorie is a calorie is a calorie, and all calories count. The need remains to teach people about lifestyle changes and to eat a variety of foods,” Karmally cautions.

DeLio agrees. “Enova is not a substitute for eating a balanced diet and exercising properly. What it does offer consumers is the opportunity to maintain or lose a little weight when [it is] substituted for regular vegetable oil as part of a sensible diet.”

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