AGRI MARKETING PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
RUNNERS-UP
October 2005

Editor’s note: This year we had several notable entries that weren’t named Product of the Year but deserve to be recognized as a strong second place.

We had one entry that took the award in a different direction -- from crop and livestock production input products to products with value-added output traits. Its story follows.

ASOYIA ULTRA LOW LIN SOYBEAN OIL
by Asoyia LLC

"Faith, luck and timing." That's what inspired Iowan Jim Sladek and a group of other soybean farmers to start their new company. Rather than sticking with the traditional mode of harvesting, delivering crops for processing and walking away until the next growing season, these growers saw an opportunity to integrate farming with production, marketing and sales. They would call the shots and capture a larger portion of the value added to their crops.

With that, Asoyia LLC was born. Just one year later, the company is engaged in full-on competition with some of the biggest names in food service. Its product, Asoyia Ultra Low Lin Soybean Oil, has the taste and performance of hydrogenated soybean oil but without any trans fats. Beginning in 2006, the Food and Drug Administration will require food manufacturers to list the amount of trans fatty acids on food labels. As a result, pressure is on restaurants and food manufacturers to use oils that eliminate trans fatty acids.

"Asoyia addresses everyone's needs today," says Vivan Jennings, Asoyia CEO. "Zero trans fats, reduced saturated fat, little transferable taste, long fryer life and non-GMO. Plus, food cooked in Asoyia tastes great."

Asoyia entered the market after years of scientific development and testing. Its 1 percent linolenic acid content -- the lowest available -- eliminates the need for hydrogenation, which conventional soybean oils need to maintain freshness and stability. Hydrogenation creates trans fatty acids, so eliminating this process also eliminates the trans fats. Oil producers have developed other methods to avoid hydrogenation, but doing so often compromises other traits. In contrast, Asoyia eliminates trans fatty acids without increasing saturated fat or adversely affecting taste.

"With Asoyia, our customers notice no taste difference," says Jason Wheelock, manager of Hickory Park Restaurant, Ames, Iowa. "And the oil lasts twice as long as what we used before."

The company has already gained dozens of customers since the product launched last October. While Asoyia originally planned to focus on the fry oil market, tests have uncovered other applications, including salad dressings, baking, sautéing and spraying.
Restaurants, food manufacturers, and hospital and university food service operations like the product's combination of health and performance benefits. Melissa Clark, Iowa Health Des Moines, says, "Our customers are excited we're eliminating trans fats and providing healthier versions of their favorite foods."

Food distributors are also now carrying the oil to appeal to their customer's customers.

Asoyia oil is produced from 1 percent linolenic soybeans, the result of more than 30 years of research and crossbreeding by agronomists and food scientists at Iowa State University. The beans were field tested for several years throughout the Midwest, and the oil was evaluated by food scientists, nutritionists and restaurants.

In its inaugural sales year, the company marketed 4 million pounds of oil. Next year, 14 million pounds will be available after harvest of this summer's 25,000 acres. Beans are provided by 125 growers, and each receives per bushel premiums, transportation benefits and revenue sharing.

While these quantities seem large to the small Asoyia operation, they are -- pardon the pun -- a drop in the bucket. The frying oil market alone is 18 billion pounds strong. Given Asoyia's David stature in an industry of Goliaths, the company chose a highly targeted marketing approach, positioning the product as a premium oil. Marketing strategy focuses on highly targeted efforts to find pockets of the food service and food processing markets where the oil's unique characteristics can make a significant bottom-line difference.

The Asoyia Test Program has proven an efficient pipeline for sales. The company and its partners provide samples and technical support to help prospects with the R&D process in their own test kitchens. Customers praise Asoyia's personal service and quick response to specialized needs, such as providing new container sizes for easier handling.

Asoyia VP of Sales and Marketing Rich Lineback knows competing against the country's agribusiness giants is an uphill battle, but he would not trade his job with anyone. "Ours is a 100 percent positive message -- we've got the highest quality product, at a good price, with a unique array of features. And all profits go back to the growers. I couldn't represent a better product."