

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <https://www.djreprints.com>.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/put-down-that-spoonthis-soup-is-for-drinking-11546696800>

FOOD & DRINK

Put Down That Spoon—This Soup Is For Drinking

As people seek alternatives to sweet beverages and try to consume more vegetables, food makers offer soup packaged for sipping—from chilled bottles to cups with lids



Tio Gazpacho bottles of cold soup say 'no bowl required' and are meant to be consumed as a beverage on-the-go.

PHOTO: REEMA DESAI

By *Anne Marie Chaker*

Jan. 5, 2019 9:00 a.m. ET

Do people want to drink their soup?

More products pitching soup as a beverage are appearing on grocery shelves, packaged in coffee cups, bottles and Mason jars—no spoon needed. Campbell Soup Co. has a new line of “sipping soups” topped with coffee-cup lids, Tio Gazpacho’s bottled soup touts “no bowl required,” and Nona Lim, a line of Pho soups and beef broths, recently introduced “heat and sip” cups.

As people look for drinks with less sugar, try to consume more vegetables, and seek eat-on-the-go convenience, marketers say they see potential in drinkable soup. But whether consumers can get over the perception of soup as a seasonal bowl food is still a question.

Some people have embraced the idea. Cheryl Stank, a 66-year-old director of a geriatric health facility in Newtown Square, Pa., discovered “souping”—substituting soups for meals or snacks—from a dieting email. Drinking soup cold, she says, felt strange at first, but she has become used to thinking of it as a beverage that also staves off hunger. “It satisfies and it fills me,” she says.

She now spends \$320 a month in bottled soups—either ordered online or from a health food store. A 12-ounce bottle of yellow pepper turmeric soup has replaced her 10 a.m. coffee-and-muffin and a beet-orange-basil blend helps keep an evening craving for sweets at bay.

Sales of canned soup, which make up most of the \$4.75 billion soup market, have declined 6% in the last five years to \$3.9 billion, according to Euromonitor

International, as more consumers seek fresh ingredients. But chilled soups—fresh soups sold in refrigerated cases—grew 83% to \$446 million.



Züpa Noma bottled soups come in flavors such as Cucumber Avocado and Yellow Pepper Turmeric. PHOTO: ZÜPA NOMA

The line between soup and juice is blurring as health-conscious consumers try to squeeze more vegetables into their diets, and juice formulations get greener with kale, celery and mint. Traditional sodas and juices are now seen by many consumers as too sugary. Newer beverage categories, such as kombucha and ready-to-drink coffees, are smaller but growing fast, according to Beverage Marketing Corp. data.

Drinks have long been formulated with refreshment in mind, and doing that with vegetables—rather than fruit—can be tricky. Whether it can captivate enough consumers remains to be seen, food analysts say.

Kara Nielsen, vice president of trends and marketing at CCD Helmsman, an Emeryville, Calif.-based food consultancy, questions whether enough consumers will find soup appealing as a cold beverage. “When I think about the things that make soup attractive, they are: the heat, the garnish and the things you eat with it, like a cracker or a breadstick,” she says.



Nona Lim's Asian-inspired soups and broths come in heat-and-sip cups that allow consumers to drink them similarly to coffee. PHOTO: NONA LIM

Campbell launched its drinkable soups after researchers noticed that parents sometimes poured soup into thermos containers to drink in their cars or microwaved it in mugs while working from home.

With the rise of plant-based eating, vegetables had become cool and Campbell was convinced that more people were ready to drink them. The company's V8 brand, with a 60-and-up core consumer, says it also saw a rise in younger customers.

“Convenient vegetables on the go are a big gap in the marketplace,” says Ciara O’Connell, director of consumer insights. For its new sipping soups line, the company used black lids to “cue coffee culture,” she says, noting that nearly 40% of consumers say they sip their soup instead of using a spoon at least sometimes. “Weird is the new normal,” she says.

Sara Polon, owner of Washington, D.C.-based Soupergirl, which sells its homemade soups in restaurants and stores in mid-Atlantic states, says she saw a sales increase of as much as 30% when she began putting her cold gazpacho in bottles this past summer. She says consumers were already drinking it right out of the takeout tubs anyway.

In December, Novamex, a Mexican beverage distributor that owns Jarritos soda and Steaz iced tea, bought bottled soup brand Tio Gazpacho from a group of investors including General Mills. Chief Executive Luis Fernandez declined to say how much the company paid for the brand, but emphasized his company’s need to branch out into more kinds of drinks as consumer tastes shift. “We are studying whether soup can be a vegetable juice,” he says.



Soupergirl's cold gazpacho soups are now sold in bottles. PHOTO: SOUPERGIRL

Tio Gazpacho’s 10-ounce bottles cost around \$5 and come in flavors such as “maiz” (corn, roasted poblano and lime) and “verde” (kale, spinach, avocado and mint). Consumers are looking for more than just refreshment from their drinks as they seek new kinds of snacks or mini-meals, company officials say. “If people...want to

feel full and they don’t want to drink a juice that’s high in sugar, then this is for them,” says general manager Matt Merson.

At a Whole Foods in Silver Spring, Md., the blended juices stacked in the refrigerated beverage case near kombuchas and butter coffees contain between 33 grams to 57 grams of sugar per 15.2 ounce bottles. That compares to four to 14 grams of sugar in 10 ounce bottles of Tio Gazpacho soups. Still, soups are often high in sodium—with consumers sometimes adding their own salt too.

Sonoma Brands, the Sonoma, Calif.-based marketers of Smashmallow candies and Dang coconut chips, has launched a Züpa Noma brand of chilled soups in 12-ounce bottles at grocery stores and health food markets in cities including San Francisco and New York and via its website.

It is approaching stores slowly as it grapples with where it should go on shelves. “There’s not really a set [category] for drinkable soup right now,” says Jen Berliner, Züpa Noma’s president. “We’re trying to take a very strategic approach.”

Write to Anne Marie Chaker at anne-marie.chaker@wsj.com

Appeared in the January 7, 2019, print edition as ‘Put Down THAT Spoon—This Soup Is For Drinking.’