
Sugarfree Chocolate Coatings

John J. Urbanski

Wilbur Chocolate Company

Sugarfree coatings are certainly not newcomers in the food industry. They have been used in confectionery, bakery and dairy applications for 30 to 40 years or more. The earliest products were made with sorbitol, which made them difficult to manufacture and to handle. Mannitol products soon became the norm as mannitol was less hygroscopic and was certainly easier to work with on both ends of the spectrum. Unfortunately, the sensory characteristics of products made with sorbitol and mannitol left a lot to be desired and consumption was fairly limited to those who were willing to sacrifice some of the eating experience for the sheer joy of having sugarfree dietary alternatives. Consumption of such products displayed relatively stable to slight growth trends over the next 20 to 30 years.

The increasing availability of alternative sugar replacers such as maltitol, lactitol and polydextrose, as well as the use of relatively new high-intensity sweeteners, led to the proliferation of new products in the early 1990s. The new coatings quickly gained consumer acceptance. Maltitol-based products became the norm, providing low hygroscopicity, improved tolerance and excellent organoleptic properties.

The growth of the sugarfree confectionery market has been phenomenal in the past two to three years. Manufacturers who produced a few hundred thousand pounds of sugarfree coatings annually in the mid-1990s are now seeing a 10- to 20-fold increase in demand. This is partially due to the dramatic increase in diagnosed cases of Type II diabetes; the improved sensory characteristics of the products; marketing strategies; and, finally, to their use in low-carbohydrate-diet programs. The increased variety of sugarfree coatings is seen in the wide variety of products now available at superstores, grocery markets, candy shops, drugstores and health food stores. A recent search on Yahoo for "sugarfree chocolate" yielded 527,000 hits, many of which are Web sites for producers of sugarfree consumer products.

DEFINITIONS AND STANDARDS

Let's start with the fact that the terms *sugarfree chocolate* and *made-without-added-sugar chocolate* are misnomers and that the standards of identity do not allow for this terminology in the United States. If the product is flavored with chocolate liquor as the only source of chocolate flavor, the term *chocolate* may be used in the statement of

Urbanski serves as vice president of technical sales and services for Wilbur Chocolate and is the North American manager of technical services for the Gerkens Cocoa Company. He joined Wilbur in 1984. Prior to Wilbur, Urbanski worked at Cargill and at Ambrosia.



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