

Whetting the Indian appetite for probiotics

Heena Khan

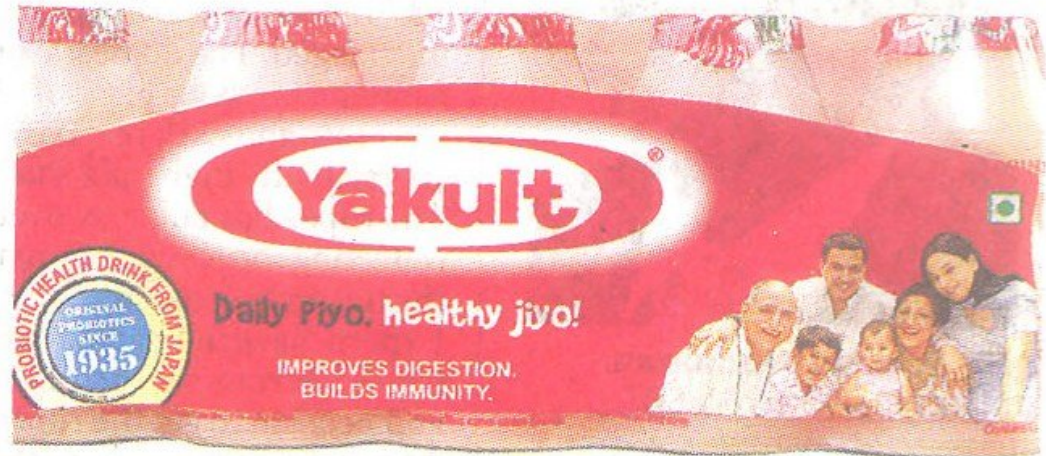
New Delhi, July 31

Health and wellness is undoubtedly the category of the future for the fast moving consumer goods segment. And the probiotic food category is slowly moving over the learning curve to carve an industry.

Interestingly, the brands are actively pushing boundaries and exploring newer markets.

Yakult Danone, for instance, is strong in North Indian markets and is now sharpening focus on South India. "Our focus this year is on developing South India (we have presence in Hyderabad and Bangalore) and Chennai is just getting launched in August," says Ms Shefali Sapra, Senior General Manager (Corporate Communications and Marketing), Yakult Danone.

Mother Dairy claims to have 35-40 per cent market share in the probiotic category with its product Nutrifit. It too has started expanding its footprint in the segment. "We were present only in Delhi NCR with this product offering but on June 25 we extended the same to Mumbai also," says Mr Munish Soni, General Manager, Marketing, (Dairy Products) Mother Dairy. Apart from captive outlets in Delhi NCR, Nutrifit is sold through about 2,000 multi-brand retail out-



Yakult Danone is sharpening focus on South India.

lets, as also retail and institutional channels. The company is working to launch more flavours besides mango and strawberry.

"It is a \$20-billion global market. In India, it is still small; only 1 per cent of the global market. Market insights point to this segment quadrupling by 2015," says Ms Sapra. Industry estimates point to the market growing at 25 per cent year-on-year.

In India, Yakult sells 52,000 bottles a day. And this year, the company hopes to sell 95,000 bottles a day. Besides being available through some 2,500 retail stores, Yakult has a unique distribution model of 80,000 Yakult women doing global home deliveries. About 40 per cent of the sales are through this channel.

Nestle is also present in the

market with its probiotic curd offering Actiplus. "The market for probiotic *dahi* is still in the early stages of growth and though we have a healthy share within this, our focus is really on growing the market itself," a Nestle spokesperson told *Business Line*. Available in metros and mini-metros, Nestle Acti-Plus 400-gm pack sells at Rs 48 and the 200-gm pack at Rs 27.

AWARENESS

Awareness happens to be the biggest challenge facing the industry, besides the absence of a cold chain infrastructure. "The drink is preventive medication and needs to be taken regularly. Each bottle contains 6.5 billion good bacteria," says Ms Sapra. Mr Soni adds, "Once this awareness increases, the volumes will definitely grow."

heena.k@thehindu.co.in