



PHOTO COURTESY KFC

Finger Lickin' Good

And **trans fat-free!**

Low-linolenic varieties are going to be in hot demand thanks to a new deal with the Colonel.

By Angela Dansby

THE COLONEL CAN BE PROUD of his chicken, especially now that it's going trans fat-free. On October 30, 2006, KFC Corporation announced that it would replace all of its partially-hydrogenated soybean oil in the United States with its non-hydrogenated, low-linolenic cousin.

This news was a treat for consumers the day before Halloween. They responded with more than 300 thank-you notes to KFC in one week alone, according to KFC spokesperson Laurie Schalow. As of April 2007, all 5,500 KFC restaurants nationwide will be converted to low-lin soybean oil, resulting in trans-free fried chicken products and potato wedges.

Several oils were tested with U.S. consumers for over two years and the only one that kept the same taste as the original recipe was low-linolenic soybean oil, says Schalow. Even the KFC franchise board of directors couldn't tell the difference. That's when they knew the Colonel was ready for an oil change.

"Taste, texture and palatability are not compromised by the low-linolenic oil," says Kurt Wickstrom, Soybean Trait Marketing Manager at Monsanto Company, which provided the oil to KFC for its consumer testing.

What makes the oil so finger lickin' good? It contains less than 3% alpha-linolenic acid compared to 8% in traditional soybean oil, which makes the low-lin oil more stable and functional in food service and manufacturing, Wickstrom notes. This added stability omits the need for partial hydrogenation, the process that creates artificial trans fat (it exists naturally to a small extent in dairy and meat products). Consumption of trans fat increases the risk of heart disease.

KFC's supplies of low-linolenic soybean oil are secured by UFPC (United Food Purchasing Co-operative), says Schalow. It purchases the oil from numerous processors, such as ADM and Cargill, which capture the value from identity-preserved low-lin beans in their oil price. Farmers contract directly with

the processors or elevators affiliated with them.

"Processors are interested in low-linolenic soybeans because they can keep out palm oil," says Wickstrom. "They want to keep the domestic industry going."

Monsanto is providing the majority of low-linolenic soybean seed (Vistive brand) for KFC while Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc. is providing the rest (Pioneer brand for Treus oil). Wickstrom says 1.5 million acres of Vistive soybeans will be planted in 2007. According to Jerry Harrington, Pioneer's Sales & Marketing Public Relations manager, Pioneer will double its low-lin bean acres to 400,000.

Farmer premiums for low-linolenic beans range from 30 to 45 cents per bushel, depending on the processor. In addition, growers who plant Pioneer low-lin beans can collect a 10-cent per bushel early signing bonus, Harrington notes.

The price of low-lin soybean seeds are about the same as regular bean seeds, and different production practices are not required to grow the beans, all of which are Roundup Ready, say Wickstrom and Harrington. Moreover, Monsanto is trying to give U.S. soybean growers an edge in the world oilseed market by pledging not to export any low-lin seed. (The oil, however, can be exported.)

"This competitive advantage is being offered because U.S. land costs make it tough for domestic farmers to compete internationally," Wickstrom says. "In addition, it's a way for Monsanto to support U.S. farmers who have adopted our technology and respected intellectual property rights."

It is projected that 8 to 15 million acres of Vistive beans are needed long term to replace a significant chunk of the 20 to 22 million acres of soybeans used in partially-hydrogenated oils now, he adds. This is no surprise as low-lin soybeans are among the first biotech seeds to directly benefit consumers along with farmers, processors and food providers. Going from the kernel to the Colonel, the value chain is clear. **SW**