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## Breaking News on Food & Beverage Development - North America

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### Shedding light on dark chocolate

By Catherine Boal

12/11/2006- **The US based Chocolate Manufacturers Association (CMA) has released a guide to cacao content labels in order to demystify confused chocolate consumers.**

The luxurious image of dark chocolate combined with increased publicity about its purported health benefits has made it a popular chocolate choice – leading many manufacturers to incorporate product labels proclaiming percentage cocoa content.

However, this is frequently easily misunderstood by consumers who fail to understand the exact nature of the cacao composition and can make inaccurate assumptions about the health benefits or taste of the product.

CMA president Lynn Bragg said: *"We wanted to provide consumers with useful information for a greater appreciation of this trend, as cacao terminology becomes increasingly more important."*

The CMA consumer guide defines cacao percentages as *"the total percentage of ingredients (by weight) which come from the cacao bean"*. These ingredients can include chocolate liquor, cocoa butter and cocoa powder.

Three main points are emphasized in the document, which explains how this percentage relates to flavour, sweetness and health.

While dark chocolate has been praised by health experts for its high content of flavanol antioxidants, consumers should be wary of automatically assuming that the higher the cacao percentage, the more flavanols the chocolate contains.

According to the CMA, *"While these compounds are associated with the non-fat cocoa solids, actual levels of flavanol content may fluctuate widely depending upon recipe, cocoa bean selection, subsequent processing practices and storage and handling conditions. Therefore, '% cacao' may not necessarily indicate the flavanol content of chocolates."*

However, a higher cacao percentage *does* mean a more intense chocolate flavour due its greater chocolate liquor content – except in the case of white chocolate where the cacao content is solely derived from cocoa butter.

Similarly, the greater the cacao content, the more bitter the chocolate as less sugar has been added to sweeten the product.

Educated consumers could further drive up sales of dark chocolate which, according to analysts Leatherhead International now makes up 19 per cent of the global chocolate market and is well-positioned for future growth.

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