

SIMPLYTHICK™ IMPRESSES NATIONAL FOOD DISTRIBUTOR HEALTHCARE SPECIALIST

Demand continues to grow for new thickening agent

Quality PFG, formerly known as Quality Foods, Inc., is a primary food service distributor for a wide range of restaurants, convenience stores, day care centers, nursing homes and hospitals throughout an eight-state region, and is part of Performance Food Group, the nation's third largest food distributor. Based in Little Rock, Ark., the company carries more than 12,000 items and strives to assist foodservice operators in providing meals that satisfy consumers' appetites when they are not at home.

This is especially challenging for food distributors in the healthcare operation where there are special food and beverage requirements.

As the Healthcare Specialist at Quality PFG, Kay Strand is responsible for meeting these challenges. Strand provides institutions with items ranging from fortified juices and pureed products, to food thickeners, to sugar-free, fat-free, low fat and low sodium food alternatives. Strand is a registered and licensed dietician, with 10 years of experience with the company.

"I interact with many food service directors who deal with special needs and concerns. My role is to help to provide them with quality products, and in some cases, they introduce them to me," said Strand. "We take pride in being ever cognizant of new products that may be of interest to present and potential customers."

Nancy Storms-Walsh, RD, LD, corporate director of food and nutritional services at Rose Care Inc., operator of 21 skilled nursing facilities in Arkansas and southwest Missouri, is one of Strand's regular customers. Storms-Walsh, like many other managers in similar facilities, deals with dysphasia patients who have dietary directives for thickened beverages.

At the American Dietetic Association's Food and Nutrition Conference & Exhibition in the fall of 2001, Storms-Walsh heard about a new thickening agent that seemed unique to all other thickening agents on the market. After meeting with the SimplyThick™ representatives and seeing and tasting the product, Storms-Walsh was suitably impressed and decided to introduce SimplyThick to the patients at the Rose Care facilities.

She called Kay Strand at Quality PFG and told her of this new product, SimplyThick.

"At the time, Quality Foods did not carry SimplyThick," said Strand. "But we aim to meet our customers' needs and demands, and at the request of Rose Care, we began ordering the product."

Strand says that since that time, SimplyThick has made great in-roads into existing markets and she has been impressed with the calls she has received from customers and non-customers alike who have heard about the product and want to order it.

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“Demand is growing as word gets out. It certainly benefits Quality PFG to be a SimplyThick distributor,” she says. “It is a quality product that ideally meets the high standards that we set for our customers’ satisfaction.”

While Strand has been impressed with the inquiries and orders of this newly introduced product, Rose Care and other food service providers have been equally impressed by their positive feedback and reports of better compliance.

“We are very pleased with the results of using SimplyThick. If our patients adhere to our nutritional recommendations, they will be healthier and happier,” said Storms-Walsh.

SimplyThick, unlike other thickeners that are starch-based and come in powder form, is composed of xanthan gum and comes in a gel form. Its composition enables SimplyThick to be mixed thoroughly in beverages and, once stirred properly, does not continue to thicken or clump. Along with taste and consistency, simple and effective preparation is something that SimplyThick’s founders knew would be important to healthcare professionals. “SimplyThick is sold in pre-measured packets,” says John Holahan, Inventor and Founder of Phagia-Gel Technologies, the company that produces SimplyThick. “The combination of the gel formulation and the pre-measured packets is intended to ensure consistent beverage preparation day to day and from server to server. It is a simplified process, with no measuring spoons or special containers necessary.”

By having pre-measured packets SimplyThick eliminates the guesswork and uncertainty in measuring powder thickeners. “When we approached this market, the instructions for thickening beverages with powders varied both with beverage thickness and by type of beverage,” notes Holahan. “It was extremely difficult for staff members to ensure that they were getting the right amount of thickener for the beverage they were preparing. With SimplyThick, the staff need only measure four ounces of beverage then add the diet-appropriate packet – either nectar or honey – to thicken it.” Pudding consistency can be achieved with two honey packets.

SimplyThick also has the capability of doing something else to add enjoyment to a patient’s life. It thickens all liquids – hot and cold – including water, juice, soda, milk, coffee, tea, soups, purees, beer, wine and mixed drinks, while most other thickeners work with only a limited number of liquids.

And because SimplyThick will not change from its intended consistency and is freeze-thaw stable, you can freeze water thickened with SimplyThick. When it melts, it maintains the diet-appropriate consistency. This opens the door to having pitchers of thickened water with thickened ice cubes at bedside without worry about beverage consistency changes. Another possibility is to allow patients to chew or suck on thickened ice cubes.

“We know that it is difficult for patients with swallowing disorders to give up many of the pleasures they have enjoyed their entire lives,” says Holahan. “SimplyThick allows a patient the satisfaction of drinking a soda or cup of coffee, if his/her diet allows, or enjoying iced beverages, and that makes for a happier patient with an improved quality of life.”

Acceptance of any new product can be a struggle. However, in just six months SimplyThick has found a place in the market, and demand continues to grow as word of this quality product spreads to consumers, facility administrators, and distributors.

