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edition white chocolate variant for the Christmas market. In addition, the company has extended its Boasters biscuit range with an orange chocolate variant and introduced new packaging across its Baked to Perfection, Teatime and Temptations boxed biscuit selections.

McVitie's Homewheat has also been turning in an excellent performance, according to Gordon Vickers, Nisaway category controller. "McVitie's, as brand leader, has the strongest credentials."

Colleague Trevor Standing, Nisachill/Freeze trading controller, says in cakes McVitie's and Cadbury-licensed products have similar brand shares. McVitie's, he says, is static in value but growing in volume and he expects Cadbury-branded products to grow in both value and volume over the coming year as more lines are launched.

Other manufacturers are busy with new variants; Masterfoods is promoting its white limited edition Twix and Nestlé Rowntree is coming up with plenty of flavours to keep everyone's interest in Kit Kat. Says Graham Walker, sales communication manager: "Kit Kat does well because consumers favour innovation over price reduction, which is why we've launched the white and dark varieties, along with the Caramac and Strawberry and Cream versions."



Easy to digest: McVitie's is full of flavours

But is it enough? Tim Kershaw, MD at consultancy Libra Europe, points to a lack of brand strength across the sector.

"McVitie's, Burton's Foods and Jacob's brands all suffered as companies drove own label volumes and subsequently failed to invest enough in the products and brands that built them," says Kershaw. "A classic example is Jacob's Club, a major victim of this move away from brand investment."

A good relationship with retailers obviously also helps prevent brands becoming less popular.

Mark Sugden, head of customer marketing at United Biscuits, says: "You

need to work with retailers to make sure they make the right choices about which products are stocked."

He points to Sainsbury's recent category review which resulted in a cull of 130 of its 550 cakes and biscuits lines. "That was the right thing to do and they're seeing sales continue to move ahead."

Category review such as this also puts pressure on the smaller players, which find themselves having to raise their game to gain listings.

Rivermill Foods is entering the category for the first time under the Loyd Grossman brand with a range of Italian handmade biscuits that are aimed at the top end of the category.

Its Cantucci in dark chocolate and honey flavours will be joined by traditional favourites Ricciarelli and Pinolini early next year, and will create a new premium everyday category, it says.

Walkers Shortbread earlier this year developed what it calls a range of contemporary biscuits – including stem ginger and lemon, oat and heather honey and crispy butterscotch variants – to offer a more premium everyday biscuit.

New Forest Foods is also ringing the changes with its recently launched Fairtrade hand-baked biscuits brand Sherriffs, which it is selling in canisters in an effort to encourage consumers to trade up.

# Baby, you don't have to give it up

## Maintaining flavour, manufacturers keep health-conscious consumers sweet

Media coverage about obesity and the constant barrage of diet books is certainly having an impact on cake and biscuit lovers, but not because they're opting for fruit instead.

Sweet-toothed consumers are looking for healthy alternatives to their sugary treats and healthier biscuits is the second biggest sector after chocolate biscuit bars. It was also the fastest growing category last year, with double digit growth, and is now worth \$301m, up 13.6% [TNS 52 w/e September 11, 2005].

Manufacturers are reformulating products to appeal to health-conscious shoppers. United Biscuits is reducing salt levels and



Low-fat sugar babes: the beauty of the healthy but tasty alternative

removing trans fatty acids. Says Mark Sugden, head of customer marketing: "We've also launched a range of 'light' products such as digestives and talk about a healthy diet and daily allowances on-pack."

McVitie's Go Ahead! range continues to thrive, with newcomer Go Ahead! Yoghurt Breaks now the eighth-biggest seller within healthier biscuits,

according to TNS. Similarly, Fox's Biscuits has been reducing salt, removing hydrogenated vegetable oil and developing even greater consumer-friendly labelling, as well as refreshing and adding to its Fox's Officially Low Fat range of cookies, cereal bars, mini bites, fruit bakes and crunchy biscuit fingers.

Meanwhile, Nana's biscuits

is going even further with a vegan, sugar, wheat and gluten-free offering, listed in food chain Fresh & Wild.

Burton's Foods – behind the growing Cadbury Highlights brand – is bringing out chocolate and honeycomb flavour Nibbles, as well as Delights in chocolate and coffee varieties. It forecasts the better-for-you category will become the largest segment in biscuits by 2007 and buyers share this prediction.

Nisa reports a significant increase in the healthy category over the past 12 months and Kate Forbes, category marketing manager for biscuits at The Co-operative Group, says: "The healthier biscuit category is set to continue to grow and is therefore a good opportunity for the category."

But is the cake category

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