

A Sunnier Chip on the Hill



February 8, 2010 by Eric Steinman

Almost 20 years ago the SunChip was born. This semi-marginal product, now wholly unremarkable, was, at the time, a crunch of fresh air in a snack chip market dominated by the likes of Doritos and Pringles. See, the Sun Chip was a multi-grain chip, touting more profound health benefits than its fried potato and tortilla equivalents. A critical look back at the time, as well as the ingredients of Sun Chips, and it seems that this was only a modest nutritional improvement upon the predominantly low expectations of the popular salty snack.

Roughly 20 years later, Laurel Hill Tortilla Chips have borrowed a few thousand points of light from the enduring SunChips to build a better and healthier version of the beloved dipping chip. Winner of loads of praise at last summer's Fancy Food Show in New York City (as if that means much to anyone outside of the "fancy food" circle?) Laurel Hill Tortilla Chips look a bit like SunChips with their rectangular tortilla strips dusted in one of the respective flavors (Pepita & Spice, Sea Salt & Lime, Olive & Caper, etc). However the differences between SunChips and this 2.0 version are significant, as well as delicious.

First the selling points: Laurel Hill Tortilla Chips are natural and free of preservatives, gluten-free, GMO free, and relatively healthy for a chip. My favorite of the four varieties was the plain old Multi Grain, which is loaded with ingredients like quinoa, flax seeds, and chia seeds as well. This straightforward chip is crunchy (if a chip is not crunchy something has gone terribly awry) and a nice mix of nutty, sweet, and moderately salty. The other three varieties are almost equally as good, but maybe a bit overstated (no accounting for taste). The Sea Salt & Lime seems a bit too aggressive on flavor, but is well tamed after a cool dip in some sour cream. The Pepita & Spice sports a subtle pumpkin flavor (I mean subtle) and shares a lot of the same flavor qualities with the Multi-Grain variety. The trade show favorite is the Olive & Caper, which reads like a strange combination for a chip, but somehow works in a way that seems natural, as well as compelling.

An interesting side note (a bit tangential, I know) but Frito Lay, the maker of SunChips plans to introduce compostable packaging for the SunChips product line this year. The bag, made of plant-based material, will "fully decompose in about 14 weeks when placed in a hot, active compost bin or pile."

Laurel Hill Tortilla Chips are sold in 6.5-ounce bags (approximately \$2.99 depending on vendor) and are available at Whole Foods Market, Crosby's, Mrs. Greens, and various IGA markets.

