

BUBBA VS. 365

AT A RECENT DINNER PARTY, a focus group blind-tasted similar foods from Whole Foods Market's in-house brand, 365, and Save-A-Lot (SAL) house brands. The taste comparisons were, of course, subjective; the healthiness metric is based on listed ingredients, nutritional information, and information from *A Consumer's Dictionary of Food Additives*, by Ruth Winter, with nitrates and corn syrup constituting red flags. SAL scored overwhelmingly better in price, and somewhat better in taste. Whole Foods was moderately better on healthiness. —Z.B.

PRODUCT	PRICE	HEALTHINESS	FLAVOR
FROZEN BROCCOLI	WF: \$1.99/1 lb. bag SAL: \$.99/1 lb. bag	Both are 100 percent frozen broccoli; the SAL brand is a product of Guatemala, the 365 is a product of Ecuador	Both items were placed in the microwave at the same time for the same duration. 365 was slightly fresher tasting; SAL a little watery.
CANNED GREEN BEANS	WF: \$.99/14.5 oz. SAL: \$.47/14.5 oz.	Both are products of the USA. The 365 has no salt, whereas SAL is high in sodium (see flavor). Since this much salt is not healthy in a normal diet, we'll give a big nod to Whole Foods. Plus, there was a voluntary recall as a precaution against botulism by the company that supplies SAL and other brands.	The no-salt 365 beans were boarding-school bad. SAL was much better. The sodium differential made it an unfair comparison, but in the end, does anyone actually like canned green beans anyway?
CANNED TOMATOES	WF: \$1.29/28 oz. SAL: \$.49/14.5 oz.	Equal sodium. The nutritional information is about equal. Interestingly, though both have the same amount of dietary fiber, Whole Foods lists it as a higher percentage of daily value. Both brands list calcium chloride (chalk, used as a thickening agent, which can cause stomach upset or heart irregularities) in the ingredients, although SAL lists it lower (according to quantity) in the ingredients list than 365.	Most tasters found the 365 tomatoes firmer and better, though my sample had a large, unpleasant core. On the other hand, the juice from SAL was richer and better-tasting, which implies that it was cooked longer.
MAC 'N' CHEESE	WF: \$.89/7.25 oz. box SAL: \$.34/7.25 oz. box	365 has more natural ingredients, whereas SAL is made with bleached flour, food additives, and artificial color.	While SAL tasted like regular mac 'n' cheese, the 365 was unpopular with the tasters, who called it "bland," "salty," "crunchy," and reminiscent of "Tang."
MARINARA SAUCE	WF: \$1.99/32 oz. SAL: \$1.79/32 oz. \$.99/32 oz.	Both 365 and SAL brand Ferrato's, the more expensive SAL entry, have good ingredients. The cheaper SAL brand contains corn syrup. This category is pretty even, but the richer ingredients give 365 the edge.	The 365 sauce tasted like someone made an effort to make decent sauce: "spicy and complex." SAL sells two varieties of basic tomato sauce. The more expensive one with the better ingredients was palatable, but not much better than spiced tomato paste, while the cheaper one was just sweet.
BACON	WF: \$4.99/12 oz. SAL: \$2.99/16 oz.	Bacon is not a health food. The 365 brand says it's "uncured," though it contains pork, water, sea salt, and "evaporated cane sugar," which presumably is the same as evaporated cane juice. The SAL brand is cured with sugar, but contains harmful sodium nitrate.	The tasters all preferred the SAL bacon for a bigger up-front flavor, being less "Save-A-Lotty," and having a better texture.
COLA	WF: \$2.29/6 pack SAL: \$.63/2 lt. bottle	Have we really gotten to the point where "pure cane sugar" is considered healthy? The 365 brand boasts on the can that it uses non-GMO sugar in place of corn syrup. For the record, refined white sugar is harmful. Still, it's healthier than Bubba Cola, which is made with corn syrup. Both contain food additives.	While some tasters preferred Bubba's weak cola taste ("seltzer-y," "like RC"), confirmed Coke drinkers liked 365. Neither was very good.
STRAWBERRY JAM	WF: \$1.59/10 oz. SAL: \$1.99/32 oz.	The 365 fruit spread is made with concentrated white grape juice and strawberries. SAL's brand lists strawberries first among the ingredients, but then lists both corn syrup and high fructose corn syrup. In either case, strawberries are among the foods most contaminated by pesticides.	The SAL strawberry preserve was very fruity, not too sweet, and had large chunks of fruit, whereas the 365 version was drippy and undistinguished.
TOMATO JUICE	WF: \$1.99/46 oz. SAL: \$1.99/64 oz.	Both offerings are from concentrate. The SAL brand is a vegetable juice (like V-8) including carrot, beet, parsley, lettuce, celery, watercress, and spinach; the 365 is just tomato. Both are high in sodium.	The 365 was watery; SAL was a bit richer, but not as bold as V-8.
CHOCOLATE CRÈME COOKIES (OREO-OIDS)	WF: \$2.99/20 oz. SAL: \$.99/16 oz.	The 365 has much lower sodium, no corn sugars, and no saturated fat; the SAL brand has 2.5 grams of saturated fat in three cookies.	The SAL cookies had a better chocolate flavor and a better-tasting, fluff-like crème. The 365 cookies were too sweet and had a lumpy, lard-y, translucent crème.

- WHOLE FOODS (WF) ●
- SAVE-A-LOT (SAL) ●
- SLIGHT ADVANTAGE ◐
- ADVANTAGE ●
- BIG ADVANTAGE ⊕
- EVEN ◑