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Share the Love: Food Manufacturers, Food Allergens And Mommy Bloggers

Jeanette Chen, Mommy Blogger and owner of Jeanette's Healthy Living, recalled her son's ninth birthday, when she found out he was allergic to wheat, dairy, eggs, soy and tomatoes.

"He requested that I make a calzone, which seemed virtually impossible," said Ms. Chen. "But supermom instincts kicked in, and I spent the entire day creating a wheat-free, dairy-free, egg-free, soy-free and tomato-free calzone. He was thrilled to pieces and it has become one of his most memorable birthdays. Food is love, and when a mom goes to every extent possible to show that, a child feels just that: Love."

Ms. Chen believes that by working with Mommy Bloggers whose kids have food restrictions, manufacturers of allergen-free foods can make their products stand out among their competitors. These are women who are keenly aware that almost all moms are at a loss to cook for and feed children when they are initially diagnosed with food allergies. Mommy Bloggers are often the first people these moms turn to.

Pam Wattenbarger, Mommy Blogger and owner of Just Like June, whose daughter was diagnosed with celiac disease a year ago, can attest to that. "I had no experience dealing with celiac and knew a total dietary change was needed, but since there were not a lot of gluten-free options available in our local grocery stores, I began researching online to find products and recipes," she said.

"Working with Mommy Bloggers is a wonderful way for manufacturers to get information about allergen-free foods and ingredients in front of millions of moms and dads," she said.

Mommy Bloggers go to great lengths to try them out and use them to create or enhance recipes and then write honest reviews. The reviews derive significant advantages: It drives traffic to the manufacturer's site and helps to reassure parents that their kids can enjoy tasty snacks and meals. Most of all, it benefits children who want to be like "normal" kids and not be deprived of their favorite foods.

Four years ago, Amanda West, Mommy Blogger and owner of Mommy of Two Little Monkeys and Nut Allergy Mom, learned her child had a peanut and tree nut allergy. "I remember the day," said Ms. West. "I came home to a pantry that was filled with products that had possible nut contamination.

It's scary to live in a world where a single peanut could kill my child."

Ms. West started Mommy of Two Little Monkeys three years ago to blog about her experience, to review products and to connect with other moms who also had kids with food allergies.

She recently started Nut Allergy Mom to share nut-free recipes she creates. She's avid about introducing her readers to nut-free brands and products that they can use with confidence. "It's like a light has shined into my home when I find a new product that my nut-allergy child can enjoy," said Ms. West. "I will share information about it time and time again with my readers. Parents in the nut-allergy community are very passionate about brands that take the extra step to create products that are nut free, like Quaker's School Days granola bars. Do you know how huge it is when we find a product like this?"

"And let's talk about parents of kids without nut allergies. Many schools are now turning into 'nut-free zones' because of the rising number of children with nut allergies. Do you realize how hard it is for those parents to find nut-free products for their kids to eat at school? When you don't live with the nut allergy in your home and aren't familiar with nut-free products, it can cause frustration and resentment towards nut-allergy kids.

I often find myself defending my nut-allergy child with parents who are in an uproar about this issue."

Colette Martin, owner of Learning to Eat Allergy-Free and author of "Learning to Bake Allergen-Free: A Crash Course for Busy Parents on Baking without Wheat, Gluten, Dairy, Eggs, Soy or Nuts," has worked with a number of food brands as a blogger.

Regardless of the allergen, manufacturers need to be very clear about what is in the food and how it was processed. "If the information isn't on the package, they need to be reachable — their phone number should be on the label and on their website," said Ms. Martin. "They also need to have up-to-date and accurate information at the fingertips of whoever answers the phone. A speedy response is needed when your kids are hungry."

It's vital for Ms. Chen, Wattenbarger, West and Martin and thousands of other Mommy Bloggers to advocate for brands and products that are safe for their children. That should be good news for food manufacturers.

(Wendy's Bloggers is a bridge for brands to create valuable relationships between food suppliers, Mommy Bloggers and their followers. For more information, please visit www.wendysbloggers.com or email Wendy at wendy@endysbloggers.com)