

Coca-Cola to introduce stevia- sweetened soda

21 November 2017 | News

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The company had looked at dozens of molecules in the stevia plant to find ones that are the sweetest with no bitterness or aftertaste, and eventually found the best one.

The new product will be introduced in a small market outside of the U.S. in the first half of 2018. Full commercialization is still a few years away because the company has to get a large-enough quantity of the stevia glycoside to produce the drink in more markets.

This molecule was developed for use in beverages by PureCircle, which has been a leader in stevia research. The company, which holds more than 60 stevia-related patents, announced last month that it finished sequencing the plant's genome in partnership with KeyGene. This new research provides ingredient developers with a deeper understanding of the plant's glycosides and where they can be best used.

In addition to Coca-Cola and PepsiCo, a growing roster of food companies are reformulating products or launching new ones using stevia, including DanoneWave, Kraft Heinz, Nestle and Unilever.