When Dianna Benting, foodservice district manager at Portland Community College (PCC) in Oregon wanted to launch a beverage concept on her campus that focused on local, sustainable and healthy products, she knew that she did not have enough purchasing power to bring in enough product.

“Pacific Natural happened to drop a sample of their smoothie base off on my desk and I got to looking at it and thought, ‘Wow, it would be great to have our own concept,’” she said. “I know that PCC is not big enough to demand that a distributor bring in enough product, so I called Rich Turnbull at Oregon State University (OSU) and I know he did some self-branding in the past and I asked if he would like to get together for a smoothie concept and brand it.”

Turnbull had been looking to make a change in his smoothie concept as well. “Both of us were experiencing the same kind of things on campus and exploring options we might be able to take,” said Turnbull, associate director of University Housing and Dining Services at OSU in Corvallis. “We both had existing smoothie operations and were looking to make some changes or adjustments. We had been doing some research on our own about some smoothie concepts that might be out there and we were in limbo at the time. We hadn’t made any decisions, we had a lot of information from what was available in the industry but hadn’t gone forward with a proposal. It was perfect timing that Dianna called, because it allowed us to shift gears a bit and take a look at it from a different perspective.”

Turnbull and Benting contacted Tom Allenby with Morton and Associates, the broker at the time for Pacific Natural Foods. They worked together to create a concept called Chill with the support of Pacific Natural Foods, Ocean Spray, Dannon and Dole.

“Morton and Associates got the manufacturers together to chip in a certain amount of money,” said Benting. “From there, they hired a marketing firm out of Chicago that did market and trademark research and they designed a few different designs and checked some names and it just progressed smoothly from there.”

The Chill concept has a few basics to it. “We wanted all of the ingredients to be readily available because one of the challenges we had in our previous concept was special order items,” said Turnbull. “We wanted to try and make sure that whatever we put on the menu was something that was going to be readily available.”

Any school interested in launching the program can do so rather easily. “We were also looking for a simple licensing agreement — one that didn’t require a team of attorneys to review and sort through,” he said. “We were looking for some concept flexibility. We wanted to have the Chill concept be potentially successful in almost any college arena or in any arena where it might someday reside. Space flexibility — How do you design something that can work in a very small space or in a medium space or differently configured spaces?”

The only requirement of the program is that products from the four manufacturers who worked to create the program be used. “You don’t have to pay anything for the program,” said Benting. “There is just an agreement that you sign that says you will use the products as advertised. You have freedom to develop your own smoothies or you can go with the ones already in the program. You can make it fit into whatever unit you need it to fit in. There are no broad requirements or specifics that you have to do.”

“The other thing we were looking for was minimum upfront costs,” said Turnbull. “We didn’t want to spend a ton of license fees or franchise fees and of course it had to provide a good return on investment.” That has been the case. “Our sales are up about 8 percent and our food cost is actually down a little bit,” said Turnbull. “The overall perception and feedback we have received from students has been very favorable. They like that our smoothies are healthy, and have no high-fructose corn syrup — that kind of thing. The Chill Concept fit the bill there.”

Right now, schools using the Chill concept include OSU and PCC, as well other Oregon schools: University of Portland, George Fox University and Chemeketa Community College.