

Here's a twist to an age-old classic: Lactose-free chocolate milk

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Two Northeastern graduates have brought Slate, their brand of lactose-free chocolate milk, onto the shelves of more than 300 grocery stores along the East Coast. Credit: Matthew Modoono/Northeastern University

A year ago, two Northeastern graduates set out to bring forth a

revolution, specifically one flowing with chocolate.

Manny Lubin and Josh Belinsky saw that [milk consumption](#) was declining in the U.S., as more people opted for plant-based alternatives, such as [almond milk](#) or oat [milk](#). They believed their twist on an age-old classic could be another alternative that people would enjoy.

The two founded Slate, a company that sells lactose-free [chocolate](#) milk designed for adults, in 2018. After raising over \$500,000 in investments last year, their product is now sold in more than 300 [grocery stores](#) along the East Coast.

"There's been a ton of innovation in the dairy-alternative space, but there's not much in the chocolate milk space," says Lubin, who studied communication and media studies at Northeastern. "We believe that we're innovating this space, and for a drink that we love."

Slate offers a classic chocolate milk, as well as dark chocolate and espresso flavors, that are available in New England stores such as Whole Foods Markets and Roche Bros. Supermarkets.

To create the milk, the company uses a process called ultrafiltration, which removes some of the natural sugars and water in milk without reducing the protein. Lubin and Belinsky said this method enables them to make a product that has 50 percent less sugar than skim milk and 50 percent more protein than whole milk.

This past spring, Lubin and Belinsky launched a Kickstarter campaign to fund their initial production run. They raised over \$50,000 in presales from almost 1,200 different customers, which Lubin says, gave them the validation they needed.

"It blew our expectations out of the water," Lubin says. "Even if you're a

large brand, it's hard to ever validate anything. For us, that was the first step of validation, the first domino where we're like 'this is something that people want.'"

Lubin says both he and Belinsky grew up loving chocolate milk, but they, like 65 percent of people, are lactose-intolerant. That meant they drank the same brand of lactose-free chocolate milk, but as they got older, Lubin says it became less socially acceptable to drink chocolate milk because the packaging was aimed towards kids.

Lubin and Belinsky say that frustration brought the two together as business partners.

"Both of us were at a point where we were looking for the next thing, and we both wanted something we could hold, something tangible," Lubin says. "Then, we realized we both have always had this idea for a better-for-you chocolate milk that's for adults."

Lubin and Belinsky credit much of Slate's successful launch to resources at Northeastern. They received a \$10,000 grant from IDEA, Northeastern's student venture accelerator, and got help on refining the company logo, packaging, and website from Scout, the student-led design studio.

"Northeastern was huge for us, and instrumental in us getting off the ground," Lubin says. "We wouldn't be where we are without the school's resources."

Provided by Northeastern University

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