


# DELI BUSINESS

MARKETING MERCHANDISING MANAGEMENT PROCUREMENT

JUNE/JULY 2008 \$14.95



4th ANNUAL PEOPLE'S AWARD

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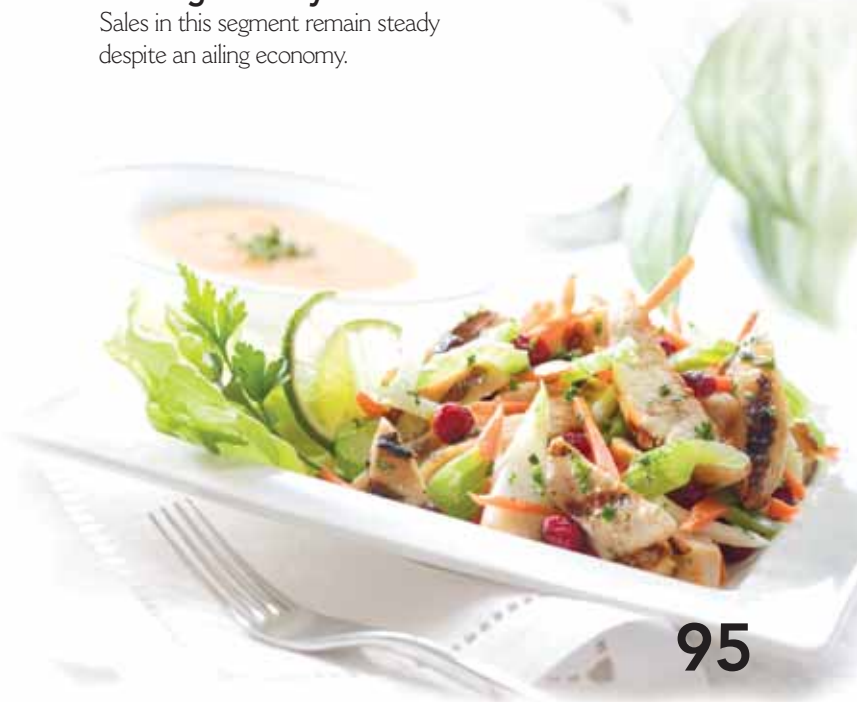
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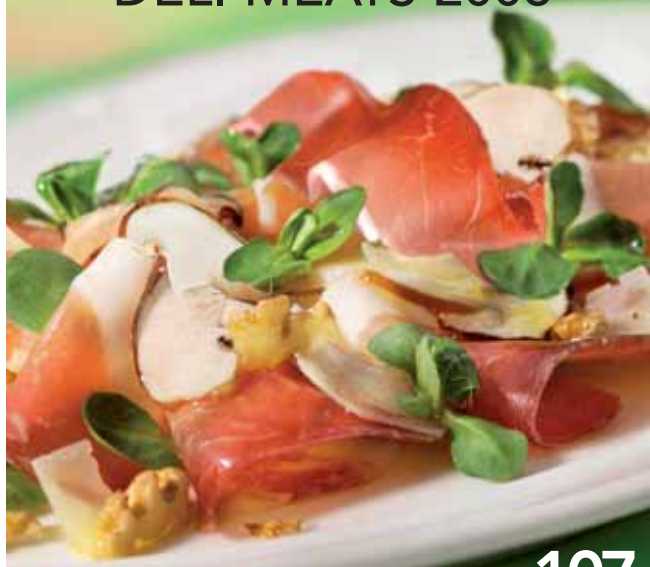
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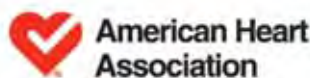




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# QUIZ



**CHICKE DRAKE**  
*Deli/Bakery Merchandiser*  
*Winn-Dixie*  
*Orlando, FL*

From her part-time job as a cashier in 1973 to her current position as deli/bakery merchandiser, Chicke Drake has spent her entire career with Winn-Dixie. In her current role, she reports to the vice president of the Orlando area, but she has "a dotted line to central procurement in corporate," Chicke says.

She moved into the deli/bakery department shortly after joining the company on a full-time basis. When asked what she likes most about her job, Chicke replies enthusiastically, "It's an exciting, cutting-edge and ever-evolving department. In the deli area, we have the opportunity to move forward with changes in time. We have to keep up with the demands of consumers. They want convenience, value and easy meal solutions—and that's what we provide."

She reads DELI BUSINESS to track the competition and to learn about innovative products as well as new packaging and meal solutions. "It's interesting to see how I can expand my horizons," she says.

For submitting the winning entry, Chicke wins a Flip Video.

## COMING NEXT ISSUE IN AUG/SEPT 2008

### THE TRANSITIONAL DELI DEPARTMENT

Increase market penetration by offering healthy, nutritious and delicious foods that are affordable alternatives to restaurants.

### FEATURE STORIES

Vegetarian  
Breakfast  
Italian Foods

### MERCHANDISING REVIEWS

Fried Chicken  
Grab-and-Go  
Hummus  
Holiday

### PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES

Potatoes  
Pâtés

### PREPARED FOODS

Soups

### DELI MEATS

Poultry

### SPECIALTY CHEESES

American Specialty  
French Cheeses

## COMING IN OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2008

The Masters of Merchandising Special Supplement

This special DELI BUSINESS supplement presents category-specific information from our Masters of Merchandising—ones with years of experience dealing with successful retailers and an arsenal of knowledge to share. Learn about effective point-of-sale materials, advertising programs, innovative cross-merchandising and creative ideas on how to build sales.

### SUBSCRIPTION & READER SERVICE INFO

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..... *Think*



**INNOVATION IN ACTION.**

# Economic Woes Are Delis' Opportunities



By  
**Jim Prevora**  
*Editor-in Chief*  
DELI BUSINESS

It was 13 years ago at the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery (IDDBA) convention in Minneapolis, MN, that we unveiled the first issue of DELI BUSINESS magazine. The cover story of that issue was about the then au courant topic of "Home Meal Replacement" (HMR) and the challenge, clearly defined, was whether supermarkets could rise to the challenge of delivering restaurant-quality food.

Fast forward to present day and that capability is no longer in doubt. What was once a specialized competency confined to high-end stores that could afford to bring in restaurant chefs to whip up some shrimp scampi is now a supply chain competency with food manufacturers and retailers partnering to offer a broad array of quality prepared foods to consumers.

With chains such as Whole Foods Market showing great strength in this area, HMR still holds an upscale connotation, but a closer look at the demographics served by chains such as Wegmans indicates this is hardly a meal solution reserved for the elite.

In fact, while changes in the economy and competitive environment are positioning the deli/retail foodservice area at the epicenter of the supermarket's efforts to capture market share, the competitive threat to this position may not be the restaurant down the road but the frozen food section a few aisles down.

The Food Marketing Institute (FMI) has just released a study indicating that 71 percent of consumers say they are eating at home more. Foodservice sales data is starting to reflect this. Sales in the casual dining segment—chains such as Outback and Applebee's—dropped by 0.3 percent in the first quarter of 2008, and this at a time of food price inflation.

This is not a short-term trend. The same FMI report shows that consumers ate their main meals in restaurants 1.5 times per week in 2006, 1.3 times a week in 2007 and are currently eating their main meal at a restaurant only 1.2 times a week.

The drivers behind this switch are superficially economic, but are actually multifaceted. With the high price of gasoline and general issues related to inflation, consumers are feeling the need to restrain spending in ways they can. Many have no choice but to buy fuel to commute; using mass transit, car pooling or buying a more economical car may not be an option. Economizing on food is.

But home cooking is something of a lost art, and just because people don't want to spend money traveling to restaurants and eating there, this hardly means they are going to become Julia Child.

This leads consumers smack into the deli/retail foodservice section of their local supermarket. Score one for our team. Yet, if all we do is offer a less-expensive alternative, we will have left a lot of opportunity sitting on the table.

Although the catalyst for this behavior change may be economic, consumers are seeing more than a little silver lining in this economic cloud. After years of publicity regarding the importance of healthy eating and massive public awareness about the obesity crisis, it turns out that most consumers have come to this conclusion: It is really hard to eat healthy while eating out.

The FMI report explains that 91 percent of consumers believe they eat healthier when they dine at home. Thirty-nine percent of consumers think eating at home is "much healthier" than eating at a restaurant. So consumers pushed into eating at home by a need to economize console themselves with the knowledge it is better for them anyway.

And not just for them, but their children as well. Comparisons between families that eat dinner together and those that do not regularly show that the children in families that eat together do better in school, are less likely to use drugs or alcohol, and are healthier. Whether it is the dinner, the togetherness or living in a family that makes togetherness a priority is really unclear. It is clear that consumers see dining together as a family as a big plus for eating at home.

So the winds are in our favor. By offering restaurant-quality food, being attentive to health and nutrition in the products we offer, and catering to families who want to eat at home—but don't want to be stuck cooking and cleaning when they could be enjoying family time—we are set up to win. And in winning, we can draw more consumers, more frequently into the store.

There is, however, a storm cloud over the horizon. All of the sudden, frozen foods are taking off. In early May, JP Morgan published research indicating that frozen dinner sales were up an astounding 42 percent in the prior four-week period. That is a combination of product innovation—such as the new "steamer" technology—and consumer perception that frozen food waste is less than fresh.

The deli industry needs to continue to innovate to keep its quality edge over frozen, and to start looking at ways to persuade consumers that fresh food won't be wasted. How about sending every order home with a "freezer bag" and instructions on how consumers can safely freeze leftovers?

We have spent over a decade positioning the industry for the big win that is possible today. Let's work together to make sure we are on top of consumer concerns and the competitive situation.

**DB**



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Reader Service No. 167

# Finding A Point Of Equilibrium In Today's Economy



By  
**Lee Smith**  
Publisher  
DELI BUSINESS

I've worked in the retail food world since the early 1970s, so I've seen a multitude of changes in the industry. We launched DELI BUSINESS 13 years ago, and more changes have occurred just in the past 10 years than in the previous 20 years.

The deli industry has become far more complex. The business model has grown from an optional department that flourished primarily in East

Coast stores to an international concept. Delis today are core profit centers and image-makers for retailers.

Along with the industry, DELI BUSINESS has evolved, and this anniversary issue of DELI BUSINESS features a new look and feel that heightens our commitment to the business of "deli." No other department is as unique and complex, requiring a broad range of skills and knowledge about a diverse range of products. The deli department must market products with its own stamp of approval or the entire consumer-advertising network does not work. The believable promise must be backed up with operational excellence.

This challenge was once viewed as impossible, but was met head on with enthusiasm and grace by industry mavericks not afraid to lead—and often bleed. The results have been extraordinary, and the future is bright because of today's leadership.

Our cover story honors some of the brightest and the best. All were nominated by organizations composed of peers who recognized their accomplishments. While each individual is unique and comes from a different facet of the industry, our honorees have a shared commonality—passion, integrity and leadership skills. Please read each profile because everyone can learn something that will help guide us on our own paths to success.

Like all industries in this country, the deli industry is going to be rolling with the punches affecting the economy. It is difficult to ascertain whether the current economic difficulties represent long-term changes to the American culture or if this recessionary period will eventually return to the economy of a few years ago. But what is certain is that in order to survive and prosper, we must make adjustments to our expectations and explore new strategies.

For all businesses a point of equilibrium must be found, balancing the ideal and the reality of keeping a business growing profitably. Some companies have found a fulcrum that allows them to keep their balance during tough times, others have only built superficial relationships with customers, suppliers and employees, and still others take an adversarial position where everyone is out for him or herself.

How companies are positioned will determine their survival. When it comes to food, the retail segment is in a position to strengthen its market share. Companies known for aggressively pursuing low prices will prosper as long as they can keep their market positions as low-price leaders,

and companies known for targeting the affluent will prosper as long as they don't lower quality. Both sides must still retain their customers' confidence.

Companies in the middle are going to have to find a marketing proposition that explains their reason for being and then stand behind it—because without an identity,

sales are destined to tumble.

Market pricing has been viewed as a temporary glitch everyone will have to shoulder. Retailers have been reluctant to pass along increased costs, and they are putting pressure on their suppliers to absorb material price increases. However, there is no evidence of a quick—if ever—return to the commodity pricing of a few years ago, and eventually, manufacturers will have to raise wholesale costs to survive.

Last year food costs increased 5.6 percent, as reported by the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, and in 2008, the U.S. Department of Agriculture projects that food prices will increase 4 percent to 5 percent. However, the price of commodities is saying a different story, with the price of milk increasing 40 percent in one year and the price of eggs increasing 26 percent. These percentages are small compared to the cost increases of wheat, corn and edible oils.

What statistics don't show is that manufacturers have not increased their prices to reflect the higher material costs. Retailers will soon be informed of large price increases, and manufacturers will have no option but to possibly walk away from unprofitable businesses. Increasingly, companies are turning down contracts from the retail industries' largest players due to unprofitable terms.

Stomping on manufacturers to keep prices in check will be a futile scenario for retailers facing today's economy. Rather, they must come to the conclusion that taking every price increase and adding more profit margin on top is going to be viewed as profiteering.

There is no doubt retailers' costs will increase, but it is unfair to ask suppliers to bite the bullet and then expect 60 percent to 70 percent gross profit margins on every price increase. We need to change expectations from a simplistic margin approach to a dollar profit model. The talent in this industry can do it, but it will require creativity and—most of all—integrity. The direction needs to come from the top because any company that bases its profit expectations solely on profit margins is going to come out the loser.

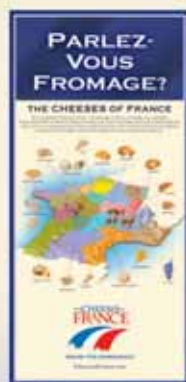
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In order to survive and prosper,  
we must make adjustments  
to our expectations and explore  
new strategies.



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Supermarket displays create excitement and appetite appeal.

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## DELI WATCH

### Transitions



**Rodrigo Troni** has been named chief marketing officer at Sabra Go Mediterranean, based in Astoria, NY. In this newly created position, Troni will spearhead strategic marketing, advertising and public relations efforts to further propel the brand's success.  
IDDBA Booth #4625  
[www.sabra.com](http://www.sabra.com)



**Peter J. Buol** has joined the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board (WMMB), Madison, WI, as director of retail programs. A veteran cheese sales professional, Buol will lead promotional programming for supermarket chains and grocery stores as well as direct the WMMB's marketing managers across the country.  
IDDBA Booth #1731  
[www.wmmb.org](http://www.wmmb.org)



**Carter Califri** has joined Soup Kitchen International Inc., New York, NY, as senior vice president, sales and marketing. Califri will be responsible for brand oversight, including the positioning and development of The Original Soup-Man's retail line of super premium soups as well as the company's franchise program.  
[www.originalsoupman.com](http://www.originalsoupman.com)



**Kenneth A. Longacre** has purchased Alderfer Inc., Harleysville, PA, a manufacturer of premium smoked meat products, from its family member shareholders. As the sole shareholder, Longacre will provide the financial resources to grow the 80-year-old company founded by Lewis M. Alderfer.  
IDDBA Booth #2155  
[www.alderfermeats.com](http://www.alderfermeats.com)

### Announcements



**WISCONSIN CHEESEMAKERS WIN BIG**  
Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association, Madison, WI, sponsors of the 2008 Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association World Championship Cheese contest, announces that Wisconsin cheesemakers won the most awards of any state or nation in the competition. Wisconsin claimed 72 awards, of which 27 were Best of Class awards among the 79 cheese and butter classes.  
[www.wischeesemakersassn.org](http://www.wischeesemakersassn.org)

Reader Service No. 401



**FRESH-PAK PACKAGING**  
Norseland Inc., Stamford, CT, has debuted Fresh-Pak packaging for its pre-sliced Jarlsberg and Jarlsberg Lite products. With its tight, "quali-seal," Fresh-Pak's easy-to-open, reclosable rigid plastic packaging locks in optimum moisture, ensuring the product stays fresher "to the last slice."  
IDDBA Booth #2333  
[www.norseland.com](http://www.norseland.com)

Reader Service No. 402



**SUPERIOR AUDIT RATING**  
Dilorio's Frozen Dough Products, Utica, NY, part of the Violet Packing family, has earned a "Superior" rating in a recent American Institute of Baking (AIB) audit. A leading producer of frozen pizzas, breads and rolls, the company earned a total score of 930 out of a possible 1,000 points.  
[www.deiorios.com](http://www.deiorios.com)

Reader Service No. 403



**PRODUCTS REACH MIDWEST STORES**  
Grass Point Farms, Thorp, WI, has released its full product line of grass-fed dairy products in stores throughout the Midwest. States in the company's distribution area include Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin.  
[www.grasspoint.com](http://www.grasspoint.com)

Reader Service No. 404

DELI WATCH is a regular feature of DELI BUSINESS. Please send information on new products, personnel changes, industry, corporate and personal milestones and available literature, along with a color photo, slide or transparency to: **Editor, DELI BUSINESS, P.O. Box 810217 • Boca Raton, FL 33481-0217 • Phone: 561-994-1118 • Fax: 561-994-1610 • E-mail: [DeliBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com](mailto:DeliBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com)**





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[your customer]



[you]



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## Announcements



### TAKING HOME THE GOLD

DCI Cheese Co., Richfield, WI, received two "Achieving Excellence" Gold awards at the 2008 International Dairy Food Association (IDFA) SmartMarketing Conference in New Orleans, LA. The company garnered awards for "Best Overall Web site" and "Best Overall Package Redesign" for its Nikos brands.

IDDBA Booth #1308  
[www.dcicheeseco.com](http://www.dcicheeseco.com)

Reader Service No. 405



### BEST OF CLASS AWARDS

Jana Foods LLC, Secaucus, NJ, exclusive importers of K.H. de Jong and Mil Lel cheese brands, won Best of Class awards at the 2008 Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association World Championship Cheese contest. Cablanca goat Gouda, part of K.H. de Jong's "Masterpieces" collection, took top honors in Class 65 (hard goat's milk cheeses) while Mil Lel Australian Parmesan captured the award in Class 19 (Parmesan).

IDDBA Booth #1347  
[www.janafoods.com](http://www.janafoods.com)

Reader Service No. 406



### SWITCHING TO MAP PACKAGING

Volpi, St. Louis, MO, a manufacturer of authentic Italian-style meat products, has made the switch from vacuum packaging to modified atmosphere packaging (MAP). The combination of nitrogen and carbon dioxide gases in the package allows for greater shelf life and easier separation of the thinly sliced meats.

IDDBA Booth #4839  
[www.volpifoods.com](http://www.volpifoods.com)

Reader Service No. 407



### REAL INNOVATION

Unilever Foodsolutions, Lisle, IL, will have chefs on hand at the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Show in New Orleans, LA, demonstrating uses of Hellmann's latest products. Recently introduced products include Real Whipped Salad Dressing and Hellmann's Sandwich Sauces.

IDDBA Booth #1546  
[www.unileverfoodsolutions.us](http://www.unileverfoodsolutions.us)

Reader Service No. 408



### ELEGANT NEW LOOK

Woolwich Dairy Inc., Orangeville, Ontario, Canada, unveiled a redesigned label that consolidates the company's traditional fresh goat cheeses, Woolwich Dairy Madame Chèvre and Woolwich Dairy Gourmet Goat, under one brand called Woolwich Dairy Chèvre. It also won Best of Class for its Madam Chèvre Elite Cranberry with Port at the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association contest. Norseland Inc., Stamford, CT, handles sales and distribution.

IDDBA Booth #2333  
[www.woolwichdairy.com](http://www.woolwichdairy.com)  
[www.norseland.com](http://www.norseland.com)

Reader Service No. 409



### PORCHETTA MADE IN THE USA

Porchetta Primata LLC, Birmingham, AL, has launched a new business to produce traditional "Ariccian" porchetta, an ancient Roman recipe, in the United States. The agricultural community in Kentucky is raising pigs to the company's specifications to produce four items: Classic Porchetta, Tronchetto, Pancetta di Prochetta and Prosciutto Prochetta.

[www.porchettaprimata.com](http://www.porchettaprimata.com)

Reader Service No. 410



### BRITISH CHEESEMAKER ENTERS U.S. MARKET

Wyke Farms, Somerset, England, the United Kingdom's largest independent cheese and milk processor, has introduced its award-winning farmhouse Cheddars and butter to the United States. Wyke, a family owned and operated business, has been using the same recipe on the same land for more than 100 years.

Fancy Food Show Booth #200  
[www.wykefarms.com](http://www.wykefarms.com)

Reader Service No. 411



### GOAT CHEESE CRUMBLES

Couturier North America, Warwick, RI, announces that Soignon Crumbled Goat Cheese won a gold medal for retail packaging at the 2008 World Championship Cheese Contest. The resealable pouch sits upright on shelves, and the bright attractive label stands out from the crowd.

IDDBA Booth # 1238  
[www.soignon.eu](http://www.soignon.eu)

Reader Service No. 412

DELI WATCH is a regular feature of DELI BUSINESS. Please send information on new products, personnel changes, industry, corporate and personal milestones and available literature, along with a color photo, slide or transparency to: Editor, DELI BUSINESS, P.O. Box 810217 • Boca Raton, FL 33481-0217 • Phone: 561-994-1118 • Fax: 561-994-1610 • E-mail: [DeliBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com](mailto:DeliBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com)



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IDDBA booth #1450



## REDONDO IGLESIAS

*Maestros del Jamón*

[www.redondoiglesias.com](http://www.redondoiglesias.com)

Reader Service No. 119



# DELI WATCH

## Products



### SALLY SHERMAN'S SANDWICH SPREAD

Sally Sherman, Fort Lauderdale, FL, introduces a new Hispanic favorite—sandwich spread Pasta De Bocaditos—made with Hellmann's Real Mayonnaise, ham and cream cheese. Available in 12-ounce and one-pound pre-packed clear containers, this ethnic favorite is a “must have” for retailers addressing the growing Hispanic community.  
[www.sallyshermansalads.com](http://www.sallyshermansalads.com)

Reader Service No. 413



### ON-TREND FOCACCIA STICKS

New York Style, Tulsa, OK, is adding some fun new “flavor” to the deli section with Focaccia Sticks, a “healthier-for-you” snack alternative. Offering authentic, fresh-baked taste, the Focaccia Sticks were developed to keep pace with on-trend artisan baked goods, such as focaccia bread.  
[www.newyorkstyle.com](http://www.newyorkstyle.com)

Reader Service No. 414



### TWISTER CROISSANT ROLLS

Sara Lee Foodservice, Downers Grove, IL, introduces Twister Croissant Rolls, made with swirled, laminated croissant dough to create signature, premium sandwiches. Each roll is pre-sliced with thaw-and-serve convenience, adding portability to any breakfast, lunch or dinner sandwich.  
IDDBA Booth #3415  
[www.saraleefoodservice.com](http://www.saraleefoodservice.com)

Reader Service No. 415



### MY FRIES CLASSIC IN THREE STYLES

Conagra Foods Lamb Weston, Eagle, ID, presents My Fries Classic in three unique cuts: Natural Twister, Slim Crinkle Wedge and Natural Platter Fries. Made from select, white flesh potatoes, these fries contain zero grams of trans fat per serving, have an excellent holding time and offer cooking oil cost savings.  
[www.myfriesadvantage.com](http://www.myfriesadvantage.com)

Reader Service No. 416



### MEATY BACK RIBS

Farmland Foods, Kansas City, MO, gives consumers meatier pork back ribs and operators better cost-control with its new Farmland Meaty Back Ribs. These individually packaged ribs are shipped frozen ready-to-cook so operators can thaw just what's needed. About 12 pieces come in a 35.4-pound average case.  
[www.farmlandfoodservice.com](http://www.farmlandfoodservice.com)

Reader Service No. 417



### ALL-NATURAL ARTISAN ROLLS

Ralcorp Frozen Bakery Products, Downers Grove, IL, brings Old World flavor and quality to the table with its new Pannè Provincio Artisan Rolls. Baked in a stone hearth oven, these all-natural rolls come in French, French seeded, multigrain and ciabatta varieties.  
IDDBA Booth #3815  
[www.ralcorp frozen.com](http://www.ralcorp frozen.com)

Reader Service No. 418



### SQUARE WITH A FLAIR

WNA, Chelmsford, MA, brings one of the hottest trends to the table—“Milan”—square-shaped disposable dinnerware. Available in four popular plate styles and matching 12-ounce bowls, Milan dinnerware comes in black, white and clear colors.  
IDDBA Booth #3656  
[www.wna.biz](http://www.wna.biz)

Reader Service No. 419



### GRILLED CHICKEN AND FENNEL SALAD

Sandridge Food Corp., Medina, OH, introduces its new Grilled Chicken and Fennel Salad, made with marinated grilled chicken breast tossed with fresh fennel in a light vinaigrette. This trans fat-free, gluten-free and dairy-free salad makes a delicious, healthy side dish or entrée for any summer meal.  
IDDBA Booth #4114  
[www.sandridge.com](http://www.sandridge.com)

Reader Service No. 420

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**T**his year, our call for nominees for the 4th Annual People's Award brought together yet another fascinating group of people. They come from different segments of our industry—from retailers and cheesemakers to manufacturers and distributors—but they all have one thing in common: They were chosen by their peers for their outstanding leadership qualities, contributions to their respective fields, dedication to their job, and willingness to help others succeed.

Some of you may already know these individuals; if not, their profiles on the following pages will give you greater insight into what makes them tick. We all can learn something valuable, whether it's their leadership philosophy, what inspires them to make a difference, their advice to neophytes just starting out, or what they believe will be the next hottest deli trend.

We salute our honorees and extend our congratulations because they truly deserve the accolades of our industry.



## JOHN CLARK

**Director of Bakery and Deli Operations  
Harps Food Stores Inc.  
Springdale, AR**

"The deli business is an excellent opportunity to be of service to my community. It's very satisfying to be involved in making a difference in the lives of our customers by providing high-quality deli offerings and services."

### **How did you get started in the industry?**

I started my foodservice career 38 years ago as a production person in a Maryland Fried Chicken outlet outside of Chicago, IL.

### **How has your career evolved over the years?**

Over the years I have spent a good deal of time in various facets of our business: retail, distribution, manufacturing, sales and marketing, and then back to retail. It is refreshing and exciting to see the deli evolve over time as a destination for customers seeking quality foods.

### **What organizations are you involved in?**

I am a member of the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association (IDDBA).

### **What is your leadership philosophy?**

I'm not sure who said this, but I try to apply the sentiment to my personal management philosophy, "Be a keen listener, a gentle guider and have a humble approach." I would add, "And surround yourself with people who are smarter than you."

### **What hobbies do you enjoy outside work?**

Beyond work, I am a hobbyist musician with a home recording studio, and my wife and I raise miniature horses.

### **Which Internet Web sites are your favorites?**

My favorite ones include Wikipedia as well as news, music purchase and musician forum sites.

### **What inspires you to make a difference in today's world?**

The deli business is an excellent opportunity to be of service to my community. It's very satisfying to be involved in making a difference in the lives of our customers by providing high-quality deli offerings and services.

### **What charity is your personal favorite?**

I support Catholic Charities USA, which has agencies throughout the country to provide food, shelter, supportive housing, clothing, financial assistance and more to help people in need. The organization also offers programs such as counseling, adoption, disaster response, child care, employment training, support systems for seniors, and more.

### **What is your advice to people starting out in this industry?**

Many entry-level associates are not immediately able to recognize the career path available to them in the deli business. I would encourage these folks to explore the industry beyond what they are doing at the moment by investigating the various trade associations and journals in order to gain a better understanding of the larger industry.

### **What do you predict will be the next hottest deli trend?**

Good-for-you foods. The deli can be a destination for wholesome meals and meal solutions. Our customers are more health-conscious and time-starved than ever before. The deli operation that recognizes this opportunity will be in a position to leverage it into increased sales and profits.



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## MIKE FARRAND

Vice President Deli Sales, Consumer Products Sales  
Hormel Foods Corp.  
Austin, MN

### How did you get started in the industry?

Quite by chance, actually. I was prepared to go into the financial industry after graduating from college until I sat through a presentation by a young product manager from Hormel Foods in one of my final marketing classes. After some reflection, I realized the food industry offered a certain stability that appealed to me. After spending much of my career in sales out East—particularly in the markets of Boston and Metro New York City—I gained an appreciation for the fine deli operations there. Ultimately, I had a hand in crafting Hormel's deli "go-to-market" strategy.

### How has your career evolved over the years?

I have always been a marketer at heart and in practice. I spent a number of years in the classical marketing of packaged foods with Hormel and gained tremendous insights into what drives the consumer. I have carried that experience in my sales positions, and it has served me well. I always parrot the phrase: "Marketing is far too important to be entrusted to the marketers." Ask them, and they will say the same is true about sales. Needless to say, we have no walls between the two here.

### What organizations are you involved in?

I have been a member of the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association (IDDBA) for years and have served on the program committee since 2005. This past February I was fortunate enough to be elected to the board of directors. It's without question the most important—and relevant—advocacy organization for our industry, and I'm proud to be a part of it.

### What is your leadership philosophy?

There's a quote by Lao Tsu that says: "The wicked leader is he who the people despise. The good leader is he who the people revere. The great leader is he who the people say, 'We did it ourselves.'" I am rewarded when I see our people realize their true potential.

### What hobbies do you enjoy outside work?

I enjoy hunting, fishing, golfing, reading and travel as well as enjoying quality time with my wife, Karen, and two young boys, Tanner and Zachary.

### Which Internet Web sites are your favorites?

I am a die-hard Red Sox fan, so you can look for me on TalkSox.com, user name: silvercreekcc2006

### What inspires you to make a difference in today's world?

If you pay close attention to the state of customer service in today's world, you will find it's really not that difficult to become the best. Take note of how excited you are the next time you are in a retail store and someone takes the time to thank you, call you by name or smile at you. Is there anything more important in our industry? Taking that a step further, is there anything more important in life?

### What charity is your personal favorite?

My house burned down in college, and I lost everything. Before the flames were extinguished, the American Red Cross was there with \$30, a cup of coffee and a hotel voucher. Since that day, I have given generously to the United Way. The organization does great work in communities, and the dollars stay close to home.

### What is your advice to people starting out in this industry?

Get to know your customers. Listen to them, and they will show you where the business is and what they need from you to get it. It's all about connecting the solutions to the need. Oh, and read Harvey MacKay's book, *Swim with the Sharks*. If a guy can become a multimillionaire selling envelopes, then don't tell me there isn't money to be made, even in the most commoditized categories.

### What do you predict will be the next hottest deli trend?

We are at a very interesting time in our industry. The deli carries with it some very strong consumer cues, such as fresh, convenient and healthy. Combine that with an atmosphere that encourages experimentation, and I think what you're left with is the most logical place for consumers to find their future meal needs: Tonight, Tomorrow and RIGHT NOW.



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# DAVID GREMMELS

**President  
Rogue Creamery  
Central Point, OR**

## **How did you get started in the industry?**

In 2002, I made a career change, leaving an executive position for a multi-channel national gift company. My partner, Cary Bryant, and I decided to open a wine bar and semi-retire. We began putting our menu together and started searching for cheese in New England. During this search, we discovered Rogue Creamery right in our backyard, which was within weeks of closing. We decided to acquire the micro-creamery after meeting its owner, Ignazio "Ig" Vella, and being assured that he would teach us to make Blue Cheese. We bought it on a handshake, and six years later, Rogue Creamery Blue cheeses are recognized as the finest in the world.

## **How has your career evolved over the years?**

My career has been "organically evolving" over the years, and Rogue Creamery and our dairy, Rogue View, are both certified by Food Alliance. We are taking an environmentally sustainable and green approach to producing and marketing our cheeses.

This year, Rogue Creamery earned the accreditations and certifications needed from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to export its raw milk cheeses to the European Union. It took a few years to accomplish this, and would not have been possible without the collaboration of local, state, and national legislators, and the U.S. Dairy Export Council, FDA, USDA, American Cheese Society (ACS) and the Oregon Department of Agriculture. Up to that point, the export of raw milk cheese was not allowed for resale or public consumption—although it was allowed for exhibition and competition—and we supported and promoted new regulations and guidelines to make exporting of raw milk cheeses possible.

## **What industry organizations are you involved in?**

I am associated with the ACS and Oregon Cheese Guild, both of which are mission-driven and responsibly connected

to the cheese industry. I am also a member of the Raw Milk Cheesemakers' Association. Currently I am vice president of the ACS, and in mid-July, will become president. Additionally, I was the founding president of the Oregon Cheese Guild, and will be stepping off the executive committee and moving to an ex-officio board position.

## **What is your leadership philosophy?**

To empower and inspire the people I work with to be the best they can be in my business, the community and our world. I strive to actively motivate others to assume responsibility and lead with compassion, integrity and commitment. I believe in sharing and celebrating successes and failures because much can be learned from both.

## **What hobbies do you enjoy outside work?**

I ride in dressage events, paint landscapes and train German Shorthaired dogs for upland hunting.

## **Which Internet Web sites are your favorites?**

Google—is there anything else?

## **What inspires you to make a difference in today's world?**

Time, relationships and experiences are all we have, so it's important to live in the present and create a vision that protects our environment, nurtures our children and families, and directs our leaders to plan wisely for the future.

## **What charity is your personal favorite?**

I have two favorite charities: the United Way and Oregon Community Foundation. I am truly inspired by community leaders who are committed to making a difference in the lives of so many people. The best tag line is "LIVE UNITED."

## **What is your advice to people starting out in this industry?**

The artisan cheese industry is truly built on passion, commitment and hard work. My advice is to start small, build your market locally, create alliances, and stay focused and committed to your vision. And never compromise on quality.

## **What do you predict will be the next hottest deli trend?**

The green and sustainable movement will continue as more growers, producers and manufacturers show compassion toward living food sources. They will create healthy, pure and delicious deli products with integrity.





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## CONNIE HAYS

**Corporate Brand Senior Sales and Sourcing  
Manager for Perishables  
The Kroger Co.  
Cincinnati, OH**

“Learn as much as you can every step of the way and enjoy working with people. Look at each job assignment as an opportunity to learn from different people and expand your view of the business.”

### **How did you get started in the industry?**

While going to school, I started as a part-time deli/bakery clerk. I loved the business so much that I decided to stay with Kroger after graduating from college. I've been working for Kroger ever since.

### **How has your career evolved over the years?**

While attending college, I was a deli/bakery department head, and when I went into management, I spent a few years in store management before moving to deli/bakery merchandising. I spent the majority of my career in deli/bakery merchandising, although for a few years I was involved in seafood merchandising. After moving to Kroger corporate headquarters, I headed up the deli/bakery operation. Currently I'm working with the corporate brand department in all the perishable departments (deli/bakery, meat/seafood, produce/floral and natural foods) on the development of private labeling.

### **What organizations are you involved in?**

I am a member of the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association (IDDBA). When I was the deli/bakery training coordinator for Kroger, I created a training program for Kroger personnel that incorporated several IDDBA training materials. I used the program for training zone and store managers, deli department heads, and perishable field specialists.

### **What is your leadership philosophy?**

Provide your team with the best training possible and then empower them to get the job done right.

### **What hobbies do you enjoy outside work?**

My hobbies include traveling, hiking in the Smokey Mountains, reading and spending time with my teenage son before he heads off to college.

### **Which Internet Web sites are your favorites?**

Frommers.com and Mintel.com

### **What inspires you to make a difference in today's world?**

The youth of today. I look at my son and his friends and see how connected they are to the world through the Internet and technology and how passionate they are about politics, injustices, and different causes. I know that I want to provide a nurturing, supportive environment for them as well as other young adults.

### **What charity is your personal favorite?**

Special Olympics, an international program of sports training and athletic competition for children and adults with intellectual disabilities and closely associated developmental disabilities.

### **What is your advice to people starting out in this industry?**

Learn as much as you can every step of the way and enjoy working with people. Look at each job assignment as an opportunity to learn from different people and expand your view of the business.

### **What do you predict will be the next hottest deli trend?**

We'll see more ethnic foods and healthier choices in fresh prepared meals.



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## DOUG JAY

**President & Chief Operating Officer  
Atlanta Foods International (AFI)  
Atlanta, GA**

### How did you get started in the industry?

I actually started in the food industry as a cook, and then as a bartender. At the bar I was working at, I met someone who worked for Atlanta Foods International, and that person recommended I apply. I started at AFI 24 years ago doing inside sales, and I am still here.

### How has your career evolved over the years?

As the industry evolved, so did my career. The expanded deli programs and continued emphasis on more high-end products helped me reach my goals as a sales representative. As business at AFI grew, I assumed more responsibility with high-profile accounts, ultimately managing a group of senior account managers responsible for those accounts. From there, I became vice president of sales and then president.

### What organizations are you involved in?

I am involved in the American Cheese Society and Slow Food USA, a nonprofit organization that envisions a future food system based on the principles of high quality and taste, environmental sustainability, and social justice—in essence a food system that is good, clean and fair.

### What is your leadership philosophy?

Building a good team requires hiring the best people, modeling the behavior that you expect from them, providing a positive environment for them to thrive, allowing them the autonomy to grow the business (and make mistakes), and holding them accountable for the results. Ultimately, the success of the company rests on my ability to execute this model. And always, always be truthful with your team.

### What hobbies do you enjoy outside work?

A lot of outdoor activities. Fishing ranks as No. 1, followed closely by wakeboarding and riding dirt bikes, all with family and friends. I also look forward to eating great

cheese and great meals at home made with locally grown ingredients, expertly prepared by my wife Laura, and paired with a great bottle of wine.

### Which Internet Web sites are your favorites?

Atlantafoods.com, iTunes and Netflix

### What inspires you to make a difference in today's world?

As a key player in the specialty food industry, I feel that the support we offer to emerging American cheesemakers will ultimately help in building the local, sustainable efforts they all are striving for. We are uniquely positioned to get small artisan products exposed to mainstream clientele through our large retail chain base of customers, which in turn will help them succeed. We need small producers to be successful in order for the sustainable movement in the food industry to succeed.

### What charity is your personal favorite?

Every month, my wife and I give to a charity called the Heifer Project, which teaches underprivileged people around the world about sustainable farming methods. I am also a member of Slow Food. On a local basis, we support Camp Kudzu, which is a nonprofit summer camp founded in 1999 by parents, physicians, healthcare professionals and community leaders who joined forces to establish a program in Georgia that would support the special medical and emotional needs of children living with Type-1 (insulin-dependent, juvenile) diabetes in a fun, safe environment.

### What is your advice to people starting out in this industry?

Grab on and hold tight! Seriously, the specialty food industry can be extremely challenging and rewarding. Learning to build sincere, long-term relationships with the people you deal with on a daily basis—customers, vendors and associates within your company—will prove invaluable throughout your career. Pay attention to what's going on at store level. That's where the action is and where the most valuable information will be.

### What do you predict will be the next hottest deli trend?

Delis will continue to be the trendsetters for the rest of the store: healthy, unusual, high quality, fresh, upscale and locally produced. Get the picture?



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## ROBERT POLICANO

Vice President Dairy/Deli & Frozen Merchandising  
Krasdale Foods  
White Plains, NY

### How did you get started in the industry?

My first job was at the age of 14, in a small, private neighborhood deli/grocery store in Kingston, NY.

### How has your career evolved over the years?

The food industry has been my second home for most of my professional career. From the neighborhood store, I moved to Grand Union, where I started as a deli clerk and advanced through the ranks to become a grocery manager, a store manager, a deli/bakery supervisor, a zone manager, and then the corporate perishable project director.

After Grand Union, I became a director for D'Agostino's Supermarkets, a New York City-based chain, where I held various deli/bakery/dairy positions. Following D'Agostino's, I worked with various companies and business owners on a consulting basis until joining Krasdale Foods in 1994.

From my early years working with New York-based supermarket chains to my 14 years with Krasdale, I have always focused on the perishable foods area of the business.

### What organizations are you involved in?

I am involved in the Eastern Perishable Products Association (EPPA), of which I am past president. I also have been an executive committee member and have served on numerous other committees over the past 25 years.

### What is your leadership philosophy?

I am one who believes that, inherently, people want to do a good job. Having faith in that belief, being honest, and developing trust in employees and treating them as professionals develops mutual respect, an improved sense of teamwork and creates a feeling of ownership in the process. I believe you need to provide employees with clarity and focus, empowerment, and support in order to be an effective leader. Every person needs to know his or her purpose—not just on a macro basis, but on an individual task basis to understand how the smallest efforts relate to the larger vision of the department's goals.

Effective leadership practices include the controlled delegation of authority, letting people know what they are being entrusted with, the limits of their decision-making, and the accountability of their decisions. Delegation of authority, when done in a deliberate and conscious manner, creates a feeling of ownership within the organization and allows people to think outside the box.

Supporting your staff is vital, from a part-time worker to a division manager, whether it is tangible or intangible. Backing their decisions (within reason), listening to them when they have ideas or problems, encouraging them in their daily activities, congratulating them on a job well done, and working with them on issues are all important responsibilities of a successful leader. Leadership is summarized when a goal is achieved, and the team says, "Look what WE accomplished."

### What hobbies do you enjoy outside work?

I enjoy Real Estate, electronics, gadgets, reading, my wife and my grandchildren.

### Which Internet Web sites are your favorites?

Anything I can "Google."

### What charity is your personal favorite?

Michael J. Fox Parkinson's Foundation and the Food Bank of New York and New Jersey.

### What is your advice to people starting out in this industry?

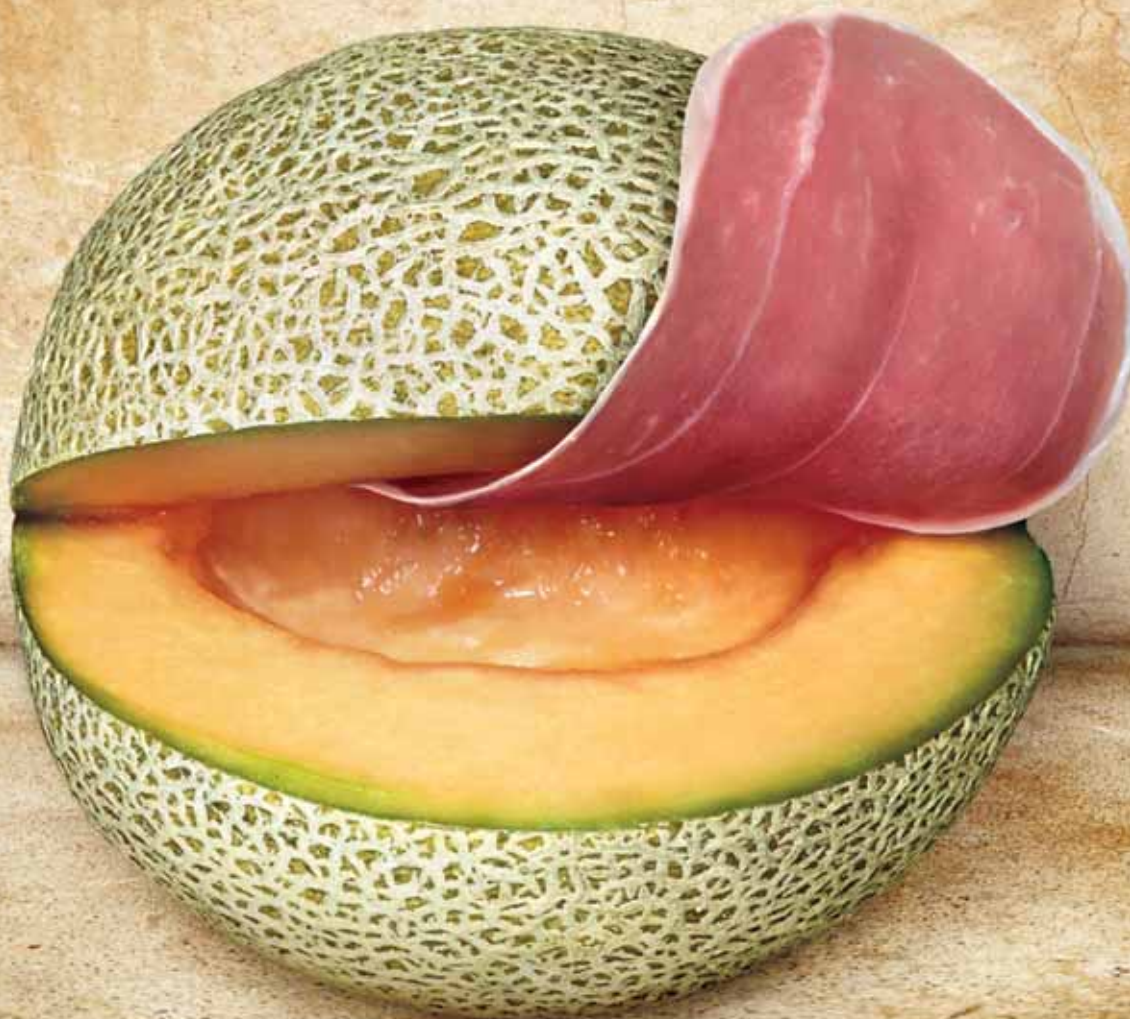
Develop goals and standards you want for yourself and your family. Stay focused, think outside the box, and believe you can and will achieve self-gratification, self-wealth and security in one's self.

### What do you predict will be the next hottest deli trend?

Most Americans, though time-pressed, are trying to eat healthier, and want foods that are fresh, convenient, upscale and natural. I see growth in "green," maybe the return of the Automat for convenience, and lunch, dinner and meal kits. We need advanced, innovative packaging technologies and, most importantly, ethnic foods for key niche markets and neighborhoods.



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## MARK RESER

**President  
Reser's Fine Foods Inc.  
Beaverton, OR**

"My leadership philosophy is to inspire people to get things done. I believe that large achievements are built on small achievements, and every employee plays an important part in the company's overall success."

### **How did you get started in the industry?**

I was born and raised in the industry and had a distinguished mentor as a father, Al Reser.

### **How has your career evolved over the years?**

After graduating from Oregon State University with a bachelor of science degree in accounting, I worked for two years in sales doing a direct store delivery route. I then had the opportunity to move to California and manage our company's first out-of-state plant in Corona, CA. One and a half years later Reser's broke ground on a plant in Topeka, KS, where I had the opportunity to open the facility and manage it from the start. I spent eight years in Kansas managing our Midwest operations. During that time we expanded the Topeka facilities and built a second plant to enter the new category of cut potatoes and side dishes.

In 1998, I moved back to Oregon and assumed responsibility for all of our operations. Since then, we have successfully built and opened three additional large prepared food plants: one in Pasco, WA, which opened in 1999; one in Halifax, NC, which opened in May 2000, and our latest plant in Topeka, KS, which opened in April 2006. In December 2006, I was promoted to president.

### **What organizations are you involved in?**

I am a current board member, treasurer and past president of the Refrigerated Foods Association (RFA).

### **What is your leadership philosophy?**

My leadership philosophy is to inspire people to get things done. I believe that large achievements are built on small achievements, and every employee plays an important part in the company's overall success. I encourage employees to consider a wide range of possibilities—from traditional to creative ways—to remove obstacles and complete projects.

I was once told: "If your boat is dead in the water, you cannot steer at all. You must continue to move. If you're moving and heading in the wrong direction, at least you have the opportunity to change course."

### **What hobbies do you enjoy outside work?**

I enjoy yard work, attending my children's sporting activities and competing on the oval racetrack myself.

### **Which Internet Web sites are your favorites?**

I like to keep up with the Web sites of other food manufacturers. In my experience, I find that inspiration can come from many sources.

### **What charity is your personal favorite?**

I enjoy children's sports. I feel that the team effort and hard work our children experience in the team environment provide an excellent framework for success in life as they grow. I also enjoy supporting our local community activities, picnics and other social events.

### **What is your advice to people starting out in this industry?**

Listen to everyone around you to hear their perspectives, from established veterans to newcomers. Work to become well rounded in all aspects of the business: costing, manufacturing, distribution and logistics, and sales and marketing. By achieving a strong understanding and competence in other areas, your performance will excel in your own area.

### **What do you predict will be the next hottest deli trend?**

I think consumers will be looking to the deli for quick meal solutions. If we think strategically, we can design products that fill the need for people to pick up dinner and be on their way in under seven minutes.





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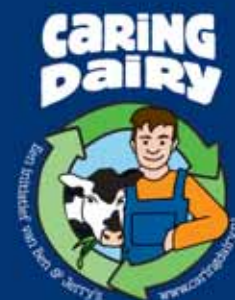


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# CATHY STRANGE

Global Cheese Buyer  
Whole Foods Market  
Austin, TX

## How did you get started in the industry?

Through my best friend from college, I became involved in the restaurant industry. She was working with another friend who owned a Northern Italian restaurant in North Carolina, and I wanted to be closer to my mother who was ill. Up to this point in my career, I had been involved in education and athletics, so this was quite a change. I am grateful, however, for having been given the opportunity to work with great individuals who were passionate about food and open to educating me about the industry.

## How has your career evolved over the years?

While working at the restaurant, I did everything and anything to maintain the success of the business. I also was responsible for maintaining the wine list.

When the owners sold the restaurant, I took time off from the industry and worked for a nonprofit organization. But I missed keeping up with the wine vintages, plus I wanted to work part time during the holiday season. To find this kind of job, I consulted a friend who turned me on to Wellspring Grocery. The month I began working for Wellspring Grocery, Whole Foods Market acquired it.

So, I started as a part-time team member for Whole Foods Market. I love the mission of the company, and Whole Foods Market has afforded me many great opportunities. Over the years, I have worked in different regions as a team leader (department manager), and then became the regional coordinator for the Mid-Atlantic Region. In June 2000, I assumed the role of global cheese buyer.

## What organizations are you involved in?

I'm a former board member and president of the American Cheese Society (ACS) as well as a member of Slow Food USA and Les Dames d'Escoffier International.

## What is your leadership philosophy?

Understand your beliefs and passions in life and follow them. When you pursue them, others will catch the spirit

and follow you. The keys to effective leadership are communication and education. Trust your team, give them responsibility, and honor them by recognizing their good work and ideas.

## What hobbies do you enjoy outside work?

I love to cook, eat good food and socialize with friends. Because I am a huge sports fan, I enjoy all athletic events, sea kayaking and fossil hunting. My work also allows me to travel and meet producers that are committed to high-quality products.

## Which Internet Web sites are your favorites?

These days, I'm looking up currency exchange rate sites online. My daily work is computer-based, so I search the Web for a lot for information, but I'm not a frequent visitor to any one site in particular.

## What inspires you to make a difference in today's world?

My friends, family and producers who are committed to good, clean and natural food products. Life is short, so it is important to work and dedicate time to people and things that make a difference. I am committed to supporting the opportunity for all humans to eat healthy foods produced using sustainable methods. This philosophy also supports traditional production good practices in terms of understanding the earth. The gifts given to us from the land and animals to support our life are essential for centuries to come. Disregarding this belief compromises our lives and those of future generations.

## What charity is your personal favorite?

I invest time with nonprofit food-oriented organizations that are mission-driven, such as the ACS, Slow Food USA, and Les Dames d'Escoffier. These organizations align with local, regional and international agencies to promote school gardens and food banks, and they provide educational and leadership direction.

## What is your advice to people starting out in this industry?

Work hard, ask questions and find a mentor. Be passionate about everything you do, and the energy will be infectious. Make sure your products are best of class and possess attributes that are in line with your personal mission. Then, you will be successful.



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# Affordable Asian Cuisines

Hungry for their favorite foods, consumers are getting their fix at retailers' delis

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Shifting immigration patterns and enlightened mainstream palates continue to broaden the popularity of Asian cuisine in America. Besides traditional Chinese and Japanese dishes, this category reflects the foods and flavors of several Far Eastern and Southeast Asian countries.

InnovAsian Cuisine Enterprises LLC, a Kent, WA-based manufacturer of Asian entrées and appetizers, reports the Asian trend is still hot. "Our company is seeing many new customer requests and growth within existing customers," says Mark Phelps, InnovAsian's owner and vice president. "Compounded annual growth has been in excess of 50 percent for our products during each of the past three years."

In 2005, *The U.S. Market for Asian Foods & Beverages*, published by Packaged Facts, a Rockville, MD-based division of Marketresearch.com, projected that sales of Asian and Indian foods would approach \$4 billion by 2009. The report also noted that popular Asian cuisines included Chinese, Japanese, Thai, Indian and Vietnamese.

Many consumers rely on restaurants to serve up the latest trends, but these days Americans appear to be cutting back on restaurant spending. Technomic Inc., a Chicago, IL-based consulting firm, revised its 2008 U.S. foodservice industry nominal growth forecast, citing a larger-than-expected slowdown in discretionary consumer spending due to the nation's economic woes. After factoring in inflation, real growth in 2008 is expected to show a 0.2 percent decline—a downturn that has happened only twice since the early 1990s.

Now, consumers hungry for their favorite Asian foods are looking for alternative and affordable channels to get their fix, such as supermarket delis.

## Versatile Sushi = Pricing Flexibility

Sushi—the combination of vinegared rice and other ingredients—is one of Japan's most widely recognized foods. According to



PHOTO COURTESY OF INNOVASIAN CUISINE ENTERPRISES LLC

the Madison, WI-based International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association's (IDDBA) report, *What's In Store 2008*, 55.4 percent of U.S. supermarkets have in-store sushi stations.

Hissho Sushi, a decade-old Charlotte, NC-based company, manages and operates sushi bars in supermarkets as well as restaurants, cafés and universities nationwide. "Sushi is still exploding all over the U.S.," says Aaron Petrosky, Hissho Sushi's director of business development. "The trend started in the West, then moved East and is now filling in-between. Urban areas still hold the largest market share of customers, but there's interest in suburban markets too. In

fact, the supermarket can be the only game in town for finding sushi in some rural areas."

Asian consumers may be a growing U.S. demographic, but sushi appeals to a wide audience of different cultures. "Rice is a universal food in many cultures," says Denise Woleben, marketing manager, Okami Inc., a Sun Valley, CA-based sushi manufacturer. "For example, we were surprised how well sushi sells to Hispanic customers."

What's inside and on top of the vinegared rice determines product costs and profit margins. Sushi connoisseurs in the United States have higher expectations and willingly pay for the exotic adventure.



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"True sushi aficionados will always go to a sushi bar," Woleben says. "Mainstream supermarket shoppers aren't ready for something too exotic. They want tried-and-true flavors in an exciting form."

And consumers who have yet to try sushi may believe the misconception that sushi means "raw fish." Says Hissio Sushi's Petrosky, "Seventy-five percent of sushi doesn't have fish at all. Instead, the most popular type of sushi in the supermarket is the California Roll, which is made with imitation crab, avocado and cucumber. These ingredients typically cost less than fresh fish, making it possible to sell a meal-size serving for an average of \$6."

Piggly Wiggly LLC, a 600-plus retailer headquartered in Keene, NH, offers fresh-made sushi daily at its sushi bars located in select stores. Sushi favorites at these bars include California Rolls, Crab Salad Rolls, Veggie Rolls and Tempura Shrimp Rolls.

"We work closely with each of our supermarket clients to recommend a product assortment that's unique for their customer base and pricing," Petrosky says. "For example, depending on ingredients, different varieties of sushi can retail anywhere from \$4 to \$10 per serving. This offers marketplace flexibility, or the ability to serve customers with varying food dollars and, ultimately, the opportunity to up sell."

Another way to add value and gain margin without upping food costs is to cut sushi thinner. "Make 12 thinner rolls rather than seven thicker ones," Petrosky says. "This makes it look like a larger serving."

### **Eggrolls: An Appetizer Or Mini-Meal**

The backbone of the U.S. market for Asian foods, according to *The U.S. Market for Asian Foods & Beverages*, includes refrigerated sushi, frozen entrées, ramen soups, soy sauce and egg rolls.

Egg rolls are the most popular item for Amy Food Inc., a Houston, TX-based manufacturer of Chinese appetizers and entrées. "We ship them frozen to the stores, which then slack them out and co-pack them for sale in the refrigerated grab-and-go case or merchandise them in the hot case," says Gary Barnett, vice president of marketing and sales.

According to Barnett, the company's best-selling egg roll filling is chicken. "It's popular with a broad range of customers—more so than pork," he says. "Each three-ounce egg roll contains 30 percent protein, which is a lot, as well as a quarter-cup of vegetables and one bread serving."

Two three-ounce egg rolls sell as an entrée and are priced on par with an average deli sandwich. "The benefit is that it adds

diversity to the deli menu and offers something once only available from the frozen food case or a restaurant," Barnett says.

National retailer Wal-Mart features egg rolls in the deli at its Plano, TX, SuperCenter. The store merchandises egg rolls, macaroni and cheese, and mashed potatoes as sides or as part of combo meals in a hot full-service case called "Deli to Go." Beneath the case are hot, ready-to-eat, rotisserie chickens. All items are priced for everyday consumption.

**"CONSUMERS ARE  
LOOKING FOR  
SOMETHING FAMILIAR,  
YET SOMETHING THAT  
CREATES A SENSE OF  
EXCITEMENT."**

—Denise Woleben  
*Okami Inc.*

Amy Food also sells one-ounce egg rolls, which are ideal for making hot appetizer trays. Earlier this year, the company launched its certified organic egg rolls in chicken and vegetable varieties.

"This is a product that consumers, to my knowledge, won't find on restaurant menus," Barnett says. "The organic egg rolls do average 30 percent higher in cost, but consumers who look for and buy organics are used to paying more."

### **Asian And Pan Asian-Style Entrées**

There's no doubt Asian cuisine is hot. According to the Washington, DC-based National Restaurant Association (NRA)'s 2007 survey, "What's Hot, What's Not," Asian entrée salads and Pan-Asian cuisine ranked 15th and 35th, respectively, out of 194 items rated by American Culinary Federation-member chefs across the nation.

This trend has translated to the supermarket level. For example, the first Publix GreenWise Market, which the 929-store retailer opened in September 2007 in Lakeland, FL, offers a signature, 4,500-square-foot freshly made prepared foods department with 10 culinary venues. One of these, called Pacific Wok, serves up Asian entrées such as Kung Pao Shrimp and General Tso Chicken Fried Rice.

"Asian foods are an affordable choice

because premium entrées can be merchandised as a complete meal with lower-cost items such as fried rice, white rice, lo mein and egg rolls," InnovAsian's Phelps says. "Many retail customers feature an Asian Combo meal with two scoops of rice or noodles, one egg roll and one scoop of entrée, such as Orange Chicken, Sweet and Sour Pork, Chicken Fried Rice and Chicken Chow Mein."

InnovAsian pioneered the concept of the 2+2+2 program: a formula consisting of two pounds of protein, two pounds of sauce and two pounds of fresh vegetables to make a restaurant-quality entrée in the deli. "Retailers can lower food costs more by adding a higher percentage of fresh vegetables without compromising the quality and consistency of the dish," Phelps says.

According to Phelps, restaurants typically have lower volume than supermarket delis. To cover labor and overhead, restaurants must work on higher gross margins of 65 percent to 70 percent. "Most delis can merchandise our items with much lower labor rates because the product line is component based and can be heated, mixed and displayed hot, or thawed, mixed and displayed cold," Phelps says. "Because of this, most retailers enjoy in excess of 50 percent gross margins and can offer comparable quality and price points as most restaurants."

If consumers are willing to do some assembling, prices may be even lower than restaurants. Okami's newest kit comes complete with ingredients to make four lettuce wraps. These ingredients include a pouch of cooked chicken mixed with shiitake mushrooms and water chestnuts in an Asian-style sauce, pouches of rice noodles and dipping sauce, and iceberg or butter lettuce leaves.

"Our new Asian-Style Chicken Lettuce Wraps mimic the P. F. Chang mainstay, but retail in delis such as Costco and Trader Joe's for half the price restaurants charge," says Okami's Woleben, who adds this product is best merchandised in the refrigerated grab-and-go case.

To plan for the future, Woleben recommends that deli operators scan the restaurant menus of the nation's top chains. "Look for the more popular offerings, but don't zero in on the super leading-edge items," Woleben says. "Dial it back in order to successfully implement the food items at the supermarket deli level."

"Consumers are looking for something familiar, yet something that creates a sense of excitement," she continues. "But don't coast after a new product introduction. Variety will bring customers back, so it's important to always keep searching for something new and different."

**DB**



# Cross-Merchandising Helps Even The Score

In the game of sales and margins, cross-promotion is a win-win situation

BY BOB JOHNSON

The economic forecast may not be sunny, but it doesn't have to cast a shadow over retailers' deli departments. Supermarkets in general may be tempted to reduce prices and profit margins, but if deli departments take advantage of cross-merchandising opportunities, they can maintain or even increase sales without biting the bullet on price.

Recessionary times spell opportunity for grocery delis as a lower-cost alternative to restaurant dining. "The delis are going to do better now than during the good times," says Bill Ammerman, chief operating officer, Hingham, MA-based Venus Wafers Inc. "The restaurants are going to suffer; they already have. More people are going to be eating at home."

Companies such as Denver, CO-based 34 Degrees actively pursue in-store promotions to showcase their products with other food items. "Cross-merchandising is a great way to show the versatility of the product," says president Craig Lieberman. "Sales are four- or fivefold times better than when they are on the shelf. When you pair them with other products, it helps consumers see the many uses of your products."

## Start With The Obvious

Some deli items are such obvious companions they beg to be cross-merchandised. Take, for instance, Stacy's Pita Chip Company, makers of pita chips, bagel chips and soy chips in a variety of flavors. "We're just gearing up now to do our first cross-promotion with Sabra hummus," says Charlie King, brand manager for the Randolph, MA-based company. "For us, pita chips and hummus are like peanut butter and jelly."

By their very nature, Valley Lahvosh's crackerbreads are designed to carry other foods, "so there is an obvious synergy with cheeses, spreads and other toppings," says Jenni Bonsignore, marketing manager, Valley Lahvosh Baking Co., Fresno, CA. "Although there are probably ways to cross-merchandise almost anything, I believe some products are a more natural fit for this kind of promotion."



PHOTO COURTESY OF DELALLO



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The same can be said for thin pretzel crisps, which The Snack Factory sells in five different flavors. “The pretzel crisp has a lot of uses,” says Milt Weinstock, marketing director of the Princeton, NJ-based company. “It can be merchandised with hummus, specialty cheeses or deli meats.”

34 Degrees makes four flavors of Crispbread crackers—Natural, Sesame, Cracked Pepper and Rosemary. “We sell the crackers with other products that tend to go with them, such as cheeses, dips, spreads and pestos,” Lieberman says.

Delis also can cross-promote premium sliced deli meats and quality flatbreads as core ingredients for a simple, economical meal. Venus Wafers, manufacturers of gourmet flatbreads and cracker products, is positioning its products in this manner.

“Flatbreads are doing very well right now,” Venus Wafer’s Ammerman says.

“They can go with many of the deli meats, and you can display them with new varieties of cheeses and spreads.”

Tasting demos, however, are just as important as the pairings—if not more so—to entice consumers to buy. The Snack Factory partners with other producers for its sampling demos and coupon programs to show how their products work together.

New or small companies eager to gain a foothold in the market are willing to help with cross-merchandising campaigns. “When you are pretty unknown, getting a trial and getting people to know who you are is pretty important,” The Snack Factory’s Weinstock says. “When we sell a case, we always include an extra bag for sampling. It’s a way to encourage more purchases both for our product and other products.”

34 Degrees also uses sampling to get the word out about the company’s novel Crisp-

bread crackers. “It has no oil and is very thin,” Lieberman says. “We help with cheese demonstrations or demos of other products by including these crackers. It is a form of cross-sampling.”

No matter whether a deli uses product demonstrators or self-serve displays, samples are an excellent way to move products. “Having a veggie platter, cubed or sliced cheese, and baguette slices ready for the consumer to try is the way to increase sales,” says Diane Vanlaningham, president of Portland, OR-based Rose City Delicacies, which makes two gourmet mustards.

### Promote Add-Ons

A skillful display of companion items frequently entices reluctant, cost-conscious customers to splurge on a small add-on item. “Stores are always looking to create a bigger ring with their customers,” says Daryl Thomas, director of marketing, Nottingham, PA-based Herr Foods Inc.

Herr’s brands encompass a wide variety of chips, and the company recently introduced a number of product lines for health-conscious consumers. These include four flavors of whole-grain pretzel sticks, blue kettle cooked potato chips, reduced-fat kettle chips, whole-grain pretzels, and a natural line of corn and kettle chips and pretzels.

Placing a horizontal rack of snack items directly underneath a display of complementary meat products in the deli case is an effective cross-merchandising tactic. This type of display encourages customers to make impulse purchases because their eye catches the add-ons as they consider their main deli purchase.

“Because the customer has time to stand in line and wait while their order is filled, there is an opportunity to encourage impulse buying,” Thomas says. “A bag of chips with a sandwich at lunch makes for a convenient, quick and economical meal.”

Adding chips to a deli sandwich to make a combo meal is another way to boost deli rings. Thomas has noticed that kettle chips, in particular, have yielded additional sales when bundled with sandwich deals. This version of the value meal “can add anywhere from \$1.50 to \$2.00 in sales to that deli,” Thomas says.

Along with chips, unique condiments are money-making add-ons for deli departments. The condiments can be displayed near the sandwich counter or the cold case with pre-sliced products.

Behind the deli service counter, these condiments can be used on prepared foods to add an extra touch. “Our creamy mustards are great on fish,” says Rose City Delicacies’ Vanlaningham. “Have the salmon or





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halibut in the deli case already cooked and a jar of mustard next to it. Or the mustard can be spread on top of the cooked fish, with a few capers or onions, and ready for the consumer to take home and heat up. Dinner is ready in minutes."

### Creatively Display Products

Attention-grabbing displays are one of the keys to a successful cross-merchandising campaign. "Cross-merchandising gives you an opportunity to do some incredible displays," Venus Wafers' Ammerman says. "The displays should be eye-catching for the consumer and encourage impulse buying."

Because many of the best candidates for cross-merchandising are new and different, the graphics of the display should also be new, different and exciting. "Today's consumers need that extra stimulus to the eye to help them get out of the rut of the 'same ole, same ole' and into new and exciting combinations," Vanlaningham says. "As they walk through the store looking and pondering over what to have, what tastes good and thinking, 'I want something different' is where retailers need to get their creative juices flowing and market, market, market."

Vanlaningham recommends creating bas-

kets for romantic occasions, such as Valentine's Day or a summer picnic, containing all the components for a simple meal. "Put a basket together with goodies for a romantic picnic and don't forget that great bottle of wine and, of course, our creamy mustards," Vanlaningham says.

King of Stacy's Pita Chips suggests cross-merchandising pita chips with wine, especially if the deli is located adjacent to the wine section. The company's Parmesan and garlic pita chip would go particularly well with wine, he notes.

In crowded deli departments, strategically placed vertical racks can display numerous snack items while saving floor space because of their small footprint. Higher-end delis can incorporate racks that complement the décor of the store to add a touch of class to their cross-promotions.

Additionally, many suppliers use eye-grabbing shipper displays to get noticed in the deli. "We ship our product in colorful display cartons," says 34 Degrees' Lieberman. "A lot of retailers use the carton as a display. We also do wall displays in the cheese department with cheeses around it."

The aisle space in and adjacent to the deli can be a strategic spot to effectively place

shippers that include information about companion products. "Shippers in the aisles catch the customer's eye and stimulate sales," Rose City's Vanlaningham says. "They don't have to scan the shelf and think. The thinking is done for them."

Creative displays to cross-promote products with different storage needs are a challenge to show both products effectively. Pita chips and hummus, for example, are excellent companion items, but the hummus must be refrigerated, while the pitas do not.

Part of the solution to this challenge, according to King, is a prepack shipper that holds the chips, but also includes graphics that describe and promote both of the products as well as the cross-promotional offer. When companion products are creatively displayed, they can sell each other without a price and profit reduction.

Recessionary times do not really change the rules of good promotion; they just make those rules more important. "I'm not sure the methods and strategies are that different whether times are good or bad," Valley Lahvosh's Bonsignore says. "You have to offer a quality product, stay in tune with your customer's needs, and be creative with promotional approaches." **DB**

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Reader Service No. 179



# Mobile Foods for Dashboard Dining

Delis are gradually changing gears to handle life in the fast lane

BY BOB JOHNSON

Forget tables and chairs—dashboards, cup holders, consoles and laps provide the tablesetting for a growing number of people these days. In our mobile society, people are commuting farther, working longer and playing harder, leaving little time to think about food. Time has become such a valuable commodity that more and more consumers are literally eating on the run.

"Everyone is on the go," says Angela Chan, director of marketing for Corbin Kitchens, based in Santa Ana, CA. "People need convenient food that can be eaten in the car or while walking. Everyone's schedule is just busier."

## The Growing "Going Category"

Today's high-speed lifestyle has created the new category of "car" foods, presenting both an opportunity and a challenge for deli departments. "We use the term 'dashboard dining'—any food that can be heated and eaten in the car," says Bill Parker, executive vice president of Don Miguel Mexican Foods, headquartered in Anaheim, CA. "The category is growing."

These foods can be eaten with one hand behind the back—or on the steering wheel. "People are looking for items that are bite size, fit in a cup holder or are easy to pour with one hand," says Jeff Weber, brand manager for Old Wisconsin Food Products, Homewood, IL. "There's more of it in the grocery than in the deli."

These highly portable products are among the fastest growing items in the entire food category. "I would say the category is definitely trending up," says Chan. Corbin Kitchens produces a variety of small-sized hamburgers, cheeseburgers and sliders.

This is not just a trend; it is an entirely new age in eating driven by scarcity of time. "Time to be more productive can directly be borrowed from eating occasions," says Tom Knoll, regional sales manager for Pittsburgh, PA-based Heinz Deli & Bakery Company. "Food items that are portable and conducive to a reasonable eating experience



PHOTO COURTESY OF CALZONE & COMPANY

are attractive to time seekers. Time-saving drive-through convenience—or dashboard dining—has become a ‘want’ for the on-the-go consumer.”

### Not Just Faster, But Better

Innovative food products and packaging built for mobility are driving the growth of car foods, while stronger flavor profiles are revving up sales. For instance, Don Miguel recently added empanadas to its line of grab-and-go deli items, including breakfast empanadas. The microwavable container contains 12 empanadas filled with whole eggs, bacon, hash browns and three cheeses.

Car foods are “anything portable or popable,” Heinz’s Knoll says.

Old Wisconsin’s snack bites fit into this category. Available in eight-ounce resealable packages, the snack bites are made of beef, turkey or pepperoni. “They can be opened, consumed and resealed,” Weber says.

As shopping dollars shrink, consumers are looking for more meal “bang for their buck,” says Alan Hamer, vice president sales and marketing for Charlotte, NC-based Stefano Foods. “The most recent consumption trend we are seeing is bolstered by demand for items with high protein content.”

According to Hamer, Stefano’s meat-topped and filled items, such as its Giovati Supreme Pizza Slice, have surged in sales. In addition to pizza slices, the company’s line of individually wrapped products include stromboli, calzones, paninis and its unique Mini Rip n Dip Stuffed Pizza, which comes with a dipping sauce.

Alpharetta, GA-based InnoWare’s revolutionary line of packaging, called OctaView, is designed to hold salad dressings, sauces and dips without leaking all over the car seat. “All our packaging is designed with leak-guard closures that can easily be opened and closed without cracking or breaking,” says product manager Tracey Murphy.



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The OctaView design concept contains a two-ounce portion cup built directly into the clear lid of the container. Inside the octagonal-shaped container, a groove secures the portion cup while eating from the container. An easy grip handle assists in transporting the container.

"We had salads in mind when designing the OctaView, but the container is also great for wings and appetizers," Murphy says. "It's a neat concept, especially for grab-and-go items. The package provides speed for the operator, and convenience and portion control for the consumer."

**"FOOD IS ONLY  
THREE-QUARTERS OF  
THE EQUATION.  
DELIVERY SYSTEMS  
THAT ENHANCE THE  
ON-THE-GO EATING  
OCCASION WHILE  
SAVING TIME IS WHAT  
CONSUMERS WANT."**

—Tom Knoll

*Heinz Deli & Bakery Company*

Besides the OctaView line, InnoWare offers more than 20 "specialty/snack" containers designed for smaller portions and snacks and a hoagie box for sandwiches and wraps. Its lunchbox line is designed with separate compartments to hold a sandwich, a side and a dessert.

Hot bar items, such as popcorn chicken and shrimp, tamales, and chilled grab-and-go items like sushi are the newest rage in deli car foods, according to Heinz's Knoll. However, sandwiches, fried chicken, chicken tenders and nuggets, potato wedges, and onion rings remain at the top of the category.

"Our most popular hand-held product seems to be potato wedges," says Matthew Petersen, marketing manager for Simplot Food Group, based in Boise, ID. The potato wedges come battered in 10-cut, eight-cut or six-cut pieces. The batter provides the strong flavor profile consumers are looking for, Petersen adds.

But the greatest selling point of potato wedges is their ability to retain heat longer. Compared to fries, the wedges have a far

## Piadina Make Their Mark

Direct from Italy comes the piadine, another "true" Italian sandwich poised to explode on the U.S. scene. Hailing from the Emilia-Romagna region of Northern Italy, this grilled flatbread sandwich is morphing its way from Italian restaurants to retailers' frozen food sections. And from the frozen-food section, it's making tracks to the deli department as an easy-to-prepare fast food. In singular tense the sandwich is called a piadine; in plural form it's piadina, and in the United States, some restaurants have Americanized the piadine to padina.

Similar to quesadillas, piadina are stuffed with a filling and then folded in half and grilled. "It's something that's very, very traditional in Northern Italy," says Chef Alfredo Patino, owner of Bistro Wine & Beach Loft Bin No. 18 in Miami, FL. Previously a private chef in Italy, Patino says the ingredients for the flatbread simply consist of lard, flour and water. "But the lard is what makes the flatbread different," he says.

At Patino's restaurant, he serves a classic vegetable padina filled with marinated artichokes, spicy hummus, roasted pepper and shaved onions. "The padina will beat a quesadilla any day of the week," Patino asserts.

In Italy, piadina are sold on the street, which is where Madeline Peters and her husband, Mark, owners of Calzone & Company, Redmond, WA, first discovered them. The company launched its regular size piadina under its Madelena's brand last August and is now introducing mini appetizer versions, or as Madeline affectionately calls them "bambino piadina."

Because the classic flatbread recipe tends to be crackly, the company created its own version and experimented with different griddles. Griddle marks are just as important as fillings when it comes to distinguishing factors. Calzone & Company's piadina feature such fillings as roast beef with caramelized onions, turkey with Pepper Jack cheese, and chicken with peppered bacon and Mozzarella cheese.

"Piadina are just in the beginning stages of taking off, just like calzones when we first began 20 years ago and when we started creating paninis," Peters says. "I have the same sense with this new product coming to market."

Peters calls the mini piadina the perfect fast-food "sliders," which have become popular items in foodservice and deli operations. "There's a trend to miniaturize foods, and I see the mini piadine as having a huge application in the deli department," she says. **DB**

larger mass-to-surface ratio, which means they have more starch to absorb and retain the heat. The batter also gives potato wedges better heat retention.

The potato wedges are par fried in the factory and then deep-fried behind the deli service counter. "The benefit of the wedge is its hold time. That gives you a product with better heat retention," Petersen says. "I would emphasize that in merchandising."

### Healthy Foods Accelerate Sales

In addition to portable foods, consumers want healthier fast foods. "The most recent development in portable foods has been strong consumer demand for quality, nutrition and culinary character in on-the-go foods," Hamer says. "Stefano's has a long tradition of making precisely this kind of item, regardless of unit size or packaging format."

"People are looking for a healthier product," says Linda Barnes, sales manager, Richmond, WA-based Calzone & Company Inc. "They want to get away from some of the

preservatives. They also want lower-fat foods with fewer calories."

Calzone & Company is moving a number of its popular frozen foods from the frozen foods section into the deli arena. Panini-type sandwiches are popular, and wraps are big in a number of sections of the market, according to Barnes. The company is also positioning its piadina—Italian flatbread sandwiches—to sell in the deli by introducing mini versions. "The category is being driven by the desire for healthier foods and the need for convenience," Barnes says.

Likewise, Corbin Kitchen's Chan has seen increased demand for portable foods, especially ones that provide a healthy alternative to fast food. "That is why we developed our all-natural Small Bites, miniature portions of popular comfort foods that are just like homemade with no additives or preservatives," Chan says. "Kings Super Markets in New Jersey has been selling these items in its deli since September 2007."

The Snack Factory, based in Princeton,



NJ, produces numerous flavors of pretzel crisps with an emphasis on health. These crunchy snacks contain zero trans fat, zero saturated fat and zero cholesterol.

"We have a new 100-calorie pack that looks like it's going to take off," says Warren Wilson, president of The Snack Factory. The 100-calorie pack, a fat-free version of the company's original pretzel crisp, fits into a weight-control program.

### Shifting Into The Fast Lane

The car food movement, however, has created some disadvantages for delis, many of which are not built to travel at freeway speeds. Retail grocers—and deli departments in particular—must compete with convenience stores in terms of speed and the added perk of filling up the car's gas tank.

"The bulk of these car foods can be found in the convenience store if not the grocery," Old Wisconsin's Weber says. "Some of the roll-, grill- or hot pocket-type sandwich people are getting these foods at the convenience store."

Because of these disadvantages, delis have experienced slower growth in this category. "The growth is moderate in the deli

section, maybe 2 or 3 percent," Don Miguel's Parker says. "We're seeing tremendous growth in convenience stores. You're talking 8 to 10 percent growth."

Convenience stores may have built-in advantages when it comes to car foods, but that's no reason to stay on cruise control. "It comes down to equipment and facilities," Parker says. "The convenience stores have roller grills and microwaves. There has to be a way for consumers to heat it themselves in the store. That's the biggest thing right now."

In order to compete with convenience stores, delis need at least one strategic advantage, Stefano's Hamer points out. "That edge could be nutritional attributes, convenient quick heating packaging or culinary style." Stefano's paninis, for instance, come in patented, heat-in-the-bag packaging.

Equipment can be made available to consumers in the deli just as it is in the convenience store. "The biggest thing is to allow consumers to heat the food in the store," Parker says. "Otherwise, they have to take it home to heat it."

InnoWare's black OctaView container was specifically created for the microwave. "It's pin vented so it can hold wings, egg rolls,

quesadillas, etc.," Murphy says. "The pin holes release steam so the foods don't get soggy." The container can withstand heat up to 225 degrees Fahrenheit.

Sometimes a change as small as providing customers with access to a microwave can make a big difference. "Microwavability is a big plus," Corbin Kitchen's Chan says. "The best merchandising is whatever is most convenient for the end user."

Sometimes, merchandising means displaying food outside the cold case to avoid sending the message that foods must be brought home immediately and stored in the refrigerator. "Some foods need to be merchandised out of refrigeration," Weber says. "There are some items that require refrigeration, but there are also convenience foods where you need to communicate that these things are portable."

Selling the quality of the food is only part of the job of merchandising in this high-speed food age. "Food is only three-quarters of the equation," Heinz's Knoll says. "Delivery systems that enhance the on-the-go eating occasion while saving time is what consumers want. Portability, easy to carry, easy to access food, no mess, easy disposal." **DB**

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# Curious Goats Wander Into New Cheese Categories

Cheesemakers take a playful leap into unpredictable territories with their lively goat cheeses

BY ELIZABETH BLAND

When the goats get going, the cheese gets good. Leaping from dainty Chèvre to robust aged Gouda, goat cheeses are twisting and turning in flirtatious caprioles. Today, there are feisty new does on the dance floor in both the soft and hard categories, and a long line of consumers ready to take them all for a spin. As Americans garner a taste for the classic goat tang—and as goat's milk becomes increasingly attractive to people with special dietary needs—the U.S. market is seeing an increase in the types of goat cheeses available, both domestic and imported.

## Why Goats Are Great

Popular for its exuberant tanginess, goat cheese does not rely on sass alone. Goat cheese complements the diet of consumers with lactose intolerance or allergies to cow's milk. Although goat's milk contains lactose, it is lower in lactose than cow's milk. The magic of goat's milk remains somewhat mysterious, but the general opinion is that its digestibility lies in the goat milk's structure. The fat globules are smaller than those in cow's milk, and because goat's milk is naturally homogenized, the fat does not cluster together, making it easier to digest. In addition, goat's milk protein produces a smaller, softer curd than that of cow's milk, which also contributes to digestibility.

Other consumer targets to consider when selecting goat cheeses are the vegetarian and kosher markets. Many soft, fresh goat cheeses are made with lactic starter, vegetable rennet or microbial rennet, and thus are suitable for vegetarians. Vegetarian goat cheeses cater to an even wider audience—and ones that are certified kosher have added marketability. Some cheese products from Meyenberg Goat Milk Products,



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Turlock, CA, and Woolwich Dairy, Orangeville, Ontario, Canada, fit into this group.

Last but not least, goat's milk is lower in fat than cow's or sheep's milk. Soft, higher-moisture goat cheeses such as Chèvre or Feta are generally lower in calories than other cheeses—hard goat cheeses included. These young cheeses complement the salads and vegetables that are central to Mediterranean diets.

### Goat Cheeses Firm Up

Fresh Chèvre remains the most common type of goat cheese on U.S. shelves, but as consumers become accustomed to—and enchanted by—the unique tanginess of goat's milk, they move onto other styles and textures. Hard goat cheeses are gaining ground for two reasons: the desire for more intensely flavored cheese and the melting, slicing and shredding options of firm cheeses. When soft Chèvres and goat Fetas were the primary choices, people who could not digest cow's milk had limited cheese-based recipes from which to choose. With firmer cheeses available, they now can enjoy goat Mozzarella shredded on pizza, enchiladas filled with melted goat Monterey Jack, or a simple cheeseburger topped with creamy goat Gouda or Cheddar.

Mary Keehn, owner of Cypress Grove Chèvre Inc., Arcata, CA, believes her goat Cheddars and Gouda-style Midnight Moon

**“GOAT MILK ADDS  
MORE SHARPNESS  
COMPARED TO A  
TYPICAL COW  
CHEDDAR, YET IT IS  
SMOOTH WITH  
GOAT OVERTONES.”**


—Tracy Plante-Darrimon  
*Meyenberg Goat Milk Products*

fulfill the demand for cheeses with broader cooking applications. “We get a lot of letters, such as, ‘I’m so happy. I just wanted a grilled cheese sandwich,’” she recounts.

Salena Feit, marketing coordinator, Best Cheese Corporation, Mount Kisko, NY, also sees an increased interest in firm goat cheeses. “Probably one of our most popular cheeses is the Hollandse Chèvre,” Feit says, referring to the company's Legendaire brand of imported goat Gouda from Holland. “The cheese has a more versatile texture for cooking. It's not just for crumbling on salads. You can slice it. You can shred it. You can blend it into a casserole.”

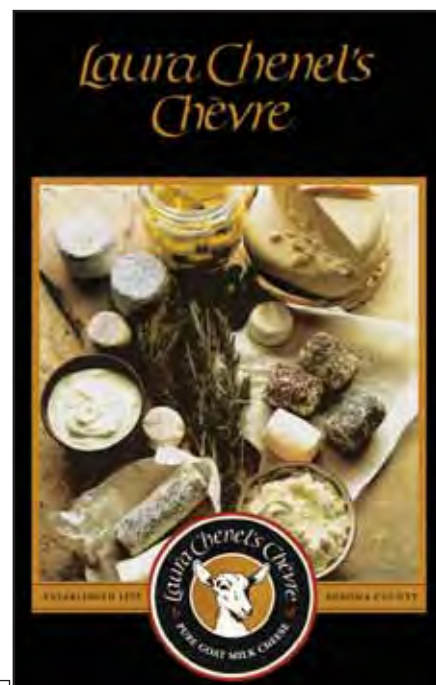
On the Canadian front, Woolwich Dairy's vast array of cheeses includes goat Gouda, Cheddar and low-moisture Mozzarella. Michael Domingues, vice president of marketing, describes the freedom that hard goat cheeses provide to people with lactose intolerance or cow's milk allergies. “It's a relief to them that they have alternatives in cheese usage,” Domingues says. “One lady commented that her child couldn't have pizza or lasagna, so when you offer them goat Mozzarella or Cheddar, they can have pizza and lasagna again.”

Hard goat cheese need not play second fiddle to cow cheese. A driving force behind firm goat cheese sales is the flavor alone. As a goat cheese ages, it retains its trademark tang, but acquires a distinct nuttiness. Tracy Plante-Darrimon, Meyenberg's director of



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marketing, notes the complexity that goat milk lends to aged Cheddar. "Goat milk adds a different dimension to Cheddars," she says. "It adds more sharpness compared to a typical cow Cheddar, yet it is smooth with goat overtones." Besides Meyenberg's nine- and 12-month goat Cheddars, the company's other firm cheeses include Smoked Jack and Jack with Jalapeño. "Our top-selling cheeses are Portobello Mushroom Goat Jack and Plain Goat Jack," Plante-Darrimon says.

Dutch goats also are claiming their corner of the pasture. Not only does a goat cheese add balance to a cow-driven category such as Gouda, but it also boosts sales. Jana Foods LLC, Secaucus, NJ, takes great pride in its award-winning, one-month-old Cablanca, a goat Gouda from Friesland, an area in northern Holland famous for its agriculture and black-and-white Friesian cows. Jana Foods' Dutch category grows by double digits every year, with goat Gouda contributing to the line's success. "The goat keeps going up," says David Voremberg, president and owner of Jana Foods. "People are looking for something different."

Mature Goudas are known for their intense nuttiness, and when made with goat's milk, the flavor is even more complex. Best Cheese's Feit has a passion for aged goat Goudas, especially for Legendairy's 12-month Gold Chèvre imported from Holland. "As the cheese ages, the flavor just gets nuttier," she says. "It doesn't get stronger and saltier like the cow Goudas. I can't resist it. It's not sweet, but since I like to eat it so much, I call it candy."

### Back To Basics

Fresh, fluffy Chèvre still reigns supreme. Once a foreign novelty, Chèvre is now a common site on retail shelves and restaurant menus across the United States. Thanks to Laura Chenel, fresh goat cheese has become standard fare. Chenel is not only a pioneer of artisan goat cheesemaking in the United States, but she is also responsible for promoting this style in the American market, beginning in the 1970s when she first started experimenting with cheese.

Although retired from cheesemaking, Chenel still runs a farm of 500 goats. And her namesake company, Laura Chenel's Chèvre Inc., Sonoma, CA, lives on, creating original boutique cheeses and supplying food-service and restaurants with high-quality, creamy Chef's Chèvre. "I've even seen our Chef's Chèvre used to make a strawberry cream cheesecake," says general manager Marie Lesoudier. "That was perfect for Chef's Chèvre because it is so creamy."

From Couturier North America, Warwick, RI, comes Soignon's new Crumbled

Goat Cheese made with no preservatives. "Sometimes when people do crumbles, they crumble logs and it's not perfect," says Dominique Pénicaut, CEO, Couturier North America, Inc. "We do the crumble from scratch, straight from the curds. It's just been launched. It's a very good combo, and it's very nice packaging." Next year Couturier North America will introduce cubed goat cheese to the U.S. market.

Imported Chèvrete Goat Feta is produced in Poitou-Charentes, the goat cheese

capital of France where the weather and soil combine forces to create ideal goat farming conditions. Katia Boulay, marketing manager, Lactalis USA Inc., New York, NY, recommends this clean, tangy Feta for a variety of cooking applications, including pizza, bruschetta and salads.

One of fresh goat cheese's charms is its ability to whet the appetite with its crisp, clean acidity. Françoise Magis, sales manager, Valcrest America Corp., New York, NY, promotes a goat cheese line of Chèvre appe-



The image features the Prunotto logo at the top, which is a circular emblem with the word "PRUNOTTO" in a bold, serif font. Below the name, it says "FRUITFUL" and "IN ALBA dal 1863". A banner at the bottom of the logo reads "Una delizia d'Italia". Below the logo is a photograph of a large, multi-story farm building with a red-tiled roof and a white balcony. In the foreground, there are several jars of Prunotto products, including jars of jam and boxes of fruit and vegetable products.

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## You're Entering Goat Territory

**J**ust like wine, cheese has a *terroir*—a broad term used to reflect the influence of plants, soil, environment and local tradition on a cheese's flavor. The world truly belongs to the goat; smaller than cows and much less grass-dependent, goats wander through pastures eating grasses, herbs and flowers.

Curious and hardy creatures, goats have a penchant for climbing and head into rugged—even rocky—territories in search of interesting sprigs. Since goats can dine in so many unusual places, their milk takes on increased complexity to give the cheese lover a gustatory glimpse into the life of a curious goat.

Contrary to popular belief, goats do not eat garbage, tin cans or clothing. Goats explore with their mouths, tugging on everything from low-hanging tree branches to clothing and purses, hence their unfortunate reputation. They do, however, eat anything in the botanical world. Because their digestive system can break down nearly any organic substance

into nutrients, and because they are immune to elements in certain plants that are toxic for cows, goats are sometimes used to clear out underbrush and make fields safe.

Not surprisingly, the notion of *terroir* comes from France. "In France it's all about *terroir*," says Cécile Delannes, ambassador of the French Cheese Club, College Park, MD. "All the food specialties that you have are extracted from the land, the roots of the vineyard, the milk of the goat. It picks up the flavor of the land."

One well-known territory is the *garrigue* of Provence, a dry, rocky shrubland dotted with aromatic plants such as lavender, sage, rosemary and wild thyme. The French Cheese Club's newly available L'Étoile du Sud line includes a creamy delicacy that exemplifies *terroir*—Le Rove des Garrigues, an aromatic fresh goat cheese made by Francis Verdier and named for the Rove breed of goats with ram-like horns that thrive in the arid provençal countryside. **DB**

tizers that are as pretty as they are mouth-watering. Chèvre Feuille de Brick is a fresh goat cheese rolled up in tubes of North African-style brick leaf—a pastry similar to phyllo dough, but lighter and more delicate. "We are very innovative with goat cheeses," Magis says of the baked appetizer line. "It is something that's selling in Europe and is going to become very big. They are refrigerated, ready to be cooked. They are a great solution for parties to serve with cocktails and drinks."

Another popular favorite is Valcrest America's Chèvre à Dorer, a breaded goat cheese. "That has become a hot item," Magis enthuses. "You would typically serve it with a salad."

### The American Palate Matures

Through cheese, America is truly becoming the "home of the brave." Where once even the meekest little Chèvre raised eyebrows, now U.S. consumers seek out the robust flavors of aged cheeses and surface-ripened cheeses, including Brie types and washed rinds. "In the past, it was really the fresh cheeses that were very popular," says Laura Chenel's Lesoudier about the shift in tastes. "I'm seeing that more and more people are attracted to aged cheese."

Couturier's Pénicaud gives an explanation for the trend. "People travel," he says. "They go to Europe. They try them. They like them. They want the same kind of things

here, in general and in the goats especially."

Cheesemakers and importers are responding with a broader range of choices, primarily in the soft-ripened category. Both Laura Chenel's Chèvre and Cypress Grove Chèvre will release new bloomy goat cheeses in 2008, and Woolwich has designed a soft-ripened, ashed goat log with a line of ash running through the center.

In the realm of smelly cheeses, Wisconsin is a national leader, and this washed-rind style has spilled over into the state's goat category. La Valle, WI-based Carr Valley Cheese Company Inc. now boasts an aromatic goat cheese.

"People want the aged, the complex and the washed rind," says Sara Hill, Carr Valley's national sales manager. The cheesemaker at Carr Valley, Sid Cook, responds to this demand with River Bend Goat, a cheese ripened with a host of ravenous bacteria.

"Sid ages it for 12 weeks and then rinses the bacteria off or else it would continue to eat away at the rind," Hill explains.

Rolling Hills, CA-based Montchevré, whose cheese plant is located in Belmont, WI, offers Bucheron, an aged goat cheese with an ivory-colored center surrounded by a white bloomy rind.

### A Bite Of Blue

Goats love to bite and so do Blue cheeses. Blue veining adds an extra dimension to the already distinctive goat's milk. Best Cheese's Feit uses crumbly Gouda-style Blue as an example. "Our Blue Chèvre is popular because it has the typical goat milk flavor that people like and also the bite of the Blue," she says. "It is one of our fastest growing cheeses."

Domestic cheesemakers have success with goat's milk Blues as well. Carr Valley's Hill raves about Billy Blue, a four- to six-month-old Blue cheese made of 100 percent goat's milk—a rarity in the United States. "Billy Blue is our star," Hill says. "People say they don't like goat's milk and don't like Blue, but it's not overly salty. It has a little bit of that goaty tang and a clean finish. It is just a wonderful salad cheese with candied walnuts. Blend it with butter and put it over a steak."

### Spirited Cheese For A Daredevil Country

The experimental side of domestic cheesemakers shines through in goat cheeses, and the name Purple Haze says it all. Cypress Grove's famous Chèvre blended with lavender and fennel pollen is one of many quirky American goats on the market.

New, exotic flavors appear every day—goat cheeses with peppers, spices and fruit. Montchevré, for instance, offers a tangy goat cheese made with Peppadew, a unique piquant pepper from South Africa as well as goat cheese logs infused with spices. Three new flavors include cranberry cinnamon, lemon fig, and sun-dried tomato and basil.

America has become enamored not only with goat cheeses, but also the animals, the dairy farmers and the cheesemakers who make these cheeses possible. The general fascination with all things goaty is apparent in the literary world, too. With the publication of a goat cheese travel memoir, *The Year of the Goat*, by Margaret Hathaway, and an illustrated children's book by Kelly Doudna, called simply *Goat Cheese*, consumers are no longer just eating goat cheese; they are also studying it and even visiting goat farms. Just like goats, inquisitive Americans are always looking for something new to chew on, with the most playful of all cheeses leading the way—the goat. **DB**



PHOTO COURTESY OF CARR VALLEY CHEESE COMPANY



# The Winning Ways Of Wisconsin's Cheesemakers

Cheese aficionados can enjoy authentic and affordable cheeses made by experts in the field

BY KAREN SILVERSTON

Cheese buyers and consumers alike are taking a serious new look at domestic cheese and discovering the high quality, authenticity and affordability of Wisconsin cheese. Hundreds of cheeses, from classic favorites to specialty cheeses, are produced on a small, medium and large scale from cow's, sheep's and goat's milk. Cheese aficionados can enjoy expertly crafted award-winning cheeses made by some of the finest cheesemakers in the world without paying exorbitant prices.

"No other place in the United States has the concentration of cheesemaking expertise that Wisconsin has," says John Gruender, national director of sales and marketing, Swiss-American Inc., St. Louis, MO. The company has been a processor, packer and distributor of imported and domestic cheeses since 1938.

And the proof is in the cheese. At the 2007 American Cheese Society (ACS) competition in Burlington, VT, 73 Wisconsin cheeses won awards—more than any other state. Monroe, WI-based Roth Käse USA Ltd.'s Roth's Private Reserve placed third in the Best of Show category, but won first place in the American Originals category. In 1999, the company's Grand Cru Gruyère Surchoix captured Best of Show.

Other Wisconsin-made cheeses that have earned the coveted Best of Show title over the years include Pleasant Ridge Reserve from Uplands Cheese Company, Dodgeville, WI (2005 and 2001); Gran Canaria from Carr Valley Cheese, La Valle, WI (2004); and Trade Lake Cedar from LoveTree Farmstead Cheese, Grantsburg, WI (1998).

At the 2008 Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association World Championship Cheese Contest (WCCC), Madison, WI, Sartori



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Foods' Rosemary & Olive Oil Rubbed Asiago garnered a Best of Class award, while its Basil & Olive Oil Rubbed Asiago placed fourth. "People who used to look at only European cheeses are starting to look at the quality we make in the United States these days," says Becky Ryan, managing director of retail for the Plymouth, WI-based company.

## A History Of European Traditions

The Roth family began making cheese in Switzerland over 140 years ago, more than a century before Roth Käse USA was formed in 1991. "The company was founded on importing the technology, not the cheese," says Kirsten Jaeckle, marketing manager.

Today, the company offers a wide range of cheeses. "Part of what our company is built on is supplying outstanding cheeses—high-quality cheeses—at a fair price," Jaeckle, says. "On a larger domestic scale, we have the capability to supply the market, and that's a real benefit to the retailer."

Some of the company's products are inspired by European methods while others are original creations. Roth's Private Reserve, like Grand Cru Gruyère Surchoix, is an acclaimed handcrafted, washed-rind cheese. It is made in an imported copper vat and aged nine months or more on special wooden shelves. Roth Käse's skill and diversity also shines in its mild, buttery, washed-rind

Knight's Vail; firm-bodied, basket-weave rinded GranQueso; full cream aged Dutch-style Vintage Van Gogh; and creamy, piquant raw milk Buttermilk Blue.

When fourth-generation cheese producer Errico Auricchio moved his family to Wisconsin and founded BelGioioso Cheese Inc. in Denmark, WI, he started with the same cheesemakers the family had in Italy. "When they came over with my family in 1979, we were making cheese with the same time-tested, traditional methods we had there,

and with the benefit of the quality of milk in Wisconsin," says Francesca Auricchio Elfner, export and operations manager for BelGioioso Cheese.

Two of the cheesemakers who came from Italy, Mauro Rozzi and Gianni Toffolon, still work at the company. Toffolon is a Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker who is certified to make Parmesan and Fontina. To become a Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker, a cheesemaker must have 10 years of licensed cheesemaking experience in Wisconsin at a

participating facility and five years of experience making the type of cheese for the desired certification.

BelGioioso's specialties include classic Italian cheese varieties and handcrafted exclusive cheeses, including grating cheese, Provolone varieties, table cheeses, and washed-rind and blue-veined types. Crescenza-Stracchino, a fresh, rindless cheese requiring precise temperature and moisture levels for proper ripening, has a limited shelf life and is made to order. Soft and creamy with a uniform consistency, it spreads and melts easily.

Huge 70-pound wheels of the company's American Grana are aged 18 months in a special environment. Italico, a surface-ripened original table cheese aged 60 days, is smooth and clean. CreamyGorg, a soft, blue-green veined cheese, is aged 90 days to achieve its full flavor and creamy texture. Burrata, a cheese similar to Mozzarella, is hand-formed around cream and fresh Mozzarella pieces.

Milk is sourced from independent farmers with whom relationships have been developed over the years. "They've signed a pledge not to use rBST," says Elfner, referring to the recombinant bovine growth hormone. "Milk that is clean when it comes in and free of impurities—that is good quality. We test every single farm and all the components."

As demand grew, the company added new varieties and built more facilities, the latter now totaling five state-of-the-art plants. The abundance of awards has not diminished the quest for excellence. "We don't rely on awards; they're icing on the cake," Elfner says. "We—the Auricchio family—are always striving to be the best and always striving to improve. We make good cheese to make people happy, and every cheese in this company comes first."

### From Basic To Specialty

Versatile in its offerings, Swiss-American stocks over 500 varieties of imported, domestic and deli specialties daily, and cuts and wraps over 300 varieties of cheeses for thousands of delis weekly. About 90 percent of its domestic cheese is Wisconsin State branded. Some lines, such as its Dutch Garden brand, include a mix of domestic-made cheese and European imports.

In its experience marketing cheeses, Swiss-American has found that regional preferences affect consumers' perceptions of quality. Take, Colby, for instance. "In the Midwest and many other places, Colby has to be a whole horn, whereas in St. Louis, people recognize a split horn as the only 'real Colby,'" says Swiss-American's Gruender. "There are people who can tell the differ-

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*B*elGioioso Cheese is as rich in history as its cheeses are in flavor and quality.

I come from a family-owned cheese company that my great-grandfather founded over a century ago. In 1979, I moved with my family from Italy to America to start a company that would create great Italian cheeses. I considered many areas of the United States;

however, Wisconsin, America's Dairyland, was chosen for its superior milk due to the dedication of the farmers and abundant pastures. Wisconsin milk was and still is simply unbeatable.



*This is how Cheese was Made 100 Years Ago*



*Gianni and Mauro, the Cheesemakers who came from Italy with Me*

In the beginning, we introduced cheeses that were known to the American consumer like Provolone, Parmesan and Romano. We made them so well, that people said they never tasted anything so good and wanted more. So, over the years, our Master Cheesemakers introduced cheeses that were not previously made here like Mascarpone, Creamy Gorgonzola, Italico™ and American Grana®, and these too have become favorites.

Today, BelGioioso employees, in five state-of-the-art facilities, manufacture, age, package and ship over 16 cheese varieties. Every cheese is treated individually, according to its own personality, and a section of each plant is specifically designed and dedicated to each variety. This is true artisanal craftsmanship.

Through the years, our cheeses have won many prestigious awards and have set a standard of excellence with the discriminating consumers. We thank our farmers and customers for this success and for believing in us. My children have joined me and will carry on the BelGioioso philosophy of commitment to

quality and consistency in the years to come. Our company will continue to grow, but we will never lose the passion we started with. We invite you to enjoy the BelGioioso family of cheeses.



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*The Next Generation being Trained*

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ence if the shape is punched out of a 640-pound block instead of made in a longhorn form, or if it tastes more like Cheddar than like Colby."

This same discerning scrutiny carries over into the realm of specialty cheeses. "Consumers who want good tasting cheese want to savor the cheese itself in smaller portions," Sartori Foods' Ryan says. "For me, quality is all about the taste."

At Sartori Foods, where Master Cheesemakers Jeff Mattes and Larry Steckbauer

are on staff, the company routinely turns out award-winning cheeses. One of its esteemed brands, Sartori Reserve, comprises SarVecchio Parmesan, nutty SarVecchio Asiago, sweet Dolcina Gorgonzola and Bellavitano, an original cheese. "Bellavitano, our rich and creamy signature hard cheese featured at the June 2008 Aspen Food and Wine Classic, is a truly great tasting artisan cheese that is uniquely American," Ryan says.

The acclaimed SarVecchio Parmesan is produced from milk sourced from patron

farmers within a certain radius of the company's Antigo, WI, plant.

"All of Wisconsin is very well suited for dairy," says Ron Buholzer, co-owner of Klondike Cheese Company, Monroe, WI, winners of numerous competitions. "Climate-wise, cold weather makes some things more difficult, but our crops benefit from the freezing and thawing cycle, and I attribute the quality of our milk to the high quality of feed we have as well as the quality of the dairy farmer."

Like other Wisconsin companies with European roots, Buholzer's grandfathers—a dairy farmer and cheesemaker, respectively—emigrated from Switzerland to Green County, WI, and founded Klondike in 1925, to produce Emmentaler.

"In the late 1960s, we were looking for something different. We had no idea of the potential of Feta when we started making it," says Buholzer, a Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker, certified for Feta and Brick. His brothers, Steve and Dave, are also Wisconsin Master Cheesemakers, both certified for Feta and Muenster.

"Feta is a fresh cheese, so consumers think of it in the category of a soft-ripened cheese," Buholzer continues. "But it's also a cheese that, as it gets several months old, does not change very much if it's stored in salt water. The body and texture get softer, and the flavor will become more pronounced. We're very proud of the quality of cheese we make."

Increasingly, grass-based milk is recognized as adding value to cheese because of its rich flavor and naturally nutritious content. A group of farmers is working together to supply Organic Farm Marketing LLC, Thorp, WI, with grass-based milk to make its Grass Point Farms brand. The company's organic lineup includes Sharp Cheddar (aged one year), Sharp Raw Milk Cheddar (aged one year), Monterey Jack, Pepper Jack, Blue Cheese and Feta.

"Our cheesemakers are making high-quality, consistent cheese that offers the special flavor profile of milk from cows that are managed on a rotationally grazed farm," explains Chad Pawlak, president of Organic Farm Marketing. "The 'Certified Pasture' eco-label indicates the farms are sustainable, and the farmers are working with nature and focused on grass management, which also benefits the health of the herd. It's the next big thing. We're proud that the unified grazing network of Wisconsin dairymen who've been practicing this production model for years is giving us ample supply."

Sheep, goat and mixed-milk cheeses are a flourishing niche, drawing source milk from Wisconsin's 165 herds of dairy goats and 11

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herds of dairy sheep. Among the aged, semi-soft varieties are Cocoa Cardona (Carr Valley Cheese), a cocoa powder-rubbed goat milk cheese; Canasta Pardo (Bass Lake, Somerset, WI), a cinnamon-rubbed sheep's milk cheese; Dante (Wisconsin Sheep Dairy Cooperative, Strum, WI), a nutty and buttery sheep's milk cheese; and Cave Aged Marisa (Carr Valley Cheese) a sheep's milk cheese that won a gold medal at the 2007 World Cheese Awards, London, England.

### Marketing Wisconsin's Cheeses

Even the best cheese begs to be understood. "Once the consumer picks up that piece of cheese, our job isn't done," says Dave Leonhardi, director of foodservice and education, Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board (WMMB), Madison, WI. "We have to show them how to use it and what to use it with. I always encourage retailers to partner cheese with other departments. When tomato, squash or apple season comes around, plan to feature cheeses with these fruits and vegetables and in recipes. Think about bigger, heartier meals in the fall and winter, tapering back in spring and summer."

A cheese of the week display helps retailers build a library of knowledge. "Communicate four to six key points about the featured

cheese," Leonhardi says. "Over time, information from the cheesemaker or the marketing arm of the company can be reused. We have one of the best Web sites in the industry (wisdairy.com) where retailers can see what works with what, and we have themed promotional programs with point-of-sale materials that can carry the store brand free of charge. Stores can promote Wisconsin by contacting our regional managers."

For instance, Sprouts Markets, based in Phoenix, AZ, showcased a 180-pound wheel of Edelweiss Creamery Emmentaler (Monticello, WI) at a recent new store opening. Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker Bruce Workman makes the huge wheels in a copper Swiss vat by hand, seasonally, using raw milk sourced from Edelweiss Graziers. The wheels age for two years.

"Promotions that are all about the big wheel cheeses might include Cheddar mammoths, gigantic Provolones or large wheels of Swiss," says Leonhardi, who recommends adding information cards to displays so consumers know when to eat the cheese, in days or weeks, and how to wrap and store the cheese.

To further promote the state's cheeses, Wisconsin Master Cheesemakers may use the Master's Mark logo on cheeses for which

they are certified. Wisconsin branding can take three forms: the Wisconsin Pride logo, the Master's Mark logo or simply a printed statement on the label. "One thing you never read in the ingredient list on the label of a good natural cheese is love of animals, respect for the milk and love of the environment, yet these are key ingredients that really create the value of Wisconsin cheese," says WMMB's Leonhardi.

In addition, the WMMB's Chef Ambassador Program taps the culinary creativity of chefs across the country to incorporate Wisconsin cheeses into their recipes. Through the development of this five-year-old program, renowned chefs have helped spread the word about Wisconsin's finest cheeses. Kent Rathbun, executive chef and partner of Abacus restaurant in Dallas, TX, as well as Jasper's restaurants in Plano, The Woodlands and Austin, TX, is one of this year's chef ambassadors.

"I'm somewhat informed as a chef, and I was surprised and amazed at how many great cheeses there are in Wisconsin," Rathbun says. "I was extremely impressed with their quality and with the passion of the people we've met who are doing these cheeses. Anytime you're dealing with an artisan product, that has to be present."

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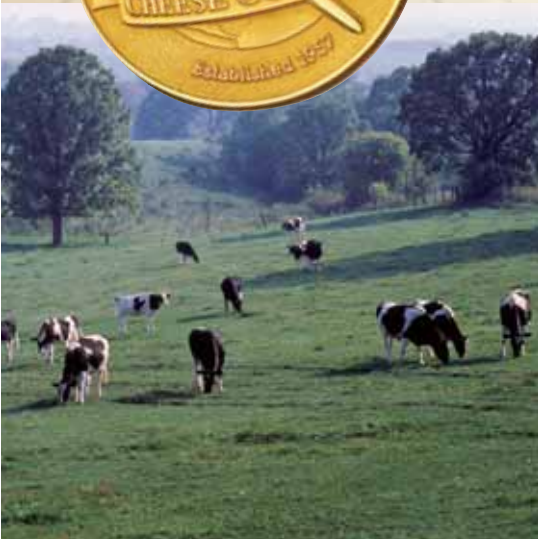
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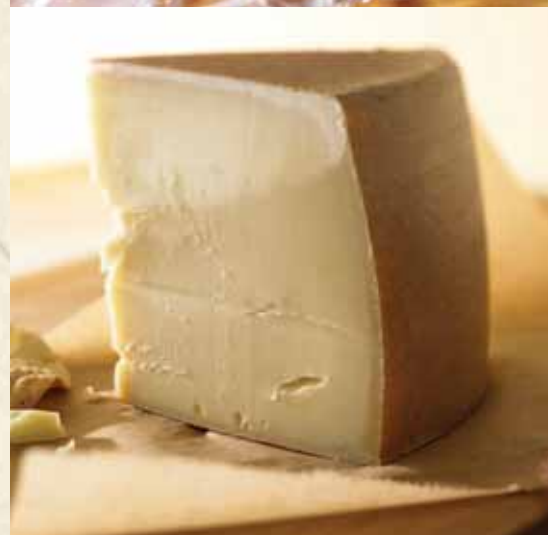
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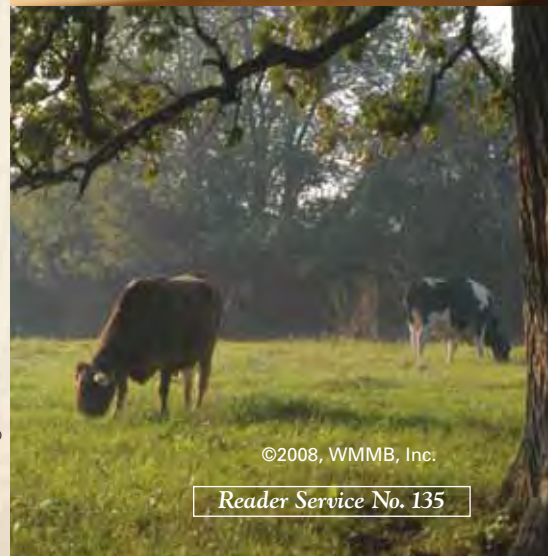


Wisconsin cheesemakers built on Wisconsin's long-standing tradition at the 2008 World Championship Cheese Contest by winning the most awards of any state or nation in the competition. Wisconsin garnered 72 awards – 27 of them Best of Class.

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Reader Service No. 135

# British Cheeses Shine In The Media

Great Britain's quest for quality and tradition is making modern news

BY ELIZABETH BLAND

British dairy is the media's latest darling. From the celebrity cheese named "Wedginald"—the aging Internet sensation of cheddarvision.tv—to the pampered lady cows of Denhay, Great Britain's quest for quality and tradition is making modern news. British cheesemaking has seen a revival of Old World techniques, especially in the Cheddar category, and British cheese trends have once again crossed the pond to inspire and entertain.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain (UK) includes England, Wales, Scotland and a chunk of Northern Ireland. British cheeses and variances thereof have always stood strong in the cheese world. During the period of colonization, which included the expansion of the English language and culture, Britain's cheese, especially Cheddar, established itself as the standard for what many predominantly English-speaking countries felt "cheese" should be—milky, tangy, firm, and above all, palate-pleasing.

However, what started out as local farmstead fare in England became so popular worldwide that it took a turn for the bland. On U.S. shelves appeared American knock-offs in sticky processed loaves. At home in Britain, the industrialized versions of Cheddar-style cheeses hardly reflected their farmhouse heritage.

Doug Jay, president of Atlanta Foods International (AFI) in Atlanta, GA, likens the rise and fall of Cheddar to the demise of a sports hero or pop star. "Cheddar is the victim of its own success," he says. "It's like a millionaire who ruins his life, but now he's reinvented himself. It's just the story of fame and fortune. What other cheese is more famous than Cheddar?"

According to Jay, as Cheddar's popularity and production increased, British cheese slipped into the realm of commodity. But unlike most wayward celebrities, this cheese got back on track gracefully, becoming a "phoenix rising from the ashes," Jay says.

Why has there been such a drastic turnaround for British cheeses? One popular the-



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ory points to competition with U.S. products for both quality and price. Emmanuelle Hofer Louis, director of marketing for Anco Fine Foods in Fairfield, NJ, says, "The U.S. has been improving dramatically. I think that the English have to offer better products in order to sell. They went back to their roots, their origin and their heritage to add more value to their cheeses."

Ironically, some of the most highly acclaimed domestic cheeses of recent competitions have been British in style. Cabot Clothbound Cheddar from Vermont won "Best in Show" in the 2006 American Cheese Society competition, and Fiscalini's 18-month bandage-wrapped Cheddar from California picked up gold and silver medals in the Cheddar categories at the 2007 World Cheese Awards in London. It also won the Wyke Farms Trophy for the best extra mature Cheddar in the world—the first time in the 20-year history of the World Cheese Awards that the trophy has gone to a cheesemaker outside of Great Britain.

Wyke Farms Ltd., located in the heart of the Somerset cheddar-making region, is the largest independent cheese producer and milk processor in the United Kingdom. In April 2008, the company began exporting its full line of farmhouse Cheddar and butter products to the United States. Family owned and operated, the company has been making award-winning cheese for more than a century on the same land using Ivy Clothier's original secret recipe since 1902. Ivy's grandsons, Richard and Tom Clothier, now run the cheesemaking operations along with their father John, while two other grandsons, David and Roger, run the family dairy farming operations.

"Our family has taken great pride in the taste, texture and development of Wyke Farms products for more than a century, and we are looking forward to sharing our heritage and passion with cheese lovers in the U.S. market," says managing director Richard Clothier.

### Cheese In The Spotlight

Not only is British cheese improving, but it is also changing the perception of farmstead cheeses for consumers. While the average consumer may not know the exact definition of "farmhouse Cheddar," the media have given this cheese unprecedented publicity. An estimated 1.7 million viewers tuned into the

cheddarvision.tv Web site to witness the year-long aging of a Protected Denomination of Origin (PDO) status wheel made by the West Country Farmhouse Cheesemakers, a group of farmers in Southwest England. This Cheddar went from local staple to international superstar, earning itself the cheesy name of "Wedginald" and its own profile on the Web site myspace.com.

"I think it's exciting that people care enough to actually tune in and watch cheese mature," says Maria Walley, director of sales and marketing for Cheese From Britain (CFB), Cincinnati, OH. "Exposure in the States, every little bit helps."

The dairy animals and their owners are also gaining media attention as consumers worldwide become more concerned with sustainable farming and humanely treated and healthy animals. "There is a current movement to support the farming community, a type of fair trade, and this is having an impact," explains David Barker, manager of business development for Coombe Castle International, a dairy export company based in Corsham, Wiltshire, England.

Along with sustainable farms and smaller herds comes better understanding of dairy animal needs, one of which is luxury bedding. Denhay, one of the most respected producers of West Country Cheddar and the only farmhouse Cheddar cheesemaker to be approved by the Freedom Foods sector of

Britain's Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), furnishes its dairy boudoir with comfortable mattresses for each cow. This trend has been echoed in the United States, where an Ohio farmer, Bill Timmons, recently spent more than \$40,000 on waterbeds for his 200 cows. The investment is already paying off with a 20 percent increase in milk production. Although the basic notion of "happy cows" is now widespread in the United States, CFB's Walley attributes this movement to European influences.

### Tradition Versus Innovation

The English have been following two routes, according to Anco's Hofer Louis. First, they have increased production of creamery and farmstead cheeses, and second, they have become more adventuresome with their flavored cheeses, creating blends with fruits and liquors. "I think the English have been way more creative in playing with the cheeses," she says.

Some of the most popular are tangy, mild dessert cheeses, usually Wensleydale or White Stilton, blended with cranberry, apricot, blueberry or lemon. "People love the cranberry," she says, referring to Anco's Wensleydale from Hartington Creamery.

CFB's Walley, who works closely with the Wensleydale Creamery in Hawes, notices that the production of fruited



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANCO FINE CHEESE



cheeses has extended to North American cheeses, including Carr Valley's Chipotle Cranberry Cheddar from Wisconsin and Celebrity's Cranberry Cinnamon goat cheese from Canada. "We are starting to see a lot of cranberries popping up," Walley remarks. "Cranberry Wensleydale was the first cranberry cheese. Fruited cheeses definitely started as an English trend."

At the extreme end of the English dessert cheese spectrum is Coombe Castle's

Stiltons remaining strong in the market and farmhouse Cheddars forever growing as a category. "There is still a lot of growth in blended cheese," CFB's Walley observes. "At the same time, there is a parallel trend of smaller farmhouse cheeses. They are both paralleling each other as cheeses become more popular."

Atlanta Foods International's Jay sees the return to farmstead cheesemaking reaching beyond the United Kingdom. "I think it's a

worldwide movement of cheese companies to get back to their roots," he says. "I don't know if it's necessarily a British thing. I think a lot of it has to do with eating local and eating handcrafted foods. It's more the ecological impact and eating sustaining foods versus a trend that people are trying to do. It's what the consumers are wanting and what the planet needs." On a personal note, AFI's Jay adds, "I'm really glad to see that Cheddar is coming back." **DB**

**"THERE IS STILL  
A LOT OF GROWTH  
IN BLENDED CHEESE.  
AT THE SAME  
TIME, THERE IS A  
PARALLEL TREND OF  
SMALLER FARMHOUSE  
CHEESES. THEY ARE  
BOTH PARALLELING  
EACH OTHER..."**

—Maria Walley  
*Cheese From Britain*

Sticky Toffee from England, a sweet Cheddar-style cheese blended with toffee, dates and raisins. "It's gone beyond fruit. It's candy," Walley says. "I don't know that it has influenced anything in America yet."

Mark Rosen, president of Rosen Specialty Foods LLC, Chicago, IL, sees the additive trend heading in the opposite direction. The company's brand, Sugar River Cheese Co., produces flavored Cheddar and Monterey Jack cheeses from Wisconsin milk. "Frankly, I think the typical American flavored hard cheese palate is more comfortable with savory or spicy flavors rather than sweet," Rosen says.

England satisfies this craving with an assortment of blended cheeses containing mustard seeds, chives, caramelized onions, pickled onions and even curry from Thailand.

While British producers continue to churn out unexpected—yet wildly popular—cheese combinations, they never abandon the cheeses that launched them into superstardom, with coop-produced Blue

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# FIVE WAYS DELIS CAN CASH IN ON ETHNIC FOODS

Take a proactive approach to generate income from global cuisines

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

**E**thnic foods are hot. According to the Washington, DC-based National Restaurant Association's (NRA) 2007 "What's Hot, What's Not" survey, member chefs of the American Culinary Federation ranked Ethnic Fusion, Latin American and Mediterranean as the three most popular cuisine styles.

And according to the Arlington, VA-based Food Marketing Institute's (FMI) *U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends, 2007*, 17 percent of shoppers prepare or eat ethnic meals one or more times a week. Recognizing the lucrative potential of this segment, international retailer Whole Foods Market incorporated hot and cold bars with world cuisine selections into its innovative store layout in Oakland, CA.

Oldways Preservation Trust, the nonprofit food think tank headquartered in Boston, MA, is keenly aware of these trends. Oldways developed the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid. "We've seen a huge increase in New Americans over the last few decades," says K. Dun Gifford, Oldways' founder and president. "These immigrants have brought their cuisine styles to the United States, and mainstream Americans have discovered how flavorful these dishes are. It's really been transforming."

Deli operators who understand their customer demographics are in a prime position to align their product mix with culinary



trends and compete effectively with foodservice operations. This can be a boon to retailers' deli sales during these recessionary times.

## 1. Build A Mediterranean Meal Set

Small plates, tapas and mezze collectively rank fourth out of 194 food items in the NRA's "What's Hot, What's Not" survey.

This group of "small bites"—popular in the Mediterranean—can be used to form the basis of a special merchandising area either behind the deli service counter or in the grab-and-go case.

The key is to select items that fit together to make a meal. "Hummus, tabbouleh, bruschetta, chickpea salad and stuffed grape leaves can all be used to build a Mediterranean set in the service deli, with items priced by the pound so customers can purchase as much or as little as they want or need," says Dominick Frocione, vice president of sales, Cedar's Mediterranean Foods, Bradford, MA. "This makes good use of space and encourages multiple purchases. You can also cross-merchandise breads like pitas, pita chips and tortillas for wraps in front of the case."

Vars Injijian, vice president of sales and marketing, Karoun Dairies Inc., Sun Valley, CA, also suggests including string cheese, Feta and soft yogurt as part of the Mediterranean set. The advantage of selling these items behind the glass "is that you can make a nice presentation and entice customers as if they were selecting from a restaurant's buffet," Injijian says.

In April, Cedar's Mediterranean Foods introduced a new line of tzatziki, a traditional Greek recipe that contains yogurt, cucumber, garlic, olive oil and lemon juice. It's served as a salad, spread or dip. Packaged in 12-ounce containers, the product comes in five flavors: French onion, tomato basil, roasted



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red pepper, Greek-style and cucumber garlic.

"This is a diverse line that appeals to a traditional as well as a whole new customer base," Frocione says. "Some retailers put the tzatziki along with several other Mediterranean mezze in olive bars to create more of a meal center. This is preferable to a salad bar, as you can often get a higher ring on items in an olive bar."

At Central Market in Austin, TX, one of H-E-B's stores in its upscale eight-store chain, heat-and-serve "Dinners for Two" are featured in the grab-and-go case in the Café on the Run department. All of the dinners include an entrée and side dishes. One of the meals on the menu is a Greek Mezze Dinner, which includes lemon garlic chicken breast, Greek salad, tabbouleh, red pepper hummus and Parmesan focaccia bread.

In the deli area at Zingerman's Deli, Ann Arbor, MI, a variety of salads take their cues from Greece and Cyprus. For example, the Mediterranean Experience combines house-made hummus, Greek Feta cheese, Spanish piquilla peppers, Italian artichokes, Kalamata olives, oven-dried tomatoes and cucumbers. The Cyprus Salad features grilled halloumi, a tasty, salty cheese from the island of Cyprus, as well as Kalamata olives, red onions and tomatoes tossed with the deli's own Greek

dressing. Customers can customize these salads by adding chicken or tuna salad, chicken breast, peppered or smoked bacon, smoked or roasted turkey or ham for an additional cost.

One of the ways Bristol Farms, a 12-store chain based in Carson, CA, merchandises its Mediterranean cuisine is as a party platter. Marinated mushrooms, fresh Mozzarella, artichoke hearts, Feta cheese, prosciutto, marinated chicken skewers, Kalamata olives and sun-dried tomato dip comprise the platter, which serves 15 to 20 people and is accompanied by breadsticks.

## 2. Stock And Use Authentic Cheeses

Queso is king when it comes to Hispanic cheeses. According to the Madison, WI-based International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association's (IDDBA), *What's In Store 2008*, Hispanic cheeses are no longer a niche market as an increasing number of non-Hispanic consumers are using such cheeses in preparing their meals. Queso Blanco, a mild flavored white cheese typically used in making enchiladas and chili rellenos, is gaining a tremendous following. Sales of this cheese in terms of dollars increased 44.6 percent while the volume of sales increased 89.7 percent in 2006, according to the U.S. Department of

Agriculture (USDA) Economic Research Service's report, *Per Capita Consumption of Selected Cheese Varieties, 1970-2006*.

While first-generation Mexican-Americans may not shop at mainstream supermarkets, second and third generations of Mexican-Americans are patronizing grocery stores to do their weekly shopping, says Cindy Jensen, sales and marketing manager, Colorado Ranchers Dairy Products Inc. The Brush, CO-based company manufactures the Queso Campesino brand of cheese. "How many times do you see delis use shredded Cheddar cheese to top burritos, quesadillas or enchiladas? This isn't in the Mexican repertoire," Jensen says. "Using authentic Mexican cheeses is a way to entice and pull these shoppers into the deli."

Queso Fresco is Colorado Ranchers' best-selling cheese. "It's a Farmer's type cheese that can be crumbled over enchiladas, rice and beans, and salads, which can then be merchandised for heat-and-eat in the deli cold case," Jensen says.

Other popular Mexican cheeses in the company's line include Panela, a firm cheese similar in texture to Mozzarella, and Cotija, the Hispanic version of Parmesan cheese.

Deli operators can appeal to "crossover" customers—non-Hispanic Americans who would like to sample bona fide ethnic cheeses—by offering smaller blocks or chunks. This way, consumers won't feel they are spending too much money on something they may not buy again.

Karoun Dairies packages its products in smaller sizes with those consumers in mind. "We've packaged our Mediterranean, Armenian, Russian, Eastern European and Arabic cheeses for the mainstream market by converting them to smaller or eight-ounce packages," says Karoun Dairies' Injijian. "The margin potential is higher in retail stores, more so than in smaller ethnic mom-and-pop markets, so the incentive is there."

Authenticity in cooking is big these days, Injijian adds. "A deli might want to carry six or seven varieties of Feta," he suggests. "Each region in the Mediterranean reflects a different flavor profile. Sevan tastes sharp, Brinza is sweeter and aromatic, Larissa is tangy, and Mykonos is a pickled feta."

## 3. Match Chicken With Ethnic Sides

According to the Perishables Group's FreshFacts data, as reported in the IDDBA's *What's In Store 2008*, chicken represents the largest segment in the deli category of prepared foods with a 22.3 percent share in 2006. This presents delis with an opportunity to boost side dish sales when merchandising rotisserie chicken, chicken tenders and chicken pieces.

The advertisement for CIBAO MEAT PRODUCTS is divided into two main sections. The top section shows a family—a man, a woman, and two children—sitting around a table outdoors, enjoying a meal. The bottom section displays a variety of CIBAO meat products, including several large rotisserie chickens, various packaged meats in cans and bags, and a platter of sliced meats. The CIBAO logo is prominently displayed at the top center of the ad. Text overlays include "The Tradition Continues..." on the left and "MADE IN USA" at the bottom left. The website "www.cibaomeat.com" and a phone number "For Sales Order Call: 718.993.5072" are at the bottom right.





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According to Edgar Soto, vice president of sales and marketing, Cibao Meat Products Inc., Bronx, NY, many consumers think all Hispanic foods are hot and spicy. “Yes, we do have a jalapeño flavor, but our meats in general are not so much hot as they are flavorful,” he explains.

Hispanic-style poultry calls for complementary sides as an added attraction. “Delis need to expand their menu, add something unique to go with chicken,” Soto says. “For example, side dishes such as rice and beans or yellow rice made with our fully cooked salami product.”

Cedar’s Mediterranean Foods’ Frocione recommends hummus as another rotisserie chicken go-with. “Instead of potato salad or macaroni salad like every other deli, pitch a container of hummus to go along with a chicken,” he says.

Cibao often uses a pre-price program to help merchandise its products. “We’ve done this in New York and other markets,” he says. “It’s an everyday low price or ongoing sale. For example, we print the price right on the label. Consumers see it as a perceived value that’s subject to an individual retailer’s mark-up. We offer stores an allowance for carrying the product.”

The company also prints recipe brochures to give customers ideas about how to prepare less costly, quick-and-easy recipes at home. These brochures can be set right on the deli counter.

#### 4. Spice Up Mini Meals

Non-Hispanic Americans have helped propel the popularity of Mexican foods in the deli. “This consumer group generally first experiences Mexican cuisine with, say, nachos or quesadillas, in a foodservice setting,” says Bill Parker, executive vice president of Don Miguel Mexican Foods, Inc., Anaheim, CA. “After that introduction they tend to move deeper into the category and look for items that are more authentic.”

In response to consumer demand, the company introduced a line of empanadas in five flavors for the cold case. Also, new are family-size, or 12- to 15-ounce trays of flautas, mini tacos and mini empanadas.

“These are ideal to merchandise as hand-held mini meals geared toward light lunches or to take to parties,” Parker says. “Operators can also merchandise these foods in the service deli and price by the pound.”

The biggest challenge Don Miguel Mexican Foods faces is getting a permanent slot in the deli for its products, especially when they generate sales of other items for the deli. “We’ve done market basket studies and found that customers who buy our items also buy cheeses, sauces and dips, like gua-

camole, to go with them—all leading to a bigger ring,” Parker says.

Similarly, tortillas—or wraps as they are more commonly called—have garnered wide appeal among U.S. consumers and beg to be accompanied by any number of fillings. “Tortillas are no longer strictly Mexican food products,” says Brian Jacobs, vice president of operations, Tumaro’s Gourmet Tortillas,



PHOTO COURTESY OF DELALLO

Los Angeles, CA. “Today, they are a bread replacement that lend themselves to any number of applications.”

One of the most popular ways tortillas are used in the deli is for making quesadillas. “This is along the lines of a panini or hand-held sandwich,” Jacobs says.

Delis that want to differentiate themselves can use flavored tortillas. Tumaro’s flavored tortillas, which also contain whole grain and organic ingredients, include honey wheat, pesto and garlic, and chipotle chile.

“The cost is more, maybe in the 10- to 20-cents range, but the product is more unique, and customers are usually willing to pay more for this,” Jacobs says.

#### 5. Go Global With Dips

According to the IDDBA’s *What’s In Store 2008*, hummus is now produced by 80 companies and sales increased by 25 percent last year. It’s targeted to be the next salsa as a popular dip.

“Hummus is flying off the chart,” says Cedar’s Mediterranean Foods’ Frocione. “Growth has been double digit and sustained. One of the reasons is the full flavor that hummus has. Not all healthy foods can claim this attribute.”

In addition to its original flavor of hummus, the company offers a wide variety of

flavors, including artichoke Kalamata, roasted red pepper, and sun-dried tomato and basil.

When eaten as a dip, hummus needs a carrier. Therefore, it makes sense to cross-merchandise it with crackers, pita chips, breads or cut vegetables.

Rodrigo Troni, chief marketing officer, Sabra/Blue & White Foods LLC, Astoria, NY, recommends highlighting the nutritional

value of hummus. “Consumers can see the value of these products as healthful micro-meals and snacks on an everyday basis rather than just for entertaining or parties,” he says.

Fermented milk products containing potentially beneficial bacteria or yeasts are starting to gain more notice. Karoun Dairies’ cultured cheese Labne falls into this category. “Probiotics are big now,” Injijian says. “Labne is made from draining the whey from slightly salted yogurt so it’s spreadable. People make dips out of it instead of high-fat ingredients such as sour cream.”

The company’s new line of labne dips include such flavors as garden vegetable, Mediterranean olive, chipotle-jalapeño, blueberry, banana and açai. Açai is the berry that grows on an Amazon palm tree and has been dubbed a “super fruit” because of its nutritional content.

“Last year, Costco in the Northeast tried our labne dip in a 24-ounce container on an experimental basis,” Injijian says. “The first Saturday of the demo, sales skyrocketed. While it didn’t catch on enough to reach the threshold of sales they wanted for permanent shelf space, Costco did agree to put it into regular rotation. So, as consumers continue to see it and sample it, I think sales will eventually be huge.”

**DB**





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# Selling The Story Of Cheese



PHOTO COURTESY OF WHOLE FOODS MARKET

Large retailers adapt  
small-store practices to  
tally sales from  
curious consumers

BY ELIZABETH BLAND



ONCE UPON A TIME, before the age of broadline grocery and major club stores, cheese was primarily produced and sold locally. There was no such thing as specialty cheese; the cheese came from nearby farms.

And no one needed a shelf-talker or cheese guru to learn about cheese; consumers knew the cheese types well and judged them using their basic senses. More often than not, the cheesemaker was the person responsible for handing out samples, spreading the word and selling the cheese. Cheese was part of local oral tradition—in both taste and tale.





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Large retailers sprang from farmers' markets and mom-and-pop shops. These "mam-moths" eventually positioned themselves as primary cheese sources, with shelves dominated by bland, industrial cheeses. However, today's growing interest in specialty and artisanal fare is driving large stores to include more specialty cheeses in their lineups. At the same time, larger retailers are adopting a small-store mentality to effectively merchandise specialty cheeses.

The difference among small, medium and large stores lies partly in how the cheese department operates. Is there a visible cut-and-wrap station? Can consumers speak with a knowledgeable salesperson? Are cheeses available for tasting? As the U.S. palate becomes more sophisticated, consumers expect variety, custom service and product education.

One challenge facing larger retailers is how to provide a taste of Old World charm and tradition while keeping labor, prices and shrink to a minimum. With this challenge comes the delicate balancing act of carefully introducing new, exotic cheeses to the case—products that require support through unconventional merchandising and promotional methods.

A lesser-known cheese risks blending into



**Cheesemaker Bruce Workman draws crowds with his 180-pound Big Wheel Emmenthaler.**

the crowd and dying on the shelf. It survives only through its story and, of course, its good taste. "Specialty cheeses often have amazing

stories," says Byron Hanson, director of deli and foodservice for Lunds and Byerly's, Lund Food Holdings Inc., Edina, MN. Lund Food Holdings owns and operates 10 Lunds and 11 Byerly's supermarkets in the metropolitan Minneapolis, MN, area.

"People love to hear the stories of cheese," Hanson continues. "There is the hand-making, the care that goes into it, the quest to go back to the land, and the nature and nurture." Every cheese tells a story, but with no mouth—and only occasional eyes—cheese cannot speak for itself. The burden of promotion lies on the retailer.

### Stocking And Organizing Cheese

By creating a buzz in the cheese department, large retailers can accommodate cheese-curious consumers and maximize sales via specialty items. The first step, however, is to assemble a selection of cheese varieties to stimulate interest and sales.

Each store or chain has its own purchasing philosophy. One common belief is to create a core based on famous imported cheeses, such as Parmigiano-Reggiano, Roquefort, Gruyère, Brie, English Cheddar and Manchego. From this platform, stores can gradually add new cheeses as consumer interest and comfort levels increase.

Another approach—one that has been adopted by some major club stores—is to keep a small base of core items in stock, but rotate a large group of peripheral ones. "Club stores have the right idea," says Fred Chesman, vice president of the cheese depart-



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ment, Atlanta Corp., Elizabeth, NJ. "There is a tremendous amount of rotation. They sell it and then they bring in a whole new set of items besides the core stock. It probably keeps the interest of the consumer up, but if somebody likes it, they won't be able to find it again until the next shot."

Others recommend that retailers stock a sizable lineup from the get-go. "Variety is what sells specialty cheese," asserts Doug Jay, president, Atlanta Foods International Inc. (AFI), Atlanta, GA. However, this big bang theory does not work for every cheese. "You have to be careful with the shelf life of what you bring in," he says, adding that firmer pre-cut wedges in Cryovac packaging lower the shrink risk without compromising variety. "The pack size is important. A lot of good distributors like Atlanta Foods sell everything in five-pound boxes. It limits your inventory, but increases your variety. The key is to have a lot of items and not a lot of shrink. You can have great variety with good shelf-life items, but you must pick carefully with soft-ripened cheeses."

Once the fancy new cheeses arrive at the store, retailers face the daunting task of setting the case. Is it best to organize by country and region, by cheese type or a little

of both? Traditionally, cheese cases are organized by country of origin. This approach is especially effective in stores catering to con-

**"THE KEY IS TO HAVE  
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CAREFULLY WITH SOFT-  
RIPENED CHEESES."**

—Doug Jay  
*Atlanta Foods International*

sumers who travel to Europe and return to the United States in search of the cheese they tasted in Tuscany.

On the flip side, with the proliferation of both domestic and imported cheeses, it is difficult for consumers to find their target cheese type among seven countries and 200 items—so difficult that some stores have installed computerized touch pads for product searches. "You really want to do it by type or variety," says John Rodger, Atlanta's vice president of cheese and specialty deli. "If you do it by country, then you have to fish around. You don't want to have your imported Cheddars here and your domestic Cheddars there. We have found the consumer really shops by type. If they like one, then they might come back and try something else the next time."

According to Hanson, Lunds and Byerly's stores merchandise cheese by both category and country. "It's easy for a lot of customers to go with Italian and Spanish," says Hanson. However, it's important to group together store-cut cheeses with volatile molds to avoid cross-contamination. "Blue has to sit aside for the nasty mold, and Bries have to go together," Hanson says.

#### Telling And Spreading The Story

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## The 'Crack' Heard Around The World



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Some large retailers, such as Austin, TX-based Whole Foods Market, have taken the art of merchandising specialty cheese to record-breaking proportions. On April 12, 2008, the “crack” heard around the world wasn’t a catastrophic earthquake, but the simultaneous opening of aged Parmigiano-Reggiano wheels in 270 Whole Foods Market stores in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. As the stores “broke open the happiness” to honor the tradition of this beloved cheese, Whole Foods Market was going for an original record in the *Guinness World Records Book*. Under the watchful eye of official judges from Guinness, the 24-month-aged wheels, each weighing 85 pounds, were cracked open within 30 minutes.

The Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano-Reggiano in Reggio Emilia, Italy, supplied five different official knives for the occasion—the same kind of knives used by its 437-member dairies that produce the cheese. The process of cracking open the wheels is done using a traditional method called a “rock cut,” which leaves the internal crystalline structure and crumbly texture of the cheese wheel intact. Opening the wheels in this manner adds to the artisan and natural history of the product.

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"Obviously, we are proud of this original initiative," says consortium chairman Giuseppe Alai, who notes that Whole Foods Market is well-known for its rigorous selection of natural foods.

"Every year, Whole Foods Market buyers visit our production area and hand-pick the wheels they want for their chain, based on the best organoleptic profiles," Alai says. "They know the producers personally and, in the selected dairies, they choose the cheese and directly supervise the two-year maturation process."

Italian artisans, whose cheesemaking prowess and methods date back almost 800 years, have passed down art of making Parmigiano-Reggiano from generation to generation. Authentic Parmigiano-Reggiano is made only in one area of Northern Italy, which includes Reggio Emilia, Parma, Modena, and portions of Bologna and Mantua. Parmigiano-Reggiano is made from the milk of cows fed only with grasses from this area, plus carefully controlled natural vegetable feed. The cheese is 100 percent natural and additive-free.

During production, the future rind is impressed with the number of the "caseificio," or cheese house, and the production date. The oval brand certification mark and the words "Parmigiano-Reggiano" are spelled out in pin dots on the rind only after professional testers have determined that the cheese measures up to the standards established by Italian and European laws, which are enforced by the Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano-Reggiano.

"In a world of mass-produced food products, we are proud to offer a true handcrafted work of art," says Cathy Strange, global cheese buyer for Whole Foods Market. "We choose the richest cheese made from the best spring and fall milk. Then our chosen wheels are carefully aged and hand-tended for a full two years to bring out the desirable 'pleasant fireworks' on the tongue."

These taste sensations can be nutty, sweet, grassy, creamy, grainy or fruity in nature. Known for its grating characteristics, the cheese also can be eaten in small wedges or bite-size pieces, and used in countless recipes. It particularly shines when combined with prosciutto di Parma, honey-drizzled pears, a creamy risotto, tomato sauces, and of course, wines from Italy. **DB**

"small store" within the cheese department. Retailers should place a cheese expert in the department to guide consumers in their choices and routinely provide samples. But if hiring a full-time cheese representative is not an option, demonstration programs are just as effective. Cheese demos bring consumers in for a feast of samples, storytelling and socializing. To build a loyal following in the cheese department, a weekly demo schedule with regular hours would be ideal, although

monthly programs are also effective.

"The most basic way of introducing any specialty cheese is introducing the customer to where the product is produced—the history, the traditions, what sets that particular product apart from any other cheese," says Lou DiPalo, co-owner of DiPalo's Fine Foods, based in New York, NY. "Consumers seek out such stores not only to shop, but also to learn."

Large retailers are emulating the kind of



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merchandising typically associated with specialty stores, such as artisan cheese shop Fromagination in Madison, WI. The store recently invited the public to see and taste a 180-pound Big Wheel Emmentaler crafted by Edelweiss Creamery in Monticello, WI. Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker Bruce Workman uses a traditional copper-lined vat imported from Switzerland to make this “real” Swiss cheese with eyes the size of a quarter. “What most people know today as Swiss cheese has eyes only about the size of a nickel,” Workman says.

Hanson of Lunds and Byerly’s organizes theme-based demos and cheese events, one of which is “Meet the Maker,” featuring local cheesemakers. “No one will have more passion than the person who makes the product and is selling it,” Hanson explains. He also arranges for local chefs to visit the stores and make dishes with the cheesemaker’s cheese during the demo.

A bustling demo table generates a friendly atmosphere and passionate “foodie” conversation—followed by repeat visits and new customers. Sal DiPalo, Lou’s brother and co-owner of DiPalo’s, notices that when consumers at their specialty store taste samples together, they recommend cheeses to each other. “They feel safe because the other cus-

tommer has nothing to gain from it,” he says.

Large retailers are finding the same to be true of their customers at their sampling

**“MEET THE MAKER”  
DEMOS FEATURE  
LOCAL CHEESEMAKERS.  
“NO ONE WILL HAVE  
MORE PASSION THAN  
THE PERSON WHO  
MAKES THE PRODUCT  
AND IS SELLING IT.”**

—Byron Hanson  
Lunds and Byerly’s

events. “People want something they can show to their friends and say, ‘Look what I found!’” Hanson says. “They can become

the new Martha Stewart on their block.”

Some demos also come in the form of themed flight tastings. Customers experience firsthand the different ages of Manchego and Pecorino Toscano, or they sample cheeses of a certain type such as Blue Cheeses. Flight tastings create opportunities to usher in lesser-known cheeses by grouping them with others of the same style or nationality.

One of Hanson’s most elaborate cheese promotions is called the “Art of Affinage.” A simple display table transforms into an Italian cheese museum with gold-framed photos of cheeses, plus a box explaining affinage. “We made it look like an art museum,” he says. “Minneapolis is a very sophisticated market.”

**Pairings And Props For  
In-Store Merchandising**

Often distributors and importers offer demos and product training as part of cheese promotions. Funding also can come from government organizations such as the Italian Trade Commission, which helps Italian food manufacturers promote their products in the United States. For instance, the Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano-Reggiano and the Consorzio del Prosciutto di Parma have joined forces to promote Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese and Parma Ham in U.S. super-

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## Up, Up And Away

Think outside the balloon—that's one of the merchandising strategies Beemster USA, Elizabeth, NJ, is employing with its Hot Air Balloon Educational Tour and participation in balloon festivals across the United States. Michael Evan Blum, director, Beemster USA, is a licensed balloon pilot as well as Rebecca Elkins, a former schoolteacher who conducts Beemster's motivational and educational seminars geared for first- to sixth-graders.

"The educational tour is not really about cheese," Blum explains. "It's about learning the history and science of ballooning, the value of eating healthy foods, and achieving goals. Rebecca calls the balloon presentation 'her toolbox of wisdom' and part of her message is telling students they can achieve anything in life."

In April, Beemster's Betty Bovine balloon visited schools in South Florida and participated in the Miami Sunrise Balloon Festival, where Lee Smith, publisher/editorial director of *Delhi Business*, and advertising salesperson Richard Purcaro experienced firsthand the thrill of "up, up and away..."

"I was amazed at the turnout of people for this event," Purcaro says. "I enjoyed the peacefulness of floating above the landscape. It takes a lot of skill to maneuver a balloon and land in the right spot."

Throughout the year, the balloon makes appearances at numerous festivals. "The Beemster balloon can't be any more branded," Blum says. "It gives a lot of legitimacy to the Beemster brand, it's fun and it receives a lot of news coverage. At the same time, I wanted the balloon educational tour to make a difference and inspire kids, and it has done that."

DB




PHOTOS COURTESY OF BEEMSTER USA

markets through in-store demos, trade training and other programs. These country- and region-based pairings create opportunities for cross-merchandising products throughout the year.

Cheeses need not restrict themselves to the cheese department, either. Hard, low-moisture cheeses can wander all over the store, even to areas without refrigeration, and soft cheese cuts can find a home in cold cases. The produce department promotes seasonal fruits and vegetables, and these products serve as fodder for many cross-merchandising ideas. A demo of freshly picked strawberries with creamy Brie or sweet watermelon sprinkled with salty Feta is hard for consumers to resist.

"Put some Parmigiano-Reggiano with Italian bread in the bakery, some aged Gouda with the apples, or Blue Cheese with hamburgers in the meat department," suggests AFI's Jay. Strategically placed ingredients—especially those with recipe cards—increase sales in all departments.



Whether cheeses are freshly cut for immediate sale or pre-packaged for longer shelf life, their presentation should always convey freshness to consumers. "A lot of people will put out a full wheel with pieces sitting on top," Atlanta's Rodger says. "The consumer has the impression that the cheese has just been freshly cut. Then you just



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rotate the cuts and the wheels. It really gives the case that specialty appeal."

Making the cheese case look less sterile and more Old World in feel will also draw customers looking for something new. Classic props used in staging the scene include straw mats for showcasing the cheese, woven baskets filled with cuts, and large, rustic barrels placed as endcaps. Accessorizing the cheese with wine bottles, salami, fruit and crackers promotes impulse buys.

Sometimes, cheese props can just be plain fun, such as Beamster's blue-and-white Betty Bovine cow. "It makes the cheese department a destination," enthuses Michael Evan Blum, director, Beamster USA, Jersey City, NJ. "You have to make merchandising cheese fun."

The cow in front of the company's building in the Netherlands inspired Blum to take the cow theme inside retailers' stores. "I thought, 'Let's take this further into the store. Let's do more of this,'" he explains.

Although some high-end retailers may question the presence of a blue-and-white cow in their stores, "it does help attract people to the cheese department," Blum says. "We've had people ask where they can buy one of the cows, and the kids love it." Betty Bovine also is prominently featured on

Beamster's hot air balloon, which the company uses for educational and corporate branding purposes (see sidebar on page 75).

With or without props, large chain stores can communicate with customers by written word about the specialty cheeses they carry. Descriptive labels, shelf-talkers, recipe cards, and point-of-sale displays with colorful photos, cheese stories and pairing ideas can entice consumers. These materials can be made in-house or requested from suppliers, distributors and importers. Other popular mouthpieces are "employee pick" and "customer pick" signs.

And never discount word-of-mouth advertising—an intangible asset to any specialty cheese department. "My father always said the best advertisement is your customers," says Lou DiPalo. "If you can convince one customer, that customer is going to go and convince three more."

Specialty cheese merchandising and promotion can be both creative and practical for stores of all sizes. The key is to present the specialty cheese department as just that—special. "You want the cheese shop to be like a speed bump in the store," Atlanta Foods' Jay says. "You want people to stop and take a look." Stop, look and listen to what the cheese has to say. **DB**

## Perfect Pairings For Merchandising Cheese

**M**arketing cheese with complementary products is one of the most effective ways to increase profits and raise consumer awareness about the types of cheeses available in the deli—either in the specialty cheese case or behind the deli service counter. Moreover, perfect pairings enhance the cheese tasting experience and convey a certain level of expertise on the part of the deli staff.

To help take the guesswork of the pairing process, the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board (WMMB) has published a simple guide titled, *Heightened Taste: Cheese Pairing Guide*. The guide features seven different cheese categories—soft/fresh, soft-ripened, blue-veined, semi-soft, Hispanic-style, semi-hard and hard—and the different foods and beverages that complement the cheeses in each category. Here's a sampling of some perfect pairings from the booklet:

Soft/Fresh cheeses, such as Mascarpone, Ricotta, Feta and other original cheeses, go well with honey, maple syrup, extra virgin olive oil, sea salt, bread and edamame.

Soft-ripened cheeses like Brie and Camembert find companions in warm pistachios, sun-dried tomatoes, pickled white asparagus and ginger thins.

Blue-veined cheeses, which include Blue Cheese, Gorgonzola and other varieties, lend character to cardamom roasted pears, nut brittle and crystallized ginger.

Semi-soft cheeses, comprising Fontina, Havarti, Muenster, Monterey Jack and others, pair well with roasted mushrooms, roasted asparagus, sugared hazelnuts, and winter fruit compote.

Hispanic-style cheeses, such as Queso Fresco, Queso Blanco, Asadero, Cotija and Manchego, complement the flavors of hot salsa, roasted spiced olives and juicy clementines.

Crackers also are essential to the tasting experience, and the variety on store shelves today offers limitless possibilities for showcasing different cheeses. These range from traditional favorites, such as water and wheat crackers, to popular Mediterranean styles, such as flatbreads, lavosh and pita chips.

Above all, cheese pairings should excite the senses and capture the imagination. With a little know-how, delis can give cheese sales a "wedge" up. **DB**

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# The Evolution Of Food Bars

Food bars are changing the deli landscape as busy consumers look for more meal options

BY LISA WHITE

**R**estaurants introduced salad bars in the late 1960s, and since then, the concept has evolved from a simple salad station into a multi-faceted food bar. What's more, food bars are changing the landscape of supermarket delis, where millions of Americans go for quick-and-easy meals. With so many people juggling hectic schedules, the deli food bar has forever transformed putting a meal on the table. It seems food bars have become entrenched in American culture and continue to grow in size and offerings.

"Consumers are getting more and more pressed for time," says Mark Phelps, vice president, Kent, WA-based InnovAsian Cuisine. "They place a premium on quality foods they can eat quickly. They know what they want—and want it fast. Subway has raised the bar on customization. Food bars let consumers choose what they want to take home for a price per pound."

Because of this cultural change, it is fitting that self-service food bars are gaining a foothold in today's supermarket deli departments. According to a recent survey by Chicago, IL-based Technomic Information Services, consumers are increasingly turning to supermarket delis for their meal choices, and the trend is expected to continue. More than half (55 percent) of consumers surveyed reported purchasing ready-to-eat or ready-to-heat foods from supermarket delis







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at least once per month. About 17 percent reported they do so once per week.

Young adults could be the driving force behind future growth in supermarket deli sales. The Technomic survey found that consumers 18 to 34 years of age are significantly more likely to purchase food from supermarket delis than people age 35 and older.

"Food bar shoppers are mainly from busy dual-income households where time is just as valuable as money," says Kathy Lenkov, communications manager for Nestlé USA FoodServices, Glendale, CA. "They are not the least expensive places to purchase food, but price is less of a concern for these consumers. They are focused on food quality and variety."

### Capitalizing On Food Bars

Large chains, such as Wegmans and Whole Foods Market, are not the only retailers profiting from food bars. Real Food Market & Deli, a single-store natural foods supermarket in Helena, MT, maintains a hot food bar daily in its deli. It is open for lunch from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and for dinner from 5 to 7:30 p.m. Brunch is also featured on weekends from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The store's extensive lunch selection includes such dishes as Kung Pao chicken, linguini with clam sauce, veggie alfredo and black bean enchiladas. Dinners are equally impressive and consist of comfort foods the likes of country beef with broccoli and chicken tetrazzini as well as more sophisticated fare like Cajun catfish and orange duck.

In the central St. Louis, MO, area, City Grocers caters to downtown workers with its hot breakfast food bar. Customers will find quiche, honey ham, bacon and even a breakfast burrito—each sold by the pound.

At Heinen's, a 17-store chain based in Warrensville Heights, OH, the salad bar is not just about salads. "We have roughly 65 items in the salad bar, which is either positioned by the café or near the produce

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MAY NOT KNOW WHAT  
IS HEALTHY TO EAT AT  
A RESTAURANT, THEY  
HAVE A BETTER  
PERCEPTION OF WHAT  
IS HEALTHY TO EAT AT  
A FOOD BAR."**

—Kathy Lenkov  
Nestlé USA Foodservices

department," says Mario Grazia, produce merchandiser. The 16- to 20-foot long salad bar is so large, it's considered a department by itself.

Deli items in this food bar include turkey as well as a variety of cheeses, such as shredded Cheddar, Mozzarella, cottage cheese, a shaved Parmesan/Romano Caesar blend, Feta and Blue Cheese crumbles. Roasted peppers are another popular item. In addition, the salad bar includes a three-bean

salad, grilled vegetables, tuna salad and crab-meat salad. Adjoining the salad bar is the soup bar, which provides a choice of three varieties that are made on-site daily. The soups prepared for the salad bar range from clam chowder and chicken noodle to chili and stuffed pepper.

"About a year and a half ago, we redid our salad bar mix," Grazia says. "We added new items like cheeses and roasted peppers. We also stopped including some deli items, like mayonnaise-based pasta salads, to emphasize healthier oil-based salads. We switched from canola to olive oil. In addition, granola and yogurt were added to the fruit section. Now, we're talking about adding grilled chicken to this area."

Heinen's also features an olive bar near the deli comprising high-end and imported varieties, in addition to roasted peppers and artichokes. Heinen's distinctive food bars have "a point of difference," Grazia says. "While our competition emphasizes deli salads and canned items, we focus on fresh food and only use canned products that are necessary, like beets."

### Quality And Variety Key Factors

As food bars in supermarket delis compete with restaurants for consumer dollars, retailers need to focus on quality and variety. Traditional deli counters are moving away from counter items, such as side salads, to dishes containing fresh, premium ingredients with more upscale and bolder flavors.

This is more in line with what today's restaurants are offering. "Supermarkets are trying to compete with these restaurants," Nestlé's Lenkov explains. "While customers may not know what is healthy to eat at a restaurant, they have a better perception of





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what is healthy to eat at a food bar."

Quality should be first and foremost, followed by variety. "Offerings dictate retailers' success in this segment," Lenkov says. "Quality and presentation are the most important aspects."

Food bars are a key segment for Nestlé, and its Stouffers brand is geared for such programs. The newest additions to this brand include Chicken and Vegetable Rice Bake and Chicken and Pesto Penne.

Nestlé recently expanded its Stouffers

Lean Cuisine line to include Sesame Chicken and Orange Beef entrées, along with Vegetable Meatballs Melanzana and Penne. In addition, Nestlé's Hot Pockets products are showing up in food bars as grab-and-go options. "We have recently begun offering new products for a limited time with the Hot Pockets line," Lenkov says. "This is the first time we've done this with the brand in deli, and we plan to introduce new products every quarter."

Along with a greater emphasis on quality

and variety, today's food bars are more likely to offer a choice of organic, natural and sustainable products. Moody Dunbar's Roasted Pepper products fit into this category. "This line is ideally suited for upscale positioning," says president Stanley Dunbar, whose company is based in Johnson, TN. "Our roasted peppers are picked and processed within hours of harvest and in an audited Sustainable Agriculture Program."

These days, Americans are keen on U.S.-grown, quality products in their food bar selections. "Before consumers had to worry about tainted imported foods, there was a feeling that imports were somehow better," Dunbar says. "Today, we are finding more retailers want the assurance of American-grown quality products, while consumers want to know their food is safe as well as good tasting."

The popularity of ethnic fare is also influencing the mix of items in food bars. InnovAsian Cuisine has been promoting self-serve Asian hot food bars, and some retailers are using this segment as a stand-alone draw, such as Wegmans' Wokery program.

"Many Asian restaurants in the United States are set up to offer customers Asian dishes buffet-style," InnovAsian's Phelps says. "For this reason, consumers are familiar with this format."

Still, salad bars remain the most popular self-service bar in supermarkets. "Others we've been seeing are olive bars, wing bars, taco bars, Italian and pizza bars, soup bars, and comfort food bars that include such items as chicken, mashed potatoes, and mac and cheese," Phelps says.

### Olive And Antipasto Bars

Olive bars, in particular, have been part of deli sections since the early 1990s. "Thanks to the rising interest in Mediterranean cooking, imported olives and other staples of the Mediterranean table have found their way beyond ethnic food stores into the mainstream and center of activity in the deli section," says Jeff Mezzetta, president of G.L. Mezzetta, an olive and antipasti supplier located in American Canyon, CA.

Olives and antipasto items are well suited to the self-service concept. "They offer the convenience of self-selection in exactly the quantities and combinations customers desire," Mezzetta says.

The company recently introduced Mediterranean Table, a self-service, free-standing antipasto-and-olive-bar concept. "Customers are migrating to quality ingredients and seek variety," explains Eric Lummis, G.L. Mezzetta's vice president, sales and marketing. "They want convenience and more healthful snack choices. The Mediter-

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reanean Table is about igniting this desire and creating new business. Our research indicates that the introduction of an antipasto bar can increase sales up to 300 percent."

To up the ante in sales, delis should stock olive and antipasto bars with a mix of items. "You want some core items that sell day in and day out," says Anthony DiPietro, vice president of George E. DeLallo Co. Inc., headquartered in Jeanette, PA. "But you also want variety, perhaps items that change with the seasons. Consumers want you to experiment and offer new products."

DeLallo offers a complete line of domestic, imported and Italian foods, including a wide assortment of olives and antipasti. According to DiPietro, 80 percent of the olive bar should remain static with core items, and 20 percent should change. Bright green Bella De Cerignola olives and deep black olives lend interesting contrast, while French olives, Black Nicoise olives and oil-cured olives offer different taste profiles.

"As far as antipasti, I would suggest stuffed grape leaves, Roman-style artichokes, roasted peppers—grilled or not grilled—artichoke salad and items that are tapas-related," DiPietro says.

FoodMatch, based in New York City, produces and imports approximately 400 items for food bars. Typically, the mix of a combined antipasto-and-olive bar is split 50-50, but "antipasti are tracking to be more popular than olives because these items are new and different," says William Voves, vice president, sales. While traditional food bars present anywhere from 18 to 24 items, smaller antipasto and olive bars feature olives, antipasti and pickles."

### Merchandising Sells

One of the biggest benefits food bars offer is merchandising capabilities. The eye appeal of a well-kept, fresh and fully stocked food bar attracts consumers more readily than packaged goods. Besides the food bar's

overall appearance, enticing smells and creative food presentations are essential to proper merchandising.

"The benefit of food bars is that consumers can purchase what they want in the quantity they desire quickly," says InnovAsian's Phelps, who recommends these units be positioned in high-traffic, impulse areas at the front of the store. "Having dedicated or express registers nearby also is a big plus."

Stores with self-service food bars are promoting a healthful, fresh image. "Food bars are a great way to position a supermarket deli as upscale and healthy," says Dunbar of Moody Dunbar. "Consumers who desire the freedom to select their own quantity of ingredients from a food bar get a sense of freshness and healthy goodness from a well-maintained food bar."

A deli also can become more of a destination with a food bar to lure consumers in and keep them coming back for more. "We have long-term customers who have had food bars for more than 10 years," says FoodMatch's Voves. "Many have expanded their bars from 12 to 90 pans."

Olive and antipasto bars, in particular, draw consumers because of their social aspect. By virtue of their interesting nature, these foods invite conversation. "Consumers will purchase items for everyday use, but also to take somewhere as a gift," DeLallo's DiPietro says.

Signage at the point-of-sale is an important element in educating customers about the products in the bar. DeLallo, for instance, offers a full line of point-of-sale materials, including easel boards, recipe boards and booklets containing pairing ideas, such as wines and cheeses. "We promote the healthy benefits of these foods," DiPietro says.

G.L. Mezzetta's signage indicates variety, origin, and wine and cheese pairing suggestions for items in olive bars. "Customers appreciate guidance in how to use specialty items," says Jane Curtis, G.L. Mezzetta's

business development manager, deli/olive bar. "It's amazing how a little education goes a long way in building trust and loyalty. Customers appreciate a retailer who helps them understand a product they may not be so familiar with. Information at the point-of-sale encourages trial and cross-selling and increases the ring."

FoodMatch also offers point-of-sale materials for pairing olives and cheeses, which include 10-minute recipes for customers to take home.

### Food Safety A Top Priority

When combining products, however, food safety should not be overlooked. InnovAsian's Phelps recommends that delis have a dedicated person in charge of the food bar to make sure it is well stocked, set at the proper temperatures and neat in appearance. "Monitoring temperatures and food holding times is critical," he says.

One of the biggest challenges in the food bar segment is controlling contamination and cross-contamination. "Customers will drop food in areas where it doesn't belong, so these areas need ongoing and constant attention," FoodMatch's Voves says.

Product dehydration is another food bar issue. "If retailers don't put enough brine in with the olives or oil in with a salad, and keep the product turned and moist, they will dehydrate, wrinkle and look unappetizing," Voves says.

Because dehydration costs retailers money, maintaining the integrity of the product is important. By hydrating food with an olive oil mister or applying oil to food while wearing rubber gloves, product will be protected from the air and keep its sheen. "If the food bar is taken care of, it can be one of the categories with the least amount of shrink. That is atypical of the deli department," Voves says.

Looking ahead, many predict the food bar segment will continue growing in U.S. supermarket delis. "This is a key growth area," Nestlé's Lenkov says. "These bars will become more sophisticated, as retailers add different food stations with a bigger variety of offerings."

And other customer-service changes may occur. "I foresee the more sophisticated retailers designating a separate area for these customers to pay for their food," Lenkov says. "They may even offer online ordering or drive-up service for added convenience."

According to DeLallo's DiPietro, new trends will come with the expansion of consumers' palates. "People are more educated and well-traveled, they watch the Food Network and travel channels, and have a level of familiarity with different products," he says.

The food bar segment continues to explode for FoodMatch. "We see more mainstream chains, like Kroger, adding significant equipment to this area," Voves says. "As suppliers bring more interesting items to food bars, it will create more demand. It also is a great margin maker for delis due to the lack of shrink."

DB



PHOTO COURTESY OF DELALLO

# Organic Deli Foods Posting Healthy Profits

Sales in this segment remain steady despite an ailing economy

BY BARBARA ROBISON

Organic food sales in grocery store delis continue to grow steadily despite a downturn in the economy's health. Categories such as organic crackers, pre-sliced meats and cheeses have been sales leaders, but other categories are showing potential. The Organic Trade Association (OTA), Greenfield, MA, a business association focusing on the organic business community in North America, points out in its *Food Facts* publication that more organic pasta sauces, salsa, fruit juices, soups, snack foods, teas and coffees are now available.

The OTA 2007 Manufacturers Survey reveals that sales of organic sausages/deli meat increased from \$30 million in 2005 to \$38 million in 2006. During the same period, organic refrigerated food sales increased from \$14 million in 2005 to \$15 million in 2006. The OTA has not yet released sales figures for 2007.

"We have seen a lot of interest in organic prepared and refrigerated foods," says OTA press secretary Barbara Haumann. "The movement toward more availability of these products was emphasized at the recent All Things Organic conference in Chicago."

According to the Madison, WI-based International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association's (IDDBA) report, *What's In Store 2008*, the availability of organic and natural foods in mainstream channels will continue to increase across all food channels, including supermarket delis.

La Farge, WI-based Organic Prairie, an independent cooperative of family farms that produces organic beef, pork and poultry products, reports the organic meat segment continues to make solid gains. "We feel that the downturn in the economy may slow some growth, but keep in mind the organic

meat market has been growing at 30-plus percent a year, so we still have strong growth, even with a slowdown," says Organic Prairie's general manager Tedd Heilmann. The company has developed a line of certified organic deli meats in resealable zipper packages to address consumer demand for convenient, wholesome deli meats.

In March 2008, Venus Wafers Inc., a Hingham, MA-based manufacturer of thin breads and crackers, posted a 78 percent increase in sales of its organic products. "We haven't seen a slowing in our organic sales; we're amazed at the dramatic increase in our flatbread sales," says chief operating officer Bill Ammerman. "The possible reasons for the sales surge are greater interest in Middle Eastern meals, flatbreads are healthy, and they fit into many menus. Also, more people are eating at home and are serving more healthy grain-type diets."

Likewise, Kracker Enterprises LLC, Dallas, TX, a manufacturer of crackers, biscuits and flatbreads, is tracking increased sales of its Dr. Kracker organic crackers, especially when displayed at salad bars. "Consumers want something to eat with their salad selections, and whole grain bread items are definitely popular," says George Eckrich, a partner in the company and the head of marketing. "Customers are looking for increased fiber and protein to add to diets for health reasons, and our whole grain organic crackers can help."

## Developing And Maintaining Core Customers

So, who are the people buying organic products and why? "The organic consumer



is belief-driven as opposed to price-driven, which allows for greater price elasticity," says Gina Asoudegan, marketing coordinator for Applegate Farms, Bridgewater, NJ. "Consumers understand that what they eat has more than just an effect on their health. It has environmental, social and economic implications as well, and they make their food choices based on this knowledge."

Applegate Farms' products include a full line of pork, beef, poultry and dry-cured organic deli meats as well as several organic cheeses. "Humane treatment is an important concern of our consumers," Asoudegan continues, "and they're willing to pay the higher price that's required for the products to be produced this way."



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Organic Prairie also caters to a loyal customer following. "We have found that core organic consumers are willing to buy organic meats regardless of the price because it is part of their belief system," Heilmann says. "Based on this, we may see some new consumer trials of organic meats decrease, but existing customers will remain loyal."

Flavor may still be the No. 1 consideration among organic food customers, but other factors are influencing their buying decisions,

according to Chad Pawlak, president of Organic Farms Marketing LLC, Thorpe, WI. The company produces organic milk, cheese and other dairy products under the Grass Point Farms brand.

"Products may meet the organic standards, but today's consumers have additional considerations in their definition of organic," Pawlak says. "Now we see definite increased interest in where the animals were bred, what they were fed, such as being

grass-fed, and how they were slaughtered."

Many retailers are targeting organic customers by introducing private label organic brands, such as Kroger's Naturally Preferred, Whole Foods Market's 365 Organic Everyday Value and Safeway's O Organics.

Consumers shopping the stores of Ralphs Grocery Co., Compton, CA, a division of the Kroger Co., Cincinnati, OH, will find a number of the company's Private Selection brand organic items in the retailers' refrigerated deli section. These items include: California Vegetable Medley in Cheese Sauce; Sun-Dried Tomato Mashed Potatoes; Beans and Brown Rice; Creamy Cheddar Macaroni and Cheese, and Spring Vegetable Risotto. They all come in 18-ounce packages, except the 22-ounce mashed potatoes.

Deli departments in the stores of Von's Companies Inc., based in Arcadia, CA, a division of Safeway Inc., Pleasanton, CA, offer sliced oven-roasted turkey breast and smoked turkey breast as well as a selection of organic cheeses under Safeway's private label, O Organics.

Inside a Southern California Whole Foods Market store, consumers will find a number of private label organic salad dressings at its salad bar and a selection of pre-sliced packaged organic meats and cheeses in the deli's cold case. Throughout the deli section, organic products, such as jams, fruit spreads, mustards, crackers, chocolate-covered berries, fruit snacks, potato chips, breads and iced teas are on display.

In April 2008, SuperValu announced plans to roll out its new Wild Harvest private label line of natural and organic products. Initially the brand will encompass 150 items, ranging from mealtime staples to pastas, sauces, crackers and other products.

Publix Super Markets Inc. headquartered in Lakeland, FL, offers organic soups, salsas and hummus in its delis, although it is not actively pursuing an extensive line of organics for the deli area, according to Maria Brous, director of media and community relations. At its new GreenWise Market in Palm Beach Gardens, FL, the company uses color-coded tags to help shoppers distinguish organic, all-natural and conventional items. Brown tags with different icons identify all-natural and organic products, while white tags identify conventional products.

### Continuing Organic Education

Continual consumer education about organic foods is one of the best ways operators can help build sales in the deli. "Customers want to know about what they are eating and are basing more purchases on what they find out about a product than ever before," says Pawlak of Organic Farms

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Marketing. "By offering them a selection of certified organic and natural foods, the retailer is showing it cares about both the customer and the environment."

Pawlak believes education is important and provides retailers with marketing support materials, including information about the differences between organic, natural, grass-fed and conventional meats. More often, he says, retail customers are asking these kinds of questions.

Many consumers may be familiar with what "organic" means when referring to produce, but not when it comes to meat. Applegate Farms' Asoudegan suggests that delis provide customers with brochures from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which explain what the term "organic" means when applied to meats. This can help educate consumers about what is involved in providing organic meats and the reason for price differences. Applegate Farms also assists deli operators with point-of-sale materials, and its Web site provides information about how its animals are raised and products are produced.

"Delis can really capitalize on consumers eating more meals at home," says Venus Wafers' Ammerman. "Those wanting to enjoy more healthful organic foods need suggestions on ways to complete an organic meal quickly and easily. Our company offers a pre-pack display that can be put together in a few minutes. It's attractive and provides an easy way to purchase an organic bread product to accompany the organic and natural meats, cheeses, and other items offered in the deli."

Organic Prairie encourages supermarket delis to cross-merchandise organic sliced deli meats with organic sliced cheeses in a common area, offering consumers a focused location to purchase organic sandwich items. "Organic deli meats and cheeses, when purchased at retail, will still be price competitive versus the alternative of eating lunch out," Heilmann says.

Delis can also position sandwiches made with organic meats and cheeses as a premium item because of their higher-quality components. "The idea is to use less meat or cheese, but of a higher quality, thereby making it easy to use organic deli meats and cheeses while staying within a budget," says Applegate Farms' Asoudegan. "Infused oils, mayonnaises, mustards, chutneys, relishes and pestos can enhance the flavors of the organic deli meats and cheeses. Mixed lettuces, grilled seasonal vegetables and fruits can also add texture and flavor to these types of sandwiches."

To help retailers control inventories, keep products fresh and prevent loss, Organic

Prairie has focused on smaller case packs of its products. This way, retailers can minimize their exposure while growing the organic meat category in their delis.

By the same token, Kracker Enterprises has introduced smaller packaging. "With the slowing economy, we realized a smaller package would be a good addition to the larger-sized packages," Eckrich, says. "Now we have a one-ounce bag to help answer consumers' needs for a smaller amount of a

quality product. We also have a half-ounce package called Snack Flats, containing one slice of flatbread that is twice as long as a regular saltine cracker. It has really taken off with consumers."

As suppliers stay in tune with market conditions, delis can adjust their organic product offerings. Pricing, too, will remain flexible, allowing delis to position organic products according to consumers' demand and their willingness to pay more. **DB**



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# *Gourmet Pasta Serves Up Meal Solutions*

Restaurant-quality pasta in the deli meets consumers' fresh expectations

BY TRISHA J. WOOLDRIDGE

**F**ast, easy and delicious, pasta appeals to a wide array of palates, from young children to sophisticated gourmets. For these reasons and more, selling pasta in or near the deli area makes perfect sense. "People go to the deli for a meal, and they make up their minds when they get there," says Tom Quinn, vice president, Nuovo Pasta Productions Ltd., Stratford, CT. "This is the first generation where the tightest resource is not money, but time. You have two-income households that could afford to go out to eat, but don't want to."

Because many people target the deli for food items that can readily be prepared at home, more supermarket delis are offering pasta as a meal alternative. Some stores are displaying fresh, ready-to-make pasta products in nearby cold cases, preparing pasta in-house as a grab-and-go option, or setting up à la carte stations to serve freshly made hot pasta.

"More and more stores are offering fresh pasta, ready-to-make, in

the deli," says Karina Graham, director of new product development for Salinas, CA-based Monterey Gourmet Foods, which includes Monterey Pasta Company. The company typically merchandises its fresh pasta products in cold cases near the deli department. "There's a higher quality associated with fresh pasta," Graham explains. "It's natural that fresh pasta is getting placed in the deli."

Nuovo Pasta's retail line of specialty pastas includes several varieties of all-natural pasta meant to be merchandised in cold display cases, preferably near delis, because the deli section is a one-stop meal center. "The pasta takes about four to five minutes to cook, you throw it together with sauce, and you get a restaurant-quality meal made at home. It's participation food," Quinn says.

Pasta is making a comeback, according to Greg Royal, vice president of sales, Brattleboro, VT-based Putney Pasta. "Low-carb diets are fading, and people are eating pasta again," Royal says. "People are looking for restaurant-quality meals, premium quality items that regu-



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lar people can't do in the kitchen. They want to bring something special to the table."

### Creating An Upscale Perception

Although many stores place fresh pasta near the dairy section, moving it to the deli department creates a more upscale perception and allows for higher price points. "People aren't afraid to spend money," Quinn says. "They want value. The deli has much higher rings now than 10 years ago. People don't want the cheapest products; they want the best value. They're looking for a higher quality of food."

Nuovo originally manufactured its products for the foodservice industry. Now, the same products the company makes for discerning restaurants, caterers and gourmet chefs are available at the retail level. "Our chefs make all of the fillings. It's the first time in years that people can get at home what's available in a restaurant. Our pastas make a nice gourmet meal," Quinn says.

Some stores, such as the retail market/cafe Living Earth in Worcester, MA, prepare gourmet products and use an à la carte hot case to sell dinners-to-go. The company's deli case offers tasty pasta salads, while its dinners-to-go program includes eggplant parmesan and lasagnas, among its vegetarian and non-vegetarian offerings.

Serving prepared, gourmet pasta in the deli, "is a wonderful idea," says Royal. "I'd love it if more delis did it." Putney Pasta's all-natural products are most often found in the freezer, but they're frozen fresh, making their items "arguably as fresh as fresh pasta," Royal says. "The trend is definitely going toward fresh, upscale meals. The product is organic and creates premium-quality meals. It definitely fits the mix of what's being looked at for deli offerings."

With the variety of fresh sauces available,

it's very simple for deli personnel to boil pasta and mix it with sauce for prepared meals or grab-and-go packages. "It's a natural choice to merchandise with fresh sauces," says Monterey's Graham. "We recommend that retailers market our pasta with fresh sauce and fresh pesto."

### Gourmet Flavors Pique Interest

High-quality products belong in the deli because they offer a unique food experience and pique customer interest, and the tantalizing flavors of gourmet pasta are no exception. Nuovo Pasta's fresh pasta line includes ravioli filled with mouth-watering crab and lobster, lobster tarragon and sherry, and black truffles and crème. For younger palates, Nuovo offers Mighty Mac-N-Cheese and Ooey Goey Cheesy Goldfish.

Monterey Pasta Company entices customers with its new, eye-catching retail packaging touting its line of ravioli, fettuccine and tortelloni, all flavored with a variety of seasonings, such as artichoke and cheese, chicken and sun-dried tomato, and garlic and basil. In addition to its all-natural and organic pastas, the company offers whole wheat pasta as an option.

Made of all-natural, extra fancy durum, Putney Pasta products feature thinner dough with more filling. The company's newest products include Portabella and Grilled Onion Ravioli as well as Cheesy Pizza Mini Raviolis, which are available in 16- and 18-ounce family sizes and only take about three minutes to prepare. "It's a very different premium product, and a great item for delis to use," Royal says.

### Marketing 'Pastabilities'

Stores can easily position the deli area as a one-stop meal center for Italian foods, where consumers can pick up pasta, sauce,

specialty Italian meats and cheeses, and appetizers from the olive bar. Proximity and availability are important because people want to go to one place to get everything they need.

"The real key is how deli departments merchandise," Quinn says. "Pasta should be easily accessible to cheeses. You should include the other parts of the meal, such as the appetizer, main course, cheese and desserts, so the customer doesn't have to leave the store. There's been a lot of success with pasta as a deli item or near the meat case—wherever people are looking for quick meal solutions."

Promoting pasta in the deli is a simple task with a lot of potential. Display pasta as the centerpiece for a nice Italian dinner with items from the deli. Show an antipasti platter with olive bar items, such as giardiniera (a mix of marinated vegetables), an olive medley, roasted bell peppers or artichoke hearts. Include specialty cheeses, such as fresh Mozzarella, aged Asiago or Parmigiano-Reggiano. From the deli case, incorporate pancetta, prosciutto, capicola or pepperoni into the meal as savory accompaniments for all kinds of pasta creations—hot or cold.

"We see pasta being used for cold, prepared salads," observes Monterey's Graham. Filled and unfilled pasta make excellent salad ingredients, and can be cross-merchandised with other Italian meats and specialty cheeses in the same manner as hot pasta.

The challenge is educating consumers, "but the big challenge is information overload," Nuovo's Quinn says. "How do you manage information overkill? People need to get information without being bombarded."

Showing customers how to use the items with displays and in-store demonstrations can go a long way. Items from outside the deli area, such as Italian bread, wine, extra virgin olive oil, and other Italian grocery items, can be used to show customers how to make pasta a special, gourmet delight or a simple Italian meal with very little effort in very little time.

Placing fresh pasta in or near deli cases gives stores a host of selling possibilities. It caters to customers who want a one-stop shop for meal solutions as well as to those who want something fresh to grab-and-go for lunch or bring home for dinner. Pasta also appeals to a wide audience, from children to adults with high-end preferences.

From a dollars and cents perspective, gourmet pasta allows for higher mark-ups and profit margins in the deli because customers expect something fresh and special, and they're willing to pay for it. "It's a higher margin on a valued product," Quinn says. "That's a good mix for a successful deli." **DB**





# FRESH PRODUCE Fits Right In

Squeezed for time and money, consumers look to delis to offer fruits and veggies to go

BY KAREN B. KING MCCALLUM

**M**any consumers are tightening their belts these days—whether they're trying to stick to a budget or a strict diet plan. In either case, supermarket delis can help consumers “get greener and leaner” by incorporating more fresh produce offerings into food and salad bars, sandwiches, and cold cases.

“Delis offer convenience, and any fresh produce item that can be presented to consumers in a convenient, value-added offering may offer great promise,” says Bruce Knobeloch, vice president of marketing, Salinas, CA-based River Ranch Fresh Foods LLC.

Produce is a natural fit for many delis, where time-starved consumers are looking for healthier meal solutions. “Delis can benefit from the produce trend because this department is already offering prepared foods,” says Ali Leon, director of fruit, vegetables and complete meals for Irwindale, CA-based Ready Pac Produce.

Not only are harried consumers seeking prepared grab-and-go meals, but they are also looking to save on time and gas. “The presence of fresh produce in delis has increased as more consumers consider one-stop shopping as the best use of their limited time,” says Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing, Coral Gables, FL-based Del Monte Fresh Produce Co. “Having a variety of fresh and healthy meal alternatives has been fundamental for the suc-

cess of deli departments in retail stores.”

In deli speak, “catering to consumers” means having fresh items at their fingertips. “We are seeing consumers who are ‘fresh stressed,’” Leon says. “They know they need fresh foods because they're better for them, but they don't have time to shop for them or prepare them.”

According to Leon, 92 percent of consumers who shop in supermarket delis are looking for fresh produce options. Grab-and-go salad kits, sandwiches with nutritious produce fixings, and pre-cut fruit and veggie snacks are just a few of the ways produce is cropping up in today's supermarket deli.

## Salads The Lead The Bunch

Salads are taking the lead in deli produce offerings. “Items that can be used as ingredients in deli-style salads show the most promise in the deli section,” says David Federico, marketing manager, Atlanta, GA-based Naturally Fresh Inc. “This would include the actual produce, such as celery, potatoes and peppers as well as sauces and dressings. Fresh, refrigerated dressings combined with produce can produce unique deli salads that stand out from traditional salads. An example would be making a potato salad with a refrigerated honey mustard dressing, such as Naturally Fresh Honey Mustard, instead of mayo.”

Consumers are eating more prepared foods outside the home than ever before, and they want healthier options. “Supermarket delis can offer produce-based, healthier options,” says Tonya Antle, vice president organic sales for Earthbound Farm, headquartered in San Juan Bautista, CA. “Salads are an obvious choice, but I think the delis that do more interesting things with salads will be able to attract more attention to those items. Offering consumers more flavorful choices of different produce items is a great way to make salads more attractive.”

Because deli operators are used to dealing with meat and other highly perishable items, they are equipped to handle salads and know how to hold refrigeration



temperatures more consistently. "This has been beneficial for the salad kits that many suppliers are merchandising in this department," says Jennifer Verdelli, director of sales, Harrisburg, PA-based Verdelli Farms Inc.. "Fresh-cut produce items can be used in pasta salads, bean salads and many other dishes to add flavor and nutrition."

Verdelli Farms offers a fresh coleslaw kit, a fresh tomato salad, and items for sandwiches such as shredded lettuce, sliced tomatoes, sliced and diced onions as well as green leaf and romaine filets. The company

also provides fresh sliced peppers and onions for pizzas.

Ready Pac markets specialty kits for salad assembly. "We provide everything from iceberg to romaine lettuce with protein toppings and a variety of ingredients that can be sold in the service case," Leon says. "We can even include bowls and lids."

Del Monte's healthy meal solutions are geared for the deli. Its deli salad kits include a variety of mixes, such as Greek salad, Waldorf salad, fruit ambrosia and oriental salad. The company also provides grab-and-go

items for merchandising in the deli, such as pre-cut vegetables and fruits and pre-cut vegetables for use in soups, salsas and trays.

Dave Mills, senior vice president, Mills Family Farms, based in Salinas, CA, says his company's whole leaf lettuce line caters to the retail deli business. Green leaf, romaine and red leaf varieties are pre-washed and ready to use for deli tray liners, sandwiches and deli salad programs.

Dole Food Co. also is addressing consumers' time constraints with its salad products. This year, the company introduced two gourmet bagged lettuce blends, Dole 7 Lettuces and Dole Tender Gardens. "Each is a mixture of gourmet lettuces and other ingredients that allow for quick meals with great taste and goodness without the time spent chopping and preparing," says Bil Goldfield, communications manager, Dole Food Co., Westlake, CA. "We are continuing to address this need with premium quality salad kits that we will be launching later this summer. Each premium salad will come complete with fixings and proprietary salad dressings developed by Dole."

### Fresh Produce For Sandwiches

According to Verdelli, supermarket delis are moving toward fresh-cut produce—shredded lettuce, chopped onions and pre-cut tomatoes—for sandwiches.

Opportunities exist, however, for delis to incorporate many more produce ingredients into sandwiches. "Sandwich toppings show the most promise in the deli section," says Gina Nucci, director of foodservice marketing, Salinas, CA-based Mann Packing.

Many of Mann's deli customers are using its Green Leaf Singles and Romaine Leaf Singles. "Mann's Simply Singles whole leaf lettuce products are washed and ready to use," Nucci says. "You just open the box, remove some of the leaves for sandwiches and return the remainder to the cooler. Deli employees just have to put the final steps together to make their items."

Mills of Mills Family Farms predicts delis will see more washed, ready-to-eat products in bags or clamshell packaging as part of sandwich stations. "There is a niche at the store level for customers to make their own sandwiches," Mills says.

### Fruit And Veggie Snacks

Produce is ideal for delis to merchandise as healthy snacks. "Health and wellness trends are on the rise," Naturally Fresh's Federico says. "Fresh produce snacks with healthy dips and dressings are becoming more and more popular."

For example, Mann Packing's healthy snack line includes Snacks on the Go and



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Veggies on the Go, both of which include a creamy ranch dip. "Catering to a lunch crowd, delis can offer healthy Snacks on the Go for those folks grabbing a sandwich and not wanting chips or potato salad as their side," Nucci says.

Fruits also make excellent snack foods, and some products fit right in with a deli. Bananas, oranges, apples, grapes, pears, nectarines and cherries are nutritious, delicious and simple to enjoy. "Any snackable commodity fruit or vegetable would be suitable for the deli," Dole's Goldfield says.

According to Goldfield, bananas account for a relatively high percentage of a produce department's and store's total sales, making them ideal to merchandise and promote. "Bananas are perfect to sell at deli counters or as part of meal programs," he says. "They are self-packaged, portion-controlled, you know when they are ideal to eat, and they are an inexpensive item."

In addition to offering fresh commodity fruit, Dole combines a medley of vegetables, such as broccoli, carrots, celery, tomatoes and snap peas, in its party and snack trays.

"These are washed, cut and ready to eat," Goldfield says.

Establishing a "healthy" trend in the deli can help project a theme throughout the store. "Super foods such as spinach and broccoli make in-store demonstrations and presentations both healthy and delicious," Verdelli says. "Healthy options are becoming more popular and are extremely necessary in fighting obesity."

### Procurement Options

Operators intent on bringing more produce into the deli often can turn to the produce pros in their own supermarket. "Deli managers usually can procure through their produce division for fresh produce," Nucci says. "Or, they can go through local foodservice distributors, which carry a broad line of products from deli meats and breads to prepped salads."

Other deli managers rely on brokers or buying consultants to purchase produce items specifically for the deli. "We work with a chain's deli procurement managers to come up with new items that can create excitement in their department while at the same time help reduce costs and labor," Ready Pac's Verdelli says.

Still others may purchase produce from local markets although not as frequently. "There is a lot less direct purchasing from growers and shippers in the deli compared to the produce department," Earthbound Farm's Antle says.

More produce in the deli offers the potential for more profits in light of today's health trends and consumers' desire for one-stop convenience. "As we learn to work more closely with deli buyers, I think we'll see more promotion and even co-branding," Antle predicts. "This will attract the attention of health-conscious consumers and increase sales."

Traditionally, retailers wanted shoppers to venture deeper into stores to pick up impulse buys. "But with greater time constraints on consumers, this is happening less, and more retailers are seeing the importance and value of merchandising in different areas of the store," Dole's Goldfield says. "More convenience for consumers will translate into more sales for them."

According to Ready Pac Produce's research, 93 percent of consumers believe deli foods are fresher than packaged food. "People will purchase fresh produce in the deli," Leon says.

Any fresh offering is a good item for delis, especially produce. "As people look for more healthful alternatives, rather than fast food, it makes a difference at the deli level for retail," says Mills of Mills Family Farms. **DB**

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# Deli Salads Duke It Out For Rings



Traditional comfort salads take on flavorful and healthier contenders

BY LISA WHITE

PHOTO COURTESY OF RESER'S FINE FOODS

In the hearts and minds of consumers, salads evoke mixed emotions. In one corner of the deli, weighing in as traditional favorites, are contenders such as cole slaw, potato, macaroni and bean salads. In the opposite corner, preparing to duke it out, are on-trend salads with healthier ingredients and stronger, bolder flavors.

"It's an odd time for salads," says Jimmy

Daskaleas, vice president of product development, Walker's Food Products, North Kansas City, MO. "You have two things going on. First, people in a crunch financially want the basics, and second, stores realize they need new and unique products to capture the market. Delis have to compete on both fronts right now. They need to offer value and quality in comfort food, and that's our biggest challenge."

People looking for value-added salads at reasonable prices will purchase traditional products while others will splurge on something healthy or unique. "It's a contradiction, but it's the nature of our economy," Daskaleas says.

The good news is that supermarket deli salads are experiencing continued strong growth, growing 12.2 percent between 2005 and 2007, according to *Refrigerated Foods*

## The Three-Pound Tub Weighs In

For the past two decades, three-pound plastic tubs have traditionally been a popular deli salad container during the summer months. “Three-pound tubs are ideal for family gatherings, picnics, graduations, etc.,” says Shirley Leonard, marketing manager, Sandridge Food Corp.

Unlike five-pound tubs sold at club stores, the three-pound size is perfect for serving families. “We have had two customers in the last week ask us if we will be offering the three-pound tubs this summer,” says Craig Drinkwater, director of sales, Hans Kissle Salad Co. “It is a big offering for us.”

And more grocery store delis are moving to larger-sized tubs to reach a specific price point. “As the cost of raw materials continues to escalate and retailers grapple with rising energy costs and other effects of economic pressures, we may see a downsizing to stay below trigger price point thresholds,” says Mark Brown, president of Orval Kent Foods Co.

Even manufacturers that focus on smaller-sized packaging say three-pound tubs are a key seller for delis. “The one-pound size is still the most popular, but three-pound tubs have replaced two-pound salad containers because they are a stronger value and can better address consumers’ needs,” says John McCarthy, senior retail marketing manager, Reser’s Fine Foods.

Some manufacturers, like Sandridge, are covering all their bases. “This summer, we’re introducing a two-pound tub in addition to our three-pound and one-pound containers to satisfy consumers’ needs for group entertaining but at more affordable prices,” Leonard says. **DB**

out to eat, but still seek the convenience of fresh prepared foods. By offering a wide variety of salads, from the more traditional comfort foods like potato salad to the more culinary upscale protein salads, retailers are in a good position to grow their deli salad business.”

Like other foods, salad prices have been affected by skyrocketing fuel and ingredient costs. “Mayo-based salads have had large cost increases,” says Jeffrey Siegel, president of Brooklyn, NY-based Chloé Foods. “Oil prices have doubled, and macaroni prices have tripled. Retailers have reacted, and we will soon find out how this affects consumers’ buying habits.”

Exactly what constitutes “affordable” depends on the consumer. “There are plenty of consumers who seek the comforting, familiar traditional salads like potato salad and cole slaw,” Leonard says. “Sandridge’s Grandma’s Original Recipes of potato salad, mustard potato salad, cole slaw and macaroni salad continue to be some of our top-selling items. But there are other consumers who seek the more gourmet-style salads. They tend to be single households and older couples, primarily age 55 and older, who are seeking more upscale, ethnically diverse meals for two. The gourmet, better-for-you salads and bolder flavored salads appeal especially to this group.”

In the end, it comes down to what consumers think is a value. “If customers can see value, they will perceive the product as affordable,” says Leslie Gordon, business development manager, Summer Fresh Salads, Woodbridge, Ontario, Canada.

Today’s consumers want to see what they’re getting and want value without compromise. “They are looking to spend less at the deli than at restaurants,” says Colleen Gagnon, product manager, Unilever US Inc., Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

### New Wave Salad Trends

The salad segment is riding the wave of the industry movement toward more

upscale prepared foods, natural and healthy products, and distinctive ethnic flavors. Many manufacturers attribute strong year-round sales of deli salads to the variety entering the marketplace. According to Mintel’s *Refrigerated Foods January 2008* report, retailers have become more willing to stock refrigerated foods and to promote the refrigerated side dish category, which includes prepared salads, fruits and cole slaw, because these products typically have higher retail margins.

“The same trends impacting the rest of the food channel are also hitting deli salads,” says Mark Brown, president of Orval Kent Foods Co., Wheeling, IL. “Along with more requests for vinaigrette-based salads as opposed to mayonnaise-based, we are seeing more interest in ingredients that are associated with healthful eating, such as chickpeas and edamame beans.”

Consumers also are looking for colorful and vibrant salads tossed with red and green bell peppers, tomatoes, carrots, and other fruits and vegetables. According to John McCarthy, senior retail marketing manager for Reser’s Fine Foods, based in Beaverton, OR, consumers are shifting from leafy green salads in favor of more vegetable types. “There is a greater acceptance of nontraditional salads and ingredients, although traditional varieties are still selling well,” McCarthy says.

Bold, tantalizing flavors are enticing consumers to try new products and repeat their purchases. “Ethnic flavors continue to be big, particularly Asian and spicy Southwestern,” Sandridge’s Leonard says. “Our new Singapore Salad and Chipotle Potato Salad fit this bill. We also launched a Grilled Chicken and Fennel Salad and an Herb Chicken and

January 2008, published by Mintel International Group Ltd., Chicago, IL. The leading reasons for purchasing deli salads are ease of use and consumers’ lack of time to cook.

Now, another reason may be consumers’ lack of disposable income for restaurant dining. “Although food prices have been increasing at the highest rates in 17 years, there is an opportunity for supermarkets to capture some business from the restaurant segment,” says Shirley Leonard, marketing manager, Medina, OH-based Sandridge Food Corp. “Consumers are cutting back on going



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Pasta Salad this spring that are visually fresh, tasty and culinary.”

Some manufacturers have taken traditional salads and changed ingredients to make something old new again. Gourmet Boutique, Jamaica, NY, offers a trail mix cole slaw infused with dried fruits and nuts, in addition to a sesame noodle salad with black sesame seeds and red pepper strips. “Stores want to differentiate themselves from their

competitors, so they are asking for specific product groupings,” says marketing manager Mike Reibman.

Increasingly, retailers are requesting specific salad ingredients or taste profiles in response to consumer demand. For example, Hans Kissle Salad Co., Haverhill, MA, has filled requests for lighter, unique salads and upscale varieties. “One customer wanted an all-bean salad and requested a specific type

of bean,” says Craig Drinkwater, director of sales. “We also received a call recently from a Midwest chain looking for an upscale salad to add to its selection.”

Another growing trend is private label brands that support consumers’ desire for “fresh” products. “Retailers are able to promote their refrigerated deli salads as ‘prepared on-site,’” says Sandridge’s Leonard. “One of the advantages of Sandridge deli salads is our ‘Fresh Initiative,’ where we receive an order and then produce, ship and deliver the product to the retailer within 24 hours for that unrivaled fresh taste and appearance. Many retailers prefer to buy their private label deli salads from Sandridge because of our high quality, consistency and strict food safety measures that are easier and less costly to their operations.”

Delis also are differentiating their salads by using distinctive salad dressings. Hellmann’s Real Whipped Salad Dressing, a product not available for retail sale, can add a signature touch to fresh salads prepared on-site. Though the dressing is mayonnaise-based, it has a clean label and a sweet flavor profile. “It goes good with fruit or seafood,” says Unilever’s Gagnon.

Meanwhile, whole grains are becoming more prevalent in today’s deli salads. “The healthier focus includes whole grains, wheatberry, quinoa, faro and whole wheat pasta,” says Summer Fresh Salads’ Gordon.

A growing number of consumers are looking for products that are kind to the digestive system, and as a result, the demand for fiber and foods fortified with probiotics, commonly found in yogurt, are on the rise. “Grain salads are making a comeback in salad bars and deli cases due to their fiber content and exotic flavors,” Sandridge’s Leonard says. “Sandridge introduced a new line of low-fat, yogurt-based salads this

## Side Dishes Have The Upper Hand

**T**hough many consumers are seeking unique salads with upscale ingredients, when it comes to side dishes, tried-and-true dishes such as macaroni and cheese and mashed potatoes have the upper hand in sales.

“Category sales for refrigerated side dishes continue to grow, as consumers seek a fresh, convenient alternative to making comfort food from scratch,” says Mark Brown, president, Orval Kent Foods Co. “The ability to produce familiar favorites in packaging that can stand in at a family meal has made items like mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, cinnamon caramel apples and green bean casserole destination items in the deli. This is particularly the case when these sides are paired with hot foods, especially with rotisserie chicken, ribs or fried chicken.”

According to Shirley Leonard, marketing manager, Sandridge Food Corp., comfort side dishes, which include deli salads, surpassed sales of refrigerated entrées for the first time in 2007, reaching more than \$1.1 billion in sales. “The fastest growing sub-category is side

dishes, consisting mostly of mashed potatoes and macaroni and cheese,” Leonard says. “Their simplicity of use and convenience are driving the sales of these products.”

Convenient refrigerated side dishes are taking over where frozen side dishes left off. “There has been a push from frozen side dishes to refrigerated ones because the refrigerated type is simple and easy to serve,” says John McCarthy, senior retail marketing manager, Reser’s Fine Foods. “Also, more consumers are aware of the availability.”

Consumer concerns about cholesterol, bad-for-you fats and calories in side dishes have passed, and business is stabilizing and growing again. “Retailers realize these are commodity products, and they are needed in the cases to build business,” says Jeffrey Siegel, president of Chloé Foods.

Although side dishes may not sell as well during warm summer months, they are a staple for many consumers. “There is always a niche for comfort foods,” says Craig Drinkwater, director of sales, Hans Kissle Salad Co. **DB**





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## Packaging Packs A Punch

**W**hen it comes to deli packaging, traditional round and clear polypropylene deli containers in eight-, 16- and 32-ounce sizes are still the most popular. “The reason there has not been any innovations is because these containers work,” says Bob Saric, national sales manager at Madison, WI-based Placon Corp., a packaging supplier. “Our HomeFresh Deli packaging provides superior clarity and is designed to show off the food, not the package. These containers are the most cost-effective package for this market segment.”

Recently, Canada-based Summer Fresh made the switch to clear packaging. “Customers can see the product,” says Leslie Gordon, business development manager. “The focus is on the product, not the packaging.”

Packaging that allows high visibility of the food inside and plainly identifies the salad’s contents is becoming the industry standard. “Deli salad packaging is starting to reflect the back-to-basics approach that is common in Europe,” says Mark Brown, president of Orval Kent Foods Co.

Still, many salad manufacturers are tweaking container labels, graphics and sizes to catch the eye of consumers. Craig Drinkwater, director of sales, Hans Kissle Salad Co., says many salad manufacturers are focusing on overhauling their private brand packaging to make

the colors brighter and graphics stand out. “In addition, manufacturers are moving toward mold labeling, where the labels are part of the packaging,” he says. “This provides an upscale appearance and is appealing to consumers.”

According to Jimmy Daskaleas, vice president of product development, Walker’s Food Products, one of the biggest trends in packaging is scenic labeling. “Many have started going toward square containers printed with scenes, which distinguishes the product as a pre-packaged item from a manufacturer,” he says.

Gourmet Boutique has been exploring packaging options because stores are looking for unique options and chains want specific packaging. “We are exploring the versatility in our packaging options, researching shapes, sizes and labeling,” says Mike Reibman, marketing manager. “We also are working on innovations to stay competitive in the market.”

Jeffrey Siegel, president of Chloé Foods, believes packaging has become a greater driving force in this category than ever before. “Salad producers, for the most part, have made product that is not branded and sold as foodservice products,” Siegel explains. “There has been a huge shift in the industry to pre-packaged product, which has forced us to be more sophisticated in our packaging design.” **DB**

spring in a variety of refreshing recipes, including Atlantis Grilled Chicken Salad, Cucumber Garden Salad and Shoreline Seafood Salad.”

Because convenience foods are driving up rings, many manufacturers note that pre-packaged salads are selling better than those behind the full-service case. “Consumers are concerned about health and sanitation in regard to people handling their food, especially with the recent E. coli incidents,” says Chloé Foods’ Siegel. “Although there is a great deal of training going on with deli personnel behind the scenes, it is unclear how these food safety issues have affected consumer confidence.”

### Positioning Salads To Move

According to Mintel’s *Refrigerated Foods January 2008* report, the refrigerated side dish segment benefits because of its broader

representation throughout a grocery store. Prepared salads/fruit/cole slaw can be found in the produce, deli and meat departments, and appetizers/snack rolls also can be found in refrigerated deli cases. Additionally, some stores create a “Fresh Meals to Go” refrigerated case, featuring one-stop shopping convenience for consumers looking to pick up quick-prep meals.

Crossing over into other departments is an effective way to merchandise salads. For example, stores with bakeries on-site can offer fresh-baked bread with a salad or bundle together soup, salad and bread as a combo meal deal. “This drives value to the end user and adds up to higher rings,” Unilever’s Gagnon says. “Smaller portion sizes also can provide a lunch option at a more affordable price point.”

During the dinner hours offer salads as part of a meal combo with brats, hot dogs or

steak. “Salad sales are strongest four months out of the year, so the best way to take advantage of this is by cross-merchandising with the meat and produce departments,” Walker Food’s Daskaleas says.

Merchandising salads with suggested main dishes and desserts is essential to help steer consumers toward salads. “The more meal suggestions supermarkets can provide consumers with to take the guesswork out of meal planning, the more they will sell,” Sandridge’s Leonard says.

Orval Kent’s Brown says deli salad customers fall into two categories: “There are those who buy only during the peak holiday periods and those who are more consistent purchasers that use deli salads throughout the year,” he says.

For this reason, it is critical to offer both traditional salads to meet high consumer demand during the summer months and holidays as well as premium salads to provide variety to consumers who buy more frequently. “A salad-of-the-month program is a great way to keep the selection fresh for those year-round consumers,” Brown says.

Not only is it important to offer a wide variety of different salads, but also knowing the preferences of a store’s demographic. “It is standard category management to know what flavor profiles your customers prefer,” Reser’s McCarthy says.

In addition to variety, delis need attractive displays to draw consumers as well as eye-catching signage. Summer Fresh’s Gordon recommends using descriptive language, such as “Made with Whole Grain,” to play up flavors or healthy choices.

Because delis are competing with other stores and local restaurants, the fresher the salad, the more likely customers will buy it. Preparing salads in view of customers and a “made by” date help connote freshness. “Offering fresh product is a challenge in retail, where things are made ahead of time,” Unilever’s Gagnon says. “But delis have larger buying power than mom-and-pop restaurants, and they can win in this segment.”

And, of course, offering samples is one of the most effective ways to lure customers and move more products. “This can be done via in-store demos or simply through educated deli clerks who do some suggestive selling and offer customers free trial samples of products,” Leonard says. “This is one of the things Whole Foods does so well, and much can be learned from them.”

By offering a varied selection of traditional favorites and gourmet-style salads—and effectively cross-merchandising and marketing salads—delis won’t have to worry about which ones will win the bout in rings. It will be a split decision. **DB**





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# Bring On The Breads

No matter the shape or grain, this dietary staple is indispensable to deli sales

BY AMY STUMPFL

Food trends may come and go, but bread remains an indispensable staple in the American diet. But that doesn't necessarily mean ordinary white bread. In fact, consumers are demanding more sophisticated bread selections at the supermarket deli counter—whether it's on a sandwich or part of a complete meal program.

According to *What's in Store 2008*, a trends report from the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association (IDDBA) in Madison, WI, a growing number of consumers are looking to the supermarket for ready-to-eat meals. However, roughly 50 percent of those surveyed indicated they would purchase more items at the deli department or hot food station if only there was a greater selection. More than half said they consider such purchases to be "impulse buys," made when they are already in the store to buy groceries. Just 12 percent of those surveyed were willing to make a special trip to the store for a deli meal.

"These days, consumers are so busy, but they are not willing to sacrifice quality," says Shelby Weeda, president of King's Hawaiian Bakery West Inc., Torrance, CA. "The deli needs to catch them as they walk in the door with specific ideas on how to answer that all-important question, 'What's for dinner?'"

The goal of King's Hawaiian Bakery West is to help answer that question, driving sales to the deli department with meal solutions, point-of-sale materials and recipes. "We developed our four-pack of rolls specifically for the meal deals—maintaining the highest quality while offering greater convenience," Weeda says.

Consumer demand for convenience led to the introduction of Snacker Rolls, a four-pack of mini sandwich rolls. "We regularly hear from our loyal consumers and commercial customers that our flavor profile is ideal for sandwich solutions," Weeda says. "The Snacker Rolls offer portability, taste and quality that hold equal appeal on the shelf, behind the deli counter or to complement a menu. I think it's a great option for kids' lunches."







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And a nutritious option, as well. "There's certainly an increasing demand for whole grains, and we've had great success with our 100 percent whole wheat and honey wheat products," Weeda says. "And as of 2008, all of our products now have zero trans fats."

### Consumers Want Their Whole Grains

*What's in Store 2008* reports a growing emphasis on whole grains in the deli department, as well as more organic products and greater nutritional/allergen identification on product labels.

## "PITAS AND WRAPS ARE NOT REALLY CONSIDERED ETHNIC FOODS ANYMORE. THEY HAVE EVOLVED INTO MORE OF A HEALTHY BREAD CHOICE."

—Karen Toufayan  
 Toufayan Bakeries

And the Mintel Global New Products Database, a division of Mintel International Group, Ltd., Chicago, IL, indicates a significant rise in product launches making the "whole grain" claim in recent years. In fact, the number of new whole grain products introduced in 2006 was nearly 10 times greater than in 2000.

Whole grains are nothing new for Chicago, IL-based Rubschlager Baking Corp., which produces a complete line of whole grain breads. "We've always been about whole grains," says Mike DiCristo, Rubschlager's national sales manager. "We're a member of the Whole Grains Council, an organization that helps take some of the confusion out of nutrition labels for consumers."

DiCristo says the company's Rye-Ola products are among its top sellers, noting that these hearty, 100 percent whole rye breads appeal to health-conscious consumers as well as deli managers. "The delis are working to upscale their approach, incorporating better breads into their sandwich programs," he says. "Our breads are heavier and more dense, so they hold up very well, even with high-moisture content."

Sandwich programs continue to be a mainstay in deli departments, says Ken Burke, vice president for sales and marketing, Costanzo's Bakery Inc., Cheektowaga, NY. The company, which operates its own retail deli along with its manufacturing operations, produces everything from eight- and 12-inch sub rolls to Kaiser rolls and breadsticks.

"We find that customers are looking for quality and consistency, with significant growth toward higher-end breads and sandwiches," Burke says. "The key is to use a good roll, good ingredients and put together a complete program for the customer. If they can buy a quality lunch—with a sandwich, chips and drink, for example—at a reasonable price, they're going to come back."

### Specialty Sandwiches Rule

But not just any sandwich will do. Consumers are increasingly sophisticated and enjoy trying new items, such as artisan and ethnic breads. According to IDDBA research, more than one-third of consumers surveyed would be more likely to visit their supermarket deli if it offered different specialty sandwiches each day.

"Paninis are not exactly new from a culinary standpoint, but they're very popular right now," says Chef Demetrios Haralambatos of Kontos Foods Inc., Paterson, NJ. Kontos is widely known for its hand-stretched flatbreads, including lavash, panini and pita breads.

"Customers like the panini because it's something different," he says. "It looks good, it's nice and hot, and it's far more impressive than the same old sandwich. Plus, it's convenient—you can eat it on the go without having everything spill out the side. The deli can assemble the sandwiches early in the day, and then heat them as needed for the customer. Or the customer can take it home and heat it up for dinner. Delis also could look at providing grilled vegetables in a panini for their vegetarian customers."

Haralambatos says that although paninis are traditionally made using a hot sandwich press, this is not always the case. "Some supermarkets may not want to make the capital investment required to buy a panini press. But with our pre-grilled panini bread, the deli can assemble the sandwiches and reheat them with or without the press, but you still have those great grill marks."

Many deli departments are finding success with other flatbreads as well, including wraps, pitas and lavash, says Karen Toufayan, vice president of sales and marketing, Toufayan Bakeries, headquartered in Ridgefield, NJ. "Pitas and wraps are not really considered ethnic foods anymore," Toufayan says. "They have evolved into more of a



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Toufayan Bakeries works with supermarket chains to customize its products. "We can customize flavors and size for specific programs in the store," Toufayan says. "One chain might want spinach lavash for a specialty sandwich, while another might need a larger size to use for pizza. Demos of the product are always a good idea, and we've had great success with accounts that run specials, promoting items such as ham salad with our pitas."

Beyond brand marketing, Toufayan Bakeries uses recipes to drive sales and reach potential customers. "We know that consumers are reading the nutritional information," she says. "When they flip the package over to read the label, they will also find recipes and tips, including creative ideas that customers might not have considered, such as breakfast recipes."

### Exploring New Markets

Kangaroo Brands, Milwaukee, WI, also is working to find new ways to use—and market—its core product, the pita. "Our focus is still on the pita, but we're always seeking



new avenues, ways to add value," says marketing manager Salem Kashou, citing the company's patented pocket pita as an example. "The pocket pita is available in white, wheat and honey and whole grain varieties. Because they're pre-opened and nestled together in the package, it's much easier to fill them without tearing."

Educating consumers about how to use these healthy, tasty and convenient pita pockets is part of the company's mission. "We have found that in positioning our products, we not only want to tell the consumer what it is, but also what to do with it,"

Kashou says. "For example, our Salad Pockets can be stuffed with chicken or tuna salad. And our whole grain Sandwich Pocket is one of our hottest selling items."

Kashou also points to Kangaroo Brands' new Omelet Pitas as an opportunity for deli departments to increase sales. This all-natural breakfast sandwich is made with fresh, whole eggs and cheese inside a nutritious pita pocket.

"There's a huge opportunity for delis to market grab-and-go items," Kashou says. "A sandwich program for breakfast or lunch could drive sales. With the omelets, delis can warm them up, pop them in the hot box and they're ready to go. It's a great opportunity to offer something healthy and convenient for their customers."

Indeed, The 2006 *Evolving Sandwich Report*, published by Technomic Information Services, Chicago, IL, noted that on-the-go breakfast sandwiches were gaining in popularity. Since then, it seems that more and more delis have been warming up to the idea of offering breakfast items.

"We have had some success with breakfast in the eastern Pennsylvania and New York markets," Costanzo's Burke says. "A soft Kaiser roll with ham, egg and cheese is quite popular, as well as a plain buttered Kaiser roll. A lot depends on the market, but the opportunity is there."

Kontos' Haralambatos sees the growing ethnic category as holding great potential for in-store delis, as well. "A lot of manufacturers and supermarkets are missing the boat when it comes to marketing to different ethnic groups," he says. "It is so important to look at your demographics—there's a lot of opportunity there. Kontos Foods is the only bakery featuring dual-certified products simultaneously for both Kosher and Halal. We've spent considerable time exploring these markets—delis need to do the same."

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# DELI MEATS 2008

**Different Times For Deli Meats**

**Dry-Cured Hams Elevate Sales In The Deli**

**Ribs And Wings Rustle Up Sales**

**Ramping Up Rotisseries**

**Tactical Maneuvers For Pre-Sliced Deli**

# Different Times For Deli Meats



*Adjusting to the economy means taking advantage of existing opportunities*

By Bob Johnson

**D**eli meat sales as a whole have already taken a hit as a result of harder economic times. Hoffmann Estates, IL-based Fresh Look Marketing Group's *FreshLook Market Report*, which tracks random weight/perishable grocery sales, shows that deli meat is down 3.7 percent in terms of pounds for the 52-week period ending March 30, 2008. During the same period, volume also was down in terms of dollar sales, but by a more modest 0.6 percent.

As far as the impact on supermarket delis—well, the hardest times may be yet to come. “The real storm will hit in the fourth quarter of 2008 and all of 2009,” says Jim Schloss, corporate vice president for sales and marketing, Smith-

field, VA-based Smithfield Foods. “The barometer is \$6 corn and \$1.15 or higher oil.”

Higher prices for corn and oil, both staples in meat production, mean higher prices for deli meats. “Wholesale prices will probably go up between 10 and 20 percent for pork and turkey,” Schloss says. “The pastas and grains have probably already shot up.”

These factors will influence deli prices and sales, but there is an upside to the economic downturn. Delis have the opportunity to compete head to head with casual dining restaurants, which are already treading water.

“There is historic evidence that economic downturns have affected consumers by reducing the number of their restaurant occasions—and continues even in today’s time-starved consumers’ world,” says Dave Brandow, director of

sales and marketing, corporate foodservice and export, Piller’s Sausages & Delicatessens Ltd., Waterloo, Ontario, Canada.

But the opportunity to coax more sales from the deli area depends on the deli’s ability to react quickly to meet consumers’ needs. “There are enormous opportunities if you can provide all of the components for a prepared meal at a price that is less than at a casual dining or higher establishment,” Schloss says.

## The Deli As A Meal Station

If the recession deepens, it will most likely cause more problems for restaurants than for grocery store delis. “The deli has an opportunity to steal market share from foodservice,” says Steve Frank, marketing manager for cooked meats, Wichita, KS-based Cargill Meat Solutions.





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"Provide an opportunity for people to buy convenient food that they would normally travel to foodservice places to buy at a higher price." As Frank points out, the cost of ingredients account for only 25 percent of the cost of a foodservice meal. Deli meals can offer significant savings.

"Traditional bulk meat deli has been shrinking over time," Frank continues. "What is growing is prepared meat products, particularly prepared chicken products. Offer more takeout options that are meat-driven."

Delis also need to provide an alternative to

quality home-cooked dinners for consumers who are constantly pressed for time. "The deli has an opportunity to take market share from home-prepared meals," Frank says.

According to Smithfield's Schloss, delis must offer everything needed for a complete meal in one place, so customers don't have to venture beyond the deli area. And the components must be high quality and fresh, rather than frozen.

"Refrigerated entrées and prepared foods are areas for big opportunities in the deli," Schloss says. "I would take a hard look at prepared meals; we are seeing demand grow for prepared meat products."

In consumers' minds, the deli then becomes a hero when the only thing they have to do is pop the food into the oven to heat-and-serve in minutes at home.

"We're seeing more people driven to the deli case because they do perceive value and feel like they will find value there," says Bobby Yarbrough, CEO of Baton Rouge, LA-based Manda Fine Meats. "Food is almost recession-proof. People are still eating."

But many are cutting back and seeking alternatives to restaurant dining. "Even the most expensive deli meats are far less than the total cost of eating out," says Jason Grobbel, president, Detroit, MI-based E.W. Grobbel Sons Inc.





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"The deli operator must show the customer that the cost per meal will always be far lower than eating out."

### Sandwiches With A Touch Of Class

Sandwiches—and the fine deli meats and cheeses that make them special—offer a second opportunity where delis can flourish in tough times. "Sandwiches would be another area where the deli could grow," Cargill's Frank says. "Sandwiches can play the role of a nutritional meal for your children."

packages, such as combo deals, which the food service industry has been promoting for years. Buying decisions are based on the total value of the package, not just the dollar amount spent. "Marketers need to keep in mind that the better the value perception, the better consumers will feel about their buying decisions," says Piller's Brandow. "It also creates brand loyalty."

Additionally, consumers are seeking different flavor adventures, as evidenced by the number of different products in the deli. "Long gone are the days of bologna and cooked ham," Brandow says. "Now you find oven roasted turkey breast,

**"Marketers need to keep in mind that the better the value perception, the better consumers will feel about their buying decisions. It also creates brand loyalty."**

*Dave Brandow  
Piller's Sausages & Delicatessens Ltd.*

To compete with restaurants, Smithfield's Schloss emphasizes that deli sandwiches should be a cut above in terms of ingredients.

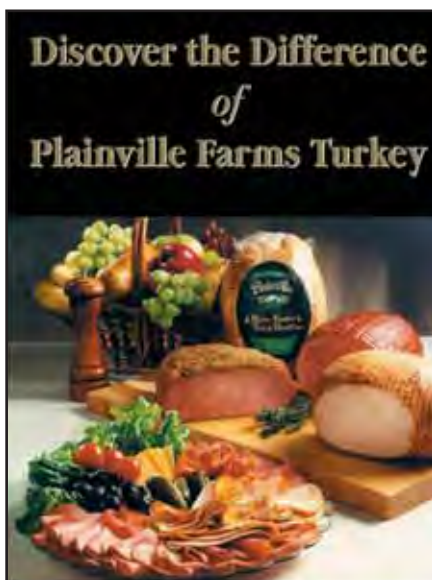
Meats, such as corned beef, roast beef and pastrami, offer versatility and substance. "There are many different ways to present these meats, from traditional hot or cold sandwiches to panini-style sandwiches—the most popular right now," Grobbel says. "Add a side of fruit or a favorite salad, and you've got a balanced and cost-effective meal."

While watching their spending, today's well-educated consumers are seeking value-added

rosemary ham and picante salami."

A sandwich made with high-quality deli ingredients is probably as affordable as it gets. Just two or three ounces of deli meat are plenty for a sandwich, according to Jennifer Templer, associate product manager-deli division, Willmar, MN-based Jennie-O Turkey Store. Even premium, all-natural deli meats, such as Jennie-O's Natural Choice brand, cost less than \$2 per serving.

"We have found much success in offering thin-sliced DeLallo turkey breast stacked on whole wheat bread with Muenster cheese, lettuce, tomato, cucumber and red onion," says Fred



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## Who's Shopping The Deli Counter?

Households with kids tend to be heavy users of in-store delis, according to the latest information from New York, NY-based The Nielsen Company, a leading provider of market and consumer information. Nielsen's research, *Targeting Households With Kids At The Deli*, examined the habits, tastes and preferences of customers shopping supermarket delis.

Data provided insights into the characteristics of families who shop the deli. These families typically have multiple children of all ages, with an oldest child at least six years of age. They also are pressed for time because they are involved in physical activities, such as sports and other leisure pursuits. These families have concerns about value, but with an income of \$75,000-plus they are not "down-scale" in nature. The households fall somewhere in Nielsen's categories of "Small Scale Families," "Younger Bustling Families" and "Older Bustling Families."

Although these families are frequent buyers of fresh-sliced deli products, they are not generating the most deli volume. Based on Nielsen's research, the households with kids are 29 percent more likely to buy fresh cold cuts behind the deli service counter than the national average and account for 47 percent of total volume. Additionally, the children tend to have a significant impact on the brands chosen. Conversely, households without children

are 43 percent less likely to buy fresh-sliced deli cold cuts than the national average, but account for 53 percent of total volume.

Why the difference in the volume of sales? Apparently, families with children are being more careful about the money they are spending. They are more likely to shop at supermarkets that offer low everyday prices and will switch brands to use cents-off coupons.

Interestingly, Nielsen's target deli shopper is more likely to be Hispanic—a consumer finding that other market researchers have noticed as well. Willmar, MN-based Jennie-O Turkey Store recently released its proprietary *Counter Intelligence 2008 Deli Consumer Study*, which found that more Miami-Fort Lauderdale, FL, deli shoppers buy from each deli category more frequently than the national average. Of the 500 shoppers polled, Hispanic shoppers made up nearly 15 percent of the deli patrons, nearly double the number in other surveyed markets. Hispanic shoppers also tend to have a higher deli purchasing frequency. In looking at the study's total U.S. demographic profile, 22 percent of Hispanics purchase from the deli more than one time a week compared with 14 percent of non-Hispanics.

Armed with this information, deli operators can position their products to reach their target consumers. **DB**

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## Sales Of Premium Meats Holding Steady

Ironically, many producers that specialize in higher-end meat products, especially organic or all-natural products, are doing well in these tough times. "When economic times become more difficult, the demand for quality usually goes up," says Jim Schloss, corporate vice president for sales and marketing, Smithfield Foods. "If they're going to spend a dollar, they want to know they're getting something for that dollar."

In addition, premium products are doing well because of a divided market. "Some customers are actually going to higher-end products," says Guy Giordano, president, Philadelphia, PA-based Vincent Giordano Corp. "Some people are shopping price, but others know they are going to pay more at the deli and want to make sure they get the best quality."

The all-natural, antibiotic-free, and organic meat products are doing particularly well. "Fortunately for us, we've experienced modest growth despite a sluggish economy," says Kyle Maas, product manager, Grand Rapids, MI-based Michigan Turkey Producers.

Demand for these products has remained steady and should continue on the same track. "Perhaps it's because the demand for this segment, particularly organic, is relatively inelastic compared to that of traditional deli meat," Maas says.

Other producers are reporting a similar demand for their natural meat products. "There's still going to be a segment of the population that wants all-natural and organic meats," says Ernie Davis, vice president for deli division sales, Golden, CO-based Coleman Natural Products. "It's a different customer, but there are people who want meat from animals containing no antibiotics and preservatives, and fed an all-vegetable diet."

Giovanna Varricchione of Colombo Importing U.S. believes much of the growth in deli meats may come from products that are leaner, nitrate-free or have more flavorful profiles. "You emphasize the healthy aspects of these products," she says.

And the idea of competing on price by lowering quality might not work in the long run, according to Giordano. "Our demand has been good," he says. "We're finding demand for all-natural or organic products, which are more expensive to produce."

Likewise, for some deli meat suppliers, simply the uniqueness of their product is enough to weather any economic climate. "We differentiate ourselves from the butcher counter with our flavor profile," says CEO Bobby Yarborough of Manda Fine Meats. "We're Louisiana. Our meats have the taste of Louisiana. I think things are staying the same as far as our meats go."

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*"Flavor Says It All"*

Mazur, director of deli operations, Jeannette, PA-based George E. DeLallo Co. "For dinner we also recommend a thick slice of turkey to be served as an entrée with a salad and vegetables."

Different price points of deli meats can drop the price of the sandwich even lower. "The recent introduction of Jennie-O Turkey Store Deli Favorites specifically addresses this consumer issue," Templer explains. "The products in the Deli Favorites line provide the attributes that consumers prefer at the price point they are more comfortable with."

### Satisfy Inquiring Minds

Hard times should bring new customers to the deli and old customers looking for different things. And it's worth the extra effort to let consumers know the details about what's new and available in the deli.

"We have found that the consumer is inquisitive and very interested in trying something new," DeLallo's Mazur says. "When we take the opportunity to offer a sample and say a few words to educate people about the product, they will return asking for that item again."

Customer interaction takes on even more importance when selling products behind the deli service counter. "At the deli counter, consumers are also looking for product information and education in order to feel comfortable with their purchase decision," Jennie-O's Templer says. "In an environment where packaging does not provide



key product information, it is important that the deli staff is educated about products and interacts with consumers."

And no information is more valuable than firsthand knowledge. Samples help consumers become familiar with the tastes and smells of different meat products. "Product sampling is a key influencer when deli shoppers are considering purchases," Templer says.

**"You might have some trade down in terms of quantity. Someone who usually buys a pound of ham or turkey at the deli might now buy a half pound."**

*Jim Schloss  
Smithfield Foods*

Sampling will become even more critical to a deli's bottom line in the months ahead. "Do more sampling," suggests Giovanna Varricchione, marketing manager for Colombo Importing U.S., based in Woodbridge, Ontario, Canada.

As for pre-packaged deli meats, Varricchione suggests that suppliers rethink package sizes to entice economically challenged consumers. "You might adjust packaging sizes to make the product more affordable," she says.

Indeed, in April 2008 Kraft Foods Inc. introduced single-serve packages of deli slices of meat as an extension of its existing line.

Likewise, consumers may opt to buy smaller quantities of the same products behind the glass. "You might have some trade down in terms of quantity," Smithfield's Schloss says. "Someone who usually buys a pound of ham or turkey at the deli might now buy a half pound."

According to research data from Counter Intelligence, an annual proprietary survey of 12,000 deli customers nationwide conducted by Jennie-O Turkey Store, quality is still a key factor drawing customers to the deli.

"According to Counter Intelligence, 57 percent of deli shoppers agree there is a difference in taste and quality between deli meats purchased in the deli case versus the supermarket meat department," Templer says. "Product freshness is the No. 1 reason consumers cited for shopping the deli. This attribute will not diminish with the economy."

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Reader Service No. 183

# Dry-Cured Hams Elevate Sales In The Deli



*Specialty meats from Italy and Spain offer consumers a memorable eating experience*

**By Trisha J. Wooldridge**

**I**n a time when more people are cutting corners to stretch their dollar further, Americans still want to reward themselves with small treats. Many are indulging their epicurean tastes by purchasing dry-cured ham from Italy and Spain. As more Americans discover the virtues of prosciutto di Parma (PDO), prosciutto di San Daniele (PDO), speck Alto Adige (PGI) and jamón serrano (TSG), U.S. sales are on the rise (see sidebar on page 120 for meaning of acronyms). According to data released by the Consorzio del Prosciutto di Parma, the organization that establishes and enforces the rigorous standards under which Parma ham is produced, U.S. sales alone reached

6.55 million pounds in 2007, a 20 percent increase over the previous year.

These meats cost more per pound, but it only takes a small amount to make an at-home dinner or weekend party a special occasion. Furthermore, these meats carry with them a tradition of quality and cultural status that lends added dimension to the eating experience.

"High-quality meats such as jamón serrano are an affordable luxury," says Kate Whittum, sales and marketing director, Redondo Iglesias USA, Garden City, NY. "If people want to treat themselves, they will make a fabulous meal at home—whatever Emeril or Bobby Flay did on TV." Redondo Iglesias USA and its parent company in Spain are known as the "maestros del jamón."

According to Gerd Wieser, sales representative for Recla, Silandro, Italy, makers of speck Alto Adige and other Italian meat products, television programs and gourmet food magazines are helping to spread the word about Italian dry-cured hams. "Customers trust high-end products—especially Italy's reputation for food," Wieser says.

Although consumers are becoming more educated about imported dry-cured hams, retailers need to inform deli personnel about the benefits of these fine meats. "The first level has to be with buyers and deli managers," says Alberto Minardi, general manager, Principe Foods, Los Angeles, CA. Known for its prosciutto di San Daniele, Principe Foods also brings to the U.S. market a



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complete line of Italian specialty meats, including prosciutto di Parma and speck Alto Adige.

"It is through knowledge and savoring these wholesome products that we can change our eating habits from common and price-driven to quality and wholesomeness," says Pierre Zreik, CEO, Rovagnati USA Inc., Clifton, NJ. The company, a subsidiary of Rovagnati in Biassono, Italy, imports the company's brand of prosciutto di Parma and speck Alto Adige.

### The Allure Of Dry-Cured Hams

Lou DiPalo, the fourth-generation owner of DiPalo's, a New York, NY-based cheese and specialty food shop, has his theory as to why sales of dry-cured meats are on the upswing. Italy and Spain are popular travel destinations for Americans, and experiencing the foods of these countries is a major part of the trip. "Tasting the flavor and texture of dry-cured ham invokes a memory," DiPalo says. "When you have a piece of cured meat, you're not only enjoying the flavor, but enjoying the place it comes from."

With a declining exchange rate for the dollar, more Americans are staying closer to home. "Consumers are deciding to vacation in the United States rather than in Europe, or not travel at all—but they always need to eat," Redondo Iglesias' Whittum says.

So, what's the allure of these meats? Dry-cured meats are minimally processed, with no additives or preservatives, creating an entirely all-natural product that meets extensive health requirements. "It's just the ham, salt and air," Rovagnati USA's Zreik says.

Wine aficionados talk about "terroir," or the effect of the environment on the flavor, texture and experience of the end product. Dry-cured meats are no exception. Most of the meats are cured using Mediterranean sea salt, which has its own distinct flavor.

Additionally, the air that cures the meat contributes to the unique flavor of each product. Prosciutto di Parma, for example, is dried in the hilly countryside in the area of Parma, Italy. "The hills funnel through country breezes, and the sweet air is infiltrated into the prosciutto di Parma," DiPalo says.

Prosciutto di San Daniele comes from the municipality of San Daniele del Friuli in the province of Udine, Italy, in the region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, where the climate is a mix of warm humidity from the Adriatic Sea and cold night air from the Alps. Speck Alto Adige is produced in Alto Adige and the entire province of Bolzano, Italy, where the sparkling air of the Alps and pristine landscape infuses the ham with flavor. Jamón serrano is cured in Spanish mountains, where fresh air contributes to its profile.

Prosciutto di Parma is a 100 percent natural product. "Not many hams can boast of being free of nitrates/nitrites or any other additives or preservatives," says Ruth Lowenberg of New



PHOTO COURTESY OF PROSCIUTTO DI PARMA

York, NY-based Lewis & Neale and spokesperson for the Consorzio del Prosciutto di Parma. The organization monitors all aspects of the production process, from raising the pigs to final packaging. Pigs used in the making of Parma ham must be at least nine months old and weigh at least 340 pounds at slaughter. The aging process—a minimum of 400 days—follows a strict schedule of salting, air drying and cellaring.

"This is the era of the concerned food customer—concerned about food safety as well as the origin of their food—where it came from and how it was prepared," Lowenberg says. "Prosciutto di Parma is produced and labeled with complete transparency."

Prosciutto di San Daniele has a milder, sweeter flavor than prosciutto di Parma and is lower in fat. The production process is highly regulated by the Consorzio del Prosciutto di San Daniele and must meet strict quality regulations before receiving its authentic seal. The production rate of San Daniele ham, however, is much less compared to Parma ham, affecting the price, perception of quality and popularity of San Daniele. Compared to the more than 200 farms producing prosciutto di Parma, less than 30 farms produce prosciutto di San Daniele.

Principe Foods produces three grades of San Daniele prosciutto, according to the aging process. San Daniele is aged for 14 months, Spe-



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## European Union Protected Designations

In 1992, the European Union (EU) introduced a system to protect and promote traditional and regional food products inspired by existing national systems, for example, the French Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) and the Italian Denominazione d'Origine Controllata (DOP) systems. To capitalize on the value of certain products, the EU decided to protect their names and to establish the conditions under which they could be used so that their specific and traditional character could be preserved. The EU's quality policy for agricultural products and foods aim to:

- Encourage diverse agricultural production.
- Protect names from misuse and imitation.
- Help consumers to understand the specific character of the products.

The EU protects by legislation particular product names that are linked to a territory or to a production method. Purchasing an EU quality labeled product guarantees not only its quality, but also its authenticity. Consumers and the food trade are increasingly interested in the geographical origin of food and other characteristics. The EU recognizes this and has developed three "quality logos," two of which have a strong geographical element and the third relates to traditional production methods. Each logo varies in the strictness of specifications that products must meet, but all share the common goal of furthering authenticity and sustainability.

**Protected Designation of Origin (PDO)** means the name of a region, a specific place or, in exceptional cases, a country, used to describe an agricultural product or a foodstuff:

- Originating in that region, specific place or country, and possessing quality or characteristics that are essentially or exclusively due to a particular geographical environment with its inherent natural and human factors, and



- The production, processing and preparation of which take place in the defined geographical area.

**Protected Geographical Indication (PGI)** means the name of a region, a specific place or, in exceptional cases, a country used to describe an agricultural product or foodstuff:

- Originating in that region, specific place or country and that possesses a specific quality or reputation or other characteristics attributable to that geographical origin, and

- The production and/or processing and/or preparation of which take place in the defined geographical area.

**Traditional Speciality Guaranteed (TSG)** means that a product must have features that distinguish it from other products. First, it must be traditional and have a special character that distinguishes it from foodstuffs in the same category. The specific features required by the system include:

- Use of traditional or raw materials in production of a foodstuff, or traditional composition,
- Or mode of production and/or processing method reflecting traditional methods.

When consumers see the EU logo, they know the product on which it is displayed is the "real thing."



Source: Fact Sheet, European Policy for Quality Agricultural Products, January 2007

DB

cial Reserve is aged for 16 months and Black Label is aged for more than 16 months.

Speck Alto Adige is made from boned ham from the same hind leg cut as prosciutto. Aged according to local practices and traditions, the ham is cured using the Central European style of smoke curing as well as the Mediterranean style of air curing the meat. During the salting process, the meat is flavored with black pepper, pimento, garlic and juniper berry, giving it a zesty flavor along with a slightly smoked taste.

"Recla's speck Alto Adige distinguishes itself by its remarkable mild taste," Recla's Wieser says. "It is less salty than other dry-cured hams

and does not leave a heavy smoky taste on the palate because of its curing process. When heated, speck Alto Adige does not smell like pork. The natural spices and herbs complement the meat's buttery taste."

In 2004, DiPalo's store in New York City offered the first speck Alto Adige PGI in the United States, Wieser says. From New York, the product made its way to other major U.S. markets, such as Texas and California, and to cities like Chicago, Boston and Miami. "Now, you can find our items across the country in deli stores, restaurants and high-level supermarkets such as Central Market and Bristol Farms," Wieser says.

Lovers of jamón serrano will point out that this dry-cured meat was introduced to Italy during the Roman Empire and is the predecessor of prosciutto. Whether this is true is debatable among culinary historians, but the quality of serrano is rarely argued. The name "serrano" reflects the mountains where the meat is cured. Like prosciutto in Italy, jamón serrano is produced in Spain according to rigid production and quality controls, from the care and breeding of pigs to the curing process.

Serrano ham, however, is cured differently than Parma ham. "Both are packed in salt and then hung to cure, but in curing prosciutto, the





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exposed meat at the end of the leg is coated with melted lard before hanging and serrano is not," Redondo Iglesias' Whittum explains. "This means that serrano ham loses more moisture, up to a quarter of the original weight of the leg, resulting in a dryer texture and a nuttier, more pronounced flavor than prosciutto."

Jamón serrano is becoming more prevalent in the United States and growing in popularity. "One is more likely to find it easily in cities like New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Miami,

Houston and Chicago—places with a Hispanic heritage or 'foodie' culture," Whittum says. "Distributors in all regions of the country carry our product, and from feedback at recent food shows, I know end users are looking for it in places you wouldn't think of as Spanish food meccas, such as in Pittsburgh."

### Strategies In A Tight Market

Dry-cured meats pack a lot of flavor, texture and possibility into a small amount. The more

deli operators know about the product, the more knowledge they can pass on to consumers through education and sampling.

Educating consumers makes a big difference, according to Rovagnati's Zreik, who has encountered a general lack of knowledge about the products during his travels across the country. Dry-cured meats are different than typical deli meats, so people need to know why they should invest in them. Simply knowing a little about each of these dry-cured meats can help consumers make better decisions, have a more fulfilling taste experience and inspire them to purchase the product again.

According to Alberto Morgante, president, Consorzio del Prosciutto di San Daniele, the potential market for San Daniele prosciutto is huge. "Even reaching a niche size would mean another Italy for us, but it is not that simple," he says. "The problem is making people understand the product and teaching the correct tasting methods, which is the only way to get ham moving."

Principe Foods is focusing its efforts on educating U.S. consumers. "Only 2 percent of the people in the United States know what prosciutto is," Minardi says.

Likewise, Recla is working with the Consorzio Speck dell'Alto Adige, importers and distributors to promote the merits of speck from Italy.

Typically dry-cured meats are sliced very thin, but not shaved. If the slices are too thick, the texture becomes chewy and loses its "melt-in-your-mouth" quality. The thin cut also doesn't overpower the palate.

By offering patrons a taste of these dry-cured meats and showing them how the meats can easily make a meal or party special—at a lower price than dining out—delis can increase sales. "We're doing more active demonstrations through retail channels and trade demonstrations," Minardi says.

Cross-merchandising these meats with other products gives customers great serving ideas. Thin slices of dry-cured meats make excellent wrappers and accompaniments for grilled vegetables, fruits and cheeses. Match meats with specialty cheeses, such as prosciutto di Parma with Parmigiano-Reggiano, which comes from the same region in Italy. Speck Alto Adige is a natural to serve with fresh Asiago PDO and jamón serrano with Manchego PDO. Delis also can offer ideas or samples of an antipasti platter with a variety of dry-cured meats, specialty cheeses and items from the olive bar.

"Because of its mild taste, speck Alto Adige is excellent with Mozzarella and arugula with an olive oil and lemon vinaigrette," Recla's Wieser says. "Other accompaniments include figs, asparagus and potato cream soup. It can also be used as a finishing touch in pasta and on pizza."

Summertime, in particular, brings opportunities for pairings. "In the summertime, prosciutto goes well with fruits such as cantaloupe and any

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## Getting To Know Speck

Among the dry-cured meat products, speck Alto Adige is perhaps the least familiar to U.S. consumers, but that's about to change. As more Italian specialty meat importers introduce their products to America, speck Alto Adige will roll off the tongue just as easily as prosciutto.

Speck Alto Adige, a slightly smoked raw ham, bears a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) stamp (see sidebar on page 120 for explanation). In Northern Italy, on the Austrian and Swiss borders, lies Alto Adige/Südtirol, the land where speck Alto Adige is traditionally produced using the method of a little salt, a little smoke and a lot of fresh air.

In reality, however, it is processed according to clear, precise specifications. It starts with the careful selection of the legs of pork, continues with the salting process (the finished product does not contain more than 5 percent), the addition of natural spices and light smoking alternating with exposure to the air. The entire process takes 22 weeks of seasoning.

The end result is a dry-cured ham with a balanced flavor, rustic appearance and unmistakable fragrance. **DB**

of the hard Italian cheeses," Principe Foods' Minardi says.

In addition to foods, pair some of the meats with different wines if the store has a wine department. "My absolute favorite way of serving serrano is thinly sliced as an appetizer with a glass of dry Fino Sherry," Redondo Iglesias' Whittum says. "It makes a really special starter for company or just a treat for yourself—especially with some Manchego or Valdeón cheese and sautéed shrimp."

Because most recipes only require a few slices, consumers can purchase smaller quantities as needed. "Post prices by the quarter pound, not by the pound," Lewis & Neale's Lowenberg suggests.

Whittum recommends going one step further. "Emphasize the price per person as opposed to

the price per pound," she says. "One to two ounces comprise a serving as opposed to four to six ounces of other meats. So in terms of how much one person consumes, it is not expensive."

Principe Foods' Minardi believes that pre-sliced packages of prosciutto are a great way to introduce U.S. consumers to the product. "For a portion of what they would spend for a pound of pre-sliced deli meat, they can get five to six slices of pre-sliced San Daniele," he says.

After customers realize dry-cured meats are

worth the price, they will come back for more. "Prosciutto di Parma and other gourmet foods are small investments in the scheme of things for upper-income people," Lowenberg says. "Whereas people might have to forego larger ticket items, they can still afford high-end deli meats."

When selling these products, the key is to focus on the value of the entire eating experience. Steeped in culture and flavor, dry-cured hams offer a tangible "memory" that reaches beyond price points. **DB**



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# Ribs And Wings Rustle Up Sales



PHOTO COURTESY OF PILGRIM'S PRIDE

*These popular summer items yield year-round profits for delis*

By Lisa White

**A**s convenient finger food, ribs and wings have been summer picnic favorites for years. Sales of these products typically ramp up in the warm months, especially when positioned for summer holidays, such as Independence Day and Memorial Day.

Better equipment technology, however, makes it easier for supermarket delis to propel these summertime sales into year-round profits. Innovative flavors and restaurant-quality food at affordable prices continue to steadily lure consumers to the deli department for ribs and wings.

According to Laurie Friedrich-Bargebuhr, president of Friedrich Metal Products, a Brown Summit, NC-based equipment supplier, barbecue is

currently one of the hottest food segments. "Where it used to be mainly regional, barbecue is now found in areas where it typically wasn't seen years ago," she says.

## A Look At Trends

In the past, ribs represented a small portion of deli sales, but now they are becoming an everyday item. "Ribs are a growing category, and more grocery delis are carrying them," says Robert Mintz, owner and CEO of Rupari Food Services, Deerfield Beach, FL. "This is because many consumers find them difficult to prepare from scratch at home."

Rupari Food Services is a leading wholesale supplier of spare ribs, back ribs, St. Louis-style ribs and other barbecue products to national restaurants, big box retailers and major super-

market chains. The company's best-selling flavor is hickory-smoked ribs, followed by sweet-sauce ribs. "This is still a very new category for retailers, and they haven't gone to the next level yet," Mintz says.

The Broaster Co., an equipment and food supplier based in Beloit, WI, recently introduced Broaster Recipe Pork Loin Back Ribs in a two-bone portion. The ribs are individually quick frozen and conveniently packed in five-pound pouches per case, making it easy for operators to simply heat and serve in a microwave, a convection oven or a conventional oven.

The company also offers a branded program that includes a pressure fryer for preparing ribs and wings on-site. "Foods fried in a Broaster pressure fryer are more tender, juicy and flavorful," says Mark Markwardt, Broaster's director of



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marketing. "Additionally, because Broaster foods are marinated, a lighter breading can be used, resulting in a product with lower carbs, less fat and fewer calories."

According to Markwardt, most retailers tend to sell more wings than ribs due to price point differences. "Wings have gone from a throw-away item to something very popular," he says. "For example, many supermarket delis are adding wing bars, which are similar to self-serve salad bars. Here, there will be six to 10 different wing flavors available, such as teriyaki, bourbon, barbecue, and hot and spicy. Customers pay by the pound."

Numerous surveys have shown that consumers today crave bold flavors, especially when it comes to wings. Marinades and seasonings with Jamaican or Asian flavors, in particular, have been strong sellers.

Progressive delis are using unique flavor offerings to draw customers—a strategy used by restaurants to rustle up business. "The flavors found on restaurant menus are filtering down to retail," says John McBride, vice president of sales, New Orleans, LA-based Chef Paul Prudhomme's/Magic Seasonings, a dry seasoning supplier. "Supermarkets are learning that people

are attracted to new flavors. Value-added flavor is key."

**Delis need to keep price in mind when marketing ribs and wings because many consumers are looking to replace restaurant meals to save money. "The magic number is between \$9.99 and \$10.99 at retail."**

*Robert Mintz  
Rupari Food Services*

Wings minus the bones are also a big hit. The Broaster Co. recently added boneless Buffalo wings to its traditional and hot and spicy wing lineup.

Pittsburg, TX-based Pilgrim's Pride, a supplier of fresh and prepared/cooked chicken products, also expanded its line of Wing Dings and Wing Zings with boneless versions.

"We introduced boneless Wing Ding and Wing Zing varieties not only to capitalize on the popularity of this segment, but also to help open up the wing supply," says Dan Emery, Pilgrim's Pride vice president of marketing. "They are easy to fix, quick to heat and offer a one-handed item for convenience."

### Sales Tips

Delis need to keep price in mind when marketing ribs and wings because many consumers are looking to replace restaurant meals to save money. According to Rupari's Mintz, the current economy is causing consumers to shift away from casual dining meals to prepared foods in retailer stores.

"The magic number is between \$9.99 and \$10.99 at retail, which is easier on the budget than the \$13.99-plus prices people are paying for the same food in a restaurant," Mintz says. He points out that ribs are an impulse item, not a destination food, which makes effective merchandising even more important in this segment.

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Ribs and wings can be merchandised in front of the deli case if they are prepackaged in a microwavable tray or behind the case by the meat. "Delis can really capitalize on the lunch segment," Pilgrim's Pride Emery says. "And if ribs and wings are sold hot on-the-spot behind the deli case, this can help increase sales."

Packaging is another important aspect to merchandising ribs and wings. Along with traditional rigid containers, many delis are discovering space-saving and environmentally friendly bags

for ribs and wings. The space that rigid containers take up is approximately five times that of bags. "These containers also are less expensive," says Ed Sussman, co-owner of Merit Paper Corp., a packaging supplier in Melville, NY.

### Equipment Innovation

Innovations in equipment technology have been vital to the growth of the ribs and wings category. Southern Pride, a Marion, IL, equipment manufacturer, provides gas-fired wood-burning or electric and wood-burning ovens in various sizes for producing product on-site. Different woods give retailers even more flavor choices. "Retailers can use hickory, oak, mesquite, pecan, apple, charcoal or a combination of these woods to create their own signature flavor," says Gene Pritchett, national sales manager.

Another equipment supplier, Alto-Shaam, located in Menomonee Falls, WI, provides a wide range of options for preparing ribs and wings. Wings can be fried with breading or

naked (with no breading), and then sauced. "From a retailer's standpoint, this is a relatively easy thing to do. Saucing afterward can create unique flavors," says Kevin Huffman, Midwest regional sales manager.

Wings also can be prepared in combi-ovens, which bake the product without oil for a healthier profile. Ribs can be slow cooked in a cook-and-hold oven at low temperatures, and then sauced before serving. They also can be sauced and then heated in a combi or sauced during the cooking cycle. Another popular way to prepare ribs is in a rotisserie oven with a basket accessory.

Alto-Shaam's combis offer a smoking option, which allows retailers to use real wood chips to smoke product.

Friedrich Metal Products' roasters and smokers provide convection air cooking. "This process is precise, because directed air streams ensure consistent temperatures throughout the oven," Friedrich-Bargebuhr says.

The company offers tabletop units with a triple rib rack as well as freestanding smokers that hold up to 80 whole chickens. Both units are self-cleaning.

"Ribs and wings are two products that will increase in sales," Merit Paper's Sussman says. "They are profitable for retailers, and these fresh grab-and-go items appeal to consumers." **DB**



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# Ramping Up Rotisseries

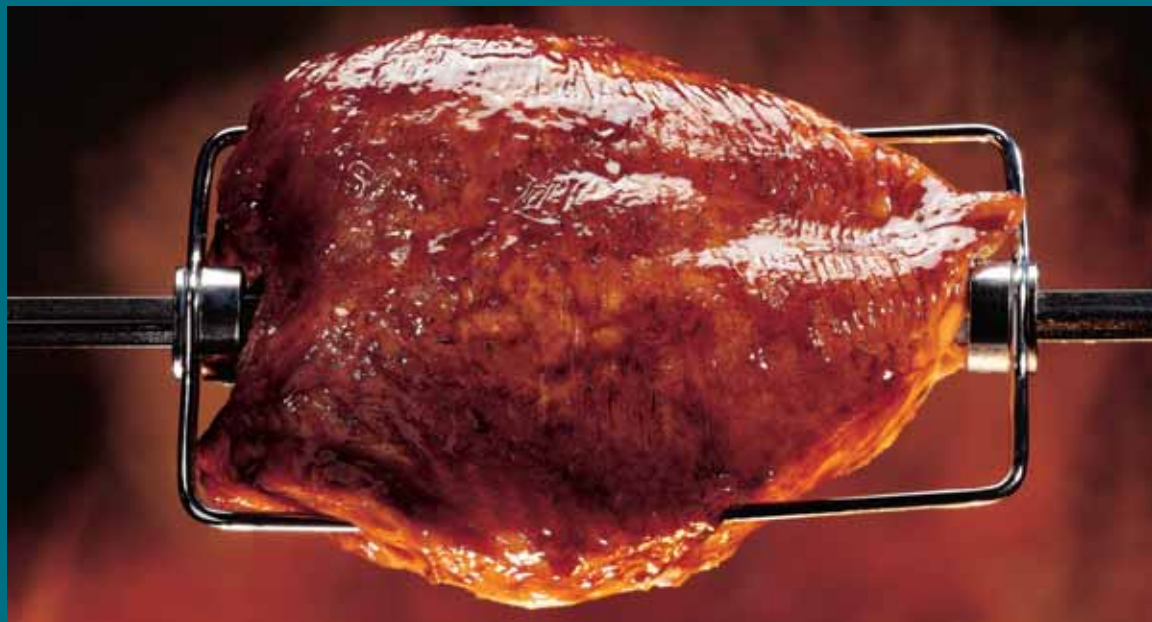


PHOTO COURTESY OF PERDUE

*The rotisserie chicken segment is reinventing itself with new flavors and more options for retailers*

By Lisa White

**R**etailers writing off the rotisserie chicken category as mature with limited-growth potential are not looking at the big picture. Those in the know are expanding their lucrative deli programs by offering more flavor and size choices, cross-merchandising, marketing meal deals, and highlighting their birds with special offers.

"Retailers are experimenting with every aspect of their programs," says Eric LeBlanc, director of marketing for foodservice retailing solutions, Tyson Foods, Springdale, AR. "These stores are finding little problem gaining year over

year increases in the double digits in this very significant deli category."

Madison, WI-based International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association's (IDDBA) survey of supermarket deli retailers, "Consumers in the Deli: Who's in Store," found that consumer respondents ate rotisserie chicken an average of 0.4 times per week, with 6 percent eating rotisserie chicken one to six times per week and 37 percent eating it one to three times per month.

According to LeBlanc, 58 percent of all rotisserie chicken is a planned purchase, with the perceived quality of the rotisserie chicken being a driver in store selection. "Rotisserie chicken is the single highest velocity SKU in the deli," LeBlanc says. "It is a product that responds well

to promotional activity, and it has high consumer awareness and good conversion to purchase. In other words, rotisserie chicken is the centerpiece of the supermarket deli's bid to be a convenience-meal destination."

## New Developments

Despite the longevity of this category, innovations continue to keep this deli segment rotating to the top. Delis are shifting to larger bird sizes to better accommodate families and provide better value to consumers. "We've seen a shift to larger bird sizes for some time," says Andrew Seymour, vice president of sales and marketing, Perdue Farms, Salisbury, MD.

Retailers looking for more differentiating



points in their rotisserie programs are doing so by incorporating larger, family-size chickens into the mix. However, preparing multiple whole-bird sizes may not be easy for all retailers to handle. "What limits this category is stores' cooking ability," says Dan Emery, vice president of marketing for Pilgrim's Pride Corp. based in Pittsburg, TX. "But if retailers can stick more pounds of bigger birds on the rotisserie, they can get their ring up in this segment."

**"Merit Paper is introducing a new generation rotisserie bag with a side closure, making it easier to reseal the bag. "It will facilitate easier loading and unloading of chickens because the bag opening will be wider."**

*Ed Sussman  
Merit Paper*

Along with larger sizes, retailers are experimenting with chicken formats. For example, Perdue is experiencing strong interest in its roaster breast for rotisseries. This all-breast product features the front half of a six and a half pound chicken that weighs just over two and a half pounds before cooking. "It's geared toward consumers who don't want dark meat," Seymour says.

Some stores are taking segmented chicken typically earmarked for frying and cooking it on the rotisserie. "This is the same product as the whole bird, but it is already cut up for the customer for added convenience," Seymour says.

Innovative flavors have been the backbone of the rotisserie chicken category, and selections on this front continue to expand. In the past, lemon pepper, barbecue and savory flavors were dominant, but today more regional profiles and ingredient call-outs are raising the bar in the taste department. Perdue's latest rotisserie introductions include its bourbon-flavored and Hispanic La Cocina whole roaster breasts.

Tyson's LeBlanc notes that Tuscan, Southwest, Hispanic and Asian flavor profiles are on the rise, in addition to reworked American favorites like mesquite-smoked as opposed to barbecue. "We also have seen more retailers

take a page out of the foodservice playbook by having limited-time offers," he says.

With all the hype about clean labels and all-natural products, it's no surprise the rotisserie chicken category has jumped on board. Perdue is introducing a line featuring an all-natural, non-injected chicken as well as a line of injected rotisserie birds featuring all-natural ingredients. "These chickens will have cleaner labels [in terms of additives]," Seymour says.

Tyson also has launched an antibiotic-free product line with labels reading "chicken raised

without antibiotics that impact antibiotic resistance in humans." This Rotisserie Chicken Raised without Antibiotics (RWA) line "is a very important innovation in this area," Le Blanc points out. "With Tyson's RWA program, we have addressed the two greatest concerns the consumer has over the quality of chicken product—the presence of hormones and antibiotics in the meat."

### Packaging Innovations

Because rotisserie chicken has long been a popular takeout item for supermarket delis, much

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## Hams Compete For Rotisserie Time

Move over chickens, here come rotisserie hams—the latest trend winding its way into deli departments. Polean Foods Inc., East Norwich, NY, is competing head to head with chickens for rotisserie time with its boneless hams, which contain no growth hormones, antibiotics, steroids, fillers, emulsifiers or trans fat. In addition, each two and a half-pound ham is totally edible end to end, providing delis and consumers with a value-added product with virtually no waste.

So, where are the hams? “It takes time to get people to promote new items in the deli,” says Polean’s president Peter Jazwinski. “It’s an education process at the deli level, and the deli people are our best salespeople.”

The company currently distributes its hams in the New York met-

ropolitan area and the Midwest. To educate deli employees, Polean conducts in-store training seminars for deli staff, emphasizing the importance of tasting demos so consumers can try the hams.

“Once consumers taste it, they buy it,” Jazwinski says. “And kids love the hams. Once a kid tastes it, I hear, ‘Mom, you’ve got to buy this ham.’”

Currently Polean offers three flavor profiles: Country Classic, a classic ham for everyday and holiday meals; Provincial Fine Herbs & Seasoning, a ham with a distinctive European-style flavor; and New England-Style Maple, a ham with a sweeter taste.

Great flavors, ease of carving and no consumer waste—these hams are ready to flex their muscle in the rotisserie segment. **DB**

## Challenges Remain

New sizes, flavors and packaging innovations are churning out sales, but the rotisserie chicken segment still faces challenges. “The biggest challenge I see in this category is one of strategy,” Tyson’s LeBlanc says. “For example, retailers have two methods of reducing shrink percentage: reduce the number of chickens discarded per day or sell more total birds. Another battleground is product quality. Overcooking chickens by even as little as 25 degrees can be a problem, and, coupled with inattention to holding times, results in a very poor eating experience for the consumer.”

Cost issues also come into play. “The increased cost of corn has caused chicken prices to go up,” Pilgrim’s Pride Emery says. “Consumers have to see the value of rotisserie chicken in relation to their other options after this price adjustment.”

Because this is a mature category, generating increased sales requires staying on top of trends and offering a variety of choices. “Branding rotisserie has produced a significant increase in sales for some stores,” Perdue’s Seymour says.

The keys to success include making sure the birds are available and optimizing leftovers. “This may seem easy, but can be hard to execute,” Seymour says. “Retailers can get around shrink by finding other ways to sell or use the birds not sold between the peak hours of 4 p.m. and 7 p.m. For instance, the meat can be used in chicken salad, pot pies or other deli dishes. It may take additional labor, but these stores will increase their rings while decreasing shrink.”

Many predict continued growth in the rotisserie chicken segment in the years ahead. “We will see healthier options become more viable and important to this category, along with unique flavors and larger bird sizes,” Seymour says.

Flavor selection and communication will be driven by foodservice insights. “Better shopper and consumer insights will foster the creation of more focused marketing strategies,” Tyson’s LeBlanc says. “The most important business

emphasis has been placed on packaging. In the past, retailers could only choose from conventional deli containers, such as rigid domes, foil-lined bags or trays with overwrapping. Today, rotisserie chicken packaging suppliers are providing creative packaging solutions that take convenience and portability up a notch.

Alan Hiebert, IDDBA’s education and information specialist, says, for the most part, retailers can find packaging options to meet their customers’ needs with little compromise. “Obviously, a perfect packaging option would be something that doesn’t fog, is easy to carry, keeps chickens hot, does not leak, can store leftover chicken in the refrigerator, and can be used to reheat leftovers in the oven or in the microwave,” he says.

According to Tara Downing, product manager for rotisserie container supplier Robbie Manufacturing, Lenexa, KS, trends show that consumers will pay more for better, more convenient packaging. “Consumers seem to want a rotisserie chicken not only for tonight’s meal, but also for the next day,” she says. “Therefore, packaging that is resealable or microwaveable is a benefit.”

Merit Paper, Melville, NY, recently extended its line of rotisserie bags, adding more sizes to accommodate the expanding marketplace, says Ed Sussman, co-owner of the company. The bags are easy to transport and reseal, and also feature an anti-fog/anti-condensation feature. Logos, production information and UPC codes are printed right on the bag rather than on labels.

Merit Paper also is introducing a new generation rotisserie bag with a slide closure, making it easier to reseal the bag. “It will facilitate easier loading and unloading of chickens because the bag opening will be wider,” Sussman explains.

What’s next on the horizon? Rotisserie packaging with larger print, particularly for food preparation and safety information, geared toward aging Baby Boomers. And to accommodate a variety of rotisserie chicken sizes, there will be advancements in film characteristics allowing for custom sizing and venting.

**“We will see healthier options become more viable and important to this category, along with unique flavors and larger bird sizes.”**

*Andrew Seymour  
Perdue Farms*

And another sign of the times: Today’s socially conscious consumers are beginning to demand environmentally friendly packaging from retailers, even though they may be unwilling to give up the convenience they’ve come to expect. “As a result, some stores are beginning to use corn- or soy-based plastics,” IDDBA’s Hiebert says.

growth strategy for a supermarket deli in this category will not be driven by a checklist, but by an understanding of the stage of development the business is currently in. The future is not a restaurant in a retail store, but a redefinition of convenience-meal solutions sourced from retail. That’s what we call foodservice retailing.” **DB**



# Tactical Maneuvers For Pre-Sliced Deli



PHOTO COURTESY OF PILLER'S

*Strategically position commodity and specialty products to generate sales*

By Trisha J. Wooldridge

Consumers have a wide variety of deli meats and cheeses to choose from—whether it's sliced behind the deli service counter or in pre-sliced packages displayed in the cold case. "Pre-packaged meats have become a huge part of the deli," says John Jack, vice president sales and marketing, Fiorucci Foods Inc., Colonial Heights, VA.

If a deli has cultivated an effective pre-sliced category, it can reap big profits by catering to time-starved customers who can't wait in line. The department can also continue to ring up deli dollars beyond the regular operating hours of the deli service counter. In addition, pre-sliced products may include premium products that might

not otherwise be suitable for the cold case.

Today's consumers face some of the longest daily commutes in history, and schedules are more varied than ever before. People not only have less time to go food shopping and cook dinners, but they may also go to the grocery store at odd times, such as very early or very late. The customer shopping after his or her third-shift job may not make it to the store during normal deli operating hours. Pre-sliced meats provide the perfect answer for these consumers because they can buy "deli-fresh" food no matter what time of day it is.

What's more, many consumers are demanding high-quality selections and are willing to pay premium prices. Having upscale pre-sliced meats in the cold case allows these customers to grab-and-go just like everyone else.

The original intent of the pre-sliced category hasn't changed; it's still to prevent loss of sales in the deli. "This means keeping sales in the deli when lines are long or the service deli is closed," explains Chris Bekermeier, deli brand manager, Butterball LLC, Naperville, IL.

However, the most significant change in the pre-sliced category is the evolution of two tiers of products: commodity and specialty. According to Kate Whittum, sales and marketing director, Redondo Iglesias USA, Garden City, NY, the common link between these groups is consumers' demand for convenience—the ability to go in, get what they want and check out quickly—whenever they're in the store.

The commodity shopper and specialty shopper are "often the same person, buying for different days of the week," Whittum says. In the

same trip to the deli, Whittum explains, this person is considering: How many school or work lunches do I need to prepare?—as well as What am I going to make for my fun, fancy dinner with friends this weekend?

### The Effects Of Packaging

Once opened, deli meat behind the case should be sold and eaten relatively quickly. Pre-sliced products, on the other hand, boast a longer shelf life and generate less shrink for the deli. Less shrink adds up to more profits. Additionally,

improved packaging means customers can get more bang for their buck by stocking up on products in one shopping trip.

Much of the growth in pre-sliced sales is due to the evolution of packaging, says Erik Waterkutte, director of marketing, John Morrell & Co., Cincinnati, OH. John Morrell & Co. is one of the country's largest producers of private label processed meat products. Deli packaging today goes beyond rigid containers and zipper bags. When resealable plastic tubs hit the scene, they made a huge impact on the category because of

their enhanced ability to keep meats fresher for longer periods of time.

Trendsetting packaging can give products an edge in the market. "You have to offer something new and something innovative," says Harry Tillman, vice president of business development, Smithfield Deli Group, a subsidiary of Smithfield, VA-based Smithfield Foods. Packaging styles, such as clear clamshell packaging, which first became popular in Europe, are now gaining momentum in the United States. Clear clamshell packaging allows consumers to see exactly what they are buying on all sides—and conveys the perception of a higher-end product.

According to David Biltchik, chairman of Consultants International Group, Washington, DC, Prosciutto di Parma (Parma ham) accounts for approximately 85 percent of the Italian dry-cured products coming into the United States. Of this, about 13 percent is shipped pre-packaged. "If it's not packaged and sliced in Italy, it cannot be called Prosciutto di Parma," Biltchik says.

Pre-packaged Parma ham has a 90-day shelf life, so it has to move quickly from Italy into U.S. retail stores. "We know that if it is consumed in those 90 days, it will be the best quality," Biltchik says. "After 90 days, it will deteriorate in color and taste."

Fiorucci Foods Inc. imports Prosciutto di Parma from its location in Parma, Italy. "Quite frankly, pre-packaged is the best way to get the product," Jack says. In addition, the company offers an assortment of Italian-style specialty meats, including Riserva prosciutto, Genoa hard salami, mortadella, sopressata and more.

Redondo Iglesias USA is a third-generation company recognized in Spain as the "maestros del jamón." The company sells a four-ounce resealable package of pre-sliced serrano ham in the United States.

"Quality packaging and quality raw materials equal the best quality product to the consumer," says Pierre Zreik, CEO, Rovagnati U.S.A., a subsidiary of Rovagnati in Biassono, Italy. Atmosphere packaging, for instance, is being used to better preserve products and further increase their value and shelf life.

### Strategize Tactics

As the pre-sliced category continues to grow, operators are tasked with finding the right balance between the selection of pre-sliced items and meats behind the deli service glass. More variety means more effort to make the department work as a whole.

"With such a variety of items available, deli managers need to be especially careful to tailor the selection," says Redondo Iglesias' Whittum. "It's tremendously valuable real estate, and every item needs to pay the rent."

If the majority of customers are buying mainly commodity pre-sliced items or commodity meats behind the case, those items deserve the most

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"real estate." On the other hand, if consumers with more sophisticated palates patronize the store, the deli needs to dedicate appropriate space to premium items. Most stores, however, will find their clientele somewhere between the two extremes and must strike a balance.

To this end, Fiorucci's Jack advises operators to take a look at the store's vision and determine how the deli fits in. And within the context of the deli's vision, operators need to determine how the pre-sliced segment fits in.

A good way to attack this approach is to take

a page from famed general Sun-Tzu's *The Art of War* and employ multiple strategies to adapt to changing conditions. Pay attention to what is working and what is not. Track which items turn over faster and which do not. If a store has the space and capability, it should try several types of displays to see which ones appeal to the store's demographic.

For some stores, hanging pre-sliced products on pegs in the deli is effective, while an island display may be more of a draw in other delis. Sometimes, stores will have both types of dis-

plays. "Just because the package has a peghole on the top, doesn't mean that's the only way to display it," says John Morrell's Watercutter.

It's also important not to go overboard and lose sight of the commodities that people depend on. Too many SKUs can overwhelm a customer, and missing commodity items, such as basic lunchmeats, can hurt these reliable rings.

## Close The Sale

According to Smithfield's Tillman, pre-sliced deli products need to be part of the advertising mix so customers know what is available in this category. If they don't see what is offered—or if it is not brought to their attention—they can't plan to purchase it.

"Most deli consumers are aware of the pre-sliced section, but not all," says Butterball's Bekemeier. "We need to make sure to use signage to make them aware. When the service deli is closed, a poster should be used at the entrance to point people to the pre-sliced section. For non-regular deli shoppers who are not aware of the pre-sliced section, you may want to consider putting an item on sale every six months or so to help build awareness of the section."

In the case of pre-sliced products, a little education can go a long way to boost sales. Delis need to inform consumers about what to expect from some of the specialty products via shelf-talkers and ads. Having knowledgeable staff on hand to explain the unique quality or higher value of a product is also critical to making a sale.

"One of the difficulties we're dealing with is that the format of pre-sliced gives people a false expectation of complete uniformity," Redondo Iglesias' Whittum says. "Serrano ham is the minimally processed leg of a pig. How can you expect package after package to contain six identical slices?"

Budget-minded consumers may be turned off by the higher prices of specialty items, but may spend a little extra if they're planning a gourmet dinner for friends. Just a small amount of prosciutto or serrano ham can turn an ordinary dish into something extraordinary.

The pre-sliced segment is still growing and evolving. More and more specialty imports from Europe are joining commodity offerings, and packaging innovations are showcasing products to their best advantage.

In comparing the pre-sliced category to the deli service segment, Butterball's Bekemeier says, "Pre-sliced will never take over deli service sales, but it will always be an ongoing contributor to deli sales for a few reasons, including convenience and food safety. These trends are currently at the top of consumers' minds and will continue to grow in the future."

And Whittum points out another factor. "As long as commute times continue to increase, there will be a rising demand for convenience foods of all kinds," she says.

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# Tips For Filtering Fads And Finding Trends At IDDBA



By  
**Sharon Olson**  
President  
Olson  
Communications  
Chicago, IL

It's that annual adventure into the "trends" at the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association (IDDBA) Show when we have the chance to taste, savor and decide what's going to captivate our customers. When Olson Communications deconstructs the characteristics that give the latest fads the staying power to catch the wave and become enduring trends, here is what we look for:

- **Of-The-Moment Excitement**—Is there something new, fresh and exciting that will lead to long-term value-added satisfaction?
- **Crave Everyday Flavor**—Exotic, intoxicating flavors always create a buzz, but consumers are not going to give up their favorite comfort foods—especially in an uncertain economy. Look for foods that use flavor to add a hint of the exotic to the classics for a safe culinary adventure. And remember, comfort foods are somewhat different for Baby Boomers than they are for Gen Y consumers.
- **The Joy Of Discovery**—Today's educated, intelligent and curious consumers want to feel like they have discovered something special. They want the inside scoop on handcrafted, handmade and one-of-a-kind products.

Olson Communications reviewed more than 20 food shows and conferences in the United States and abroad this year to consolidate its take on the trends. In doing so, we identified three broad categories:

## Foods With Integrity

Consumers are looking for so much more than a label when choosing their meals. With the mainstreaming of organic, a whole new set of criteria and characteristics has come into play as skeptical consumers wonder about the real meaning of organic when it appears on the label of a processed frozen food item.

Green City markets are doing a lot to raise consumer awareness of locally grown, sustainable foodstuffs and are drawing attention to the integrity of the process. Farm to School programs are educating schoolchildren and raising their collective consciousness about the food they eat. Consumers are beginning to learn how to discern a "green wash" from a true "green initiative" with the right intentions.

Time is the new currency driving many consumers to grab-and-go convenience foods as a lifestyle choice. When they have a moment to think about their choices, consumers want to see labels with clean ingredient statements—not words that sound like something cooked up in the science lab instead of a kitchen.

Yet, even the greenest, most zealous consumer under-

stands trade-offs. There is an expectation of abundance and variety among American consumers that allows them to accept imported foods if they have a taste for specialty foods not readily available in the United States and confidence in their local retailer.

**Cooking methods that are difficult for consumers to replicate at home are also driving flavors and new product development of prepared foods.**

## Life In Balance

The wellness movement is not about deprivation; it is about having it all and feeling great about it. It is about great tasting, healthful foods that consumers balance individually.

At last year's IDDBA, show, we heard "small is the new big." Small is captivating, but big is okay too, because

U.S. consumers are accustomed to having it all. At a conference earlier this year, research and development chefs shared ideas for introducing stealth health into prepared foods. Stealth health turns favorite foods into healthier alternatives without compromising taste, texture or appetite appeal by adding more vegetables, baking instead of frying, and decreasing the amount of sugar in dipping sauces.

Indulgence is here to stay, but it has to be worth the splurge for consumers so they can keep their lives in balance. It may mean taking a smaller bite or putting a bit more effort into an exercise program.

## Authentic Flavors

The deli has been the incubator for consumer experimentation with authentic ethnic foods forever, so what's the news? The news is about how to capture authentic flavors for mainstream consumers. Suppliers understand that being true to several ethnic cuisines might not be reasonable for the typical deli operation, so spice blends, speed scratch, and fully prepared ethnic foods make it easy to be authentic.

Cooking methods that are difficult for consumers to replicate at home are also driving flavors and new product development of prepared foods. An ethnic dish does not have to be replicated exactly, but it must deliver the flavor experience consumers want.

Woks might be fairly common for Asian takeout, but a tandoor oven might be a little more problematic. That's where suppliers of fully prepared, high-quality authentic ethnic foods fit the bill. Authentic flavor does not have to be complicated. Simple, rustic dishes, barely there sauces and clean flavors are on trend as well.

At last year's IDDBA show, we saw dozens of varieties of salt, and each had a story to tell about the place it came from, the process and its unique appeal. But beware of sodium in prepared foods; it's the latest ingredient villain.

So for every trend there is a counter trend; the trick is finding the perfect balance for your customers. **DB**

## Food Safety Issues Of Not-Ready-To-Eat Meals

14.apr.08

Colorado State University, SafeFood News - Spring 2008 - Vol. 12 No. 1

Mandy Miller, CSU Student

<http://www.ext.colostate.edu/safeFood/newsltr/v12n1s03.html>

Not-ready-to-eat meals can often be confused with ready-to-eat meals. According to the Food Safety Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (FSIS-USDA), not ready-to-eat products (NRTE) are identified as "raw" and can contain the presence of pathogens that could cause foodborne illness. Not-ready-to-eat meals require the consumer to cook thoroughly in order for safe consumption. Ready-to-eat (RTE) products, on the other hand, are identified as safe to consume without any further cooking, even though heat may be applied for palatability purposes. To the consumer, these two food classifications are difficult to distinguish and can raise some food safety concerns.

Although NRTE meals are convenient and usually require minimal preparation, they still can carry pathogens if not prepared correctly. Examples of these types of meals include frozen food entrées (pizzas, pot pies, TV dinners, etc.) and marinated, stuffed and/or breaded fish or meat, foods that appear to be fully prepared but still require further cooking. The labeling of these foods is not always recognizable as "raw and requiring cooking." Most food that needs to be cooked prior to consuming will have a label on the package that says to thoroughly cook the item.

Here are some guidelines to follow when preparing NRTE (not-ready-to-eat) foods:

- Always read the directions very carefully and be sure to follow them as written. The food must reach the proper temperature for the specified time to kill harmful bacteria.
- If using a microwave oven, find out the wattage of the oven and adjust your cooking time accordingly.
- Microwave ovens can cook food unevenly, causing cold spots in the food; therefore, stirring while cooking can aid in assuring that the correct temperature is reached throughout the product.
- When microwaving, be sure to allow the food to sit for the specified time after cooking as this time is considered part of the overall cooking time and important in ensuring the safety of the product.
- When cooking multiple foods, always make sure to follow the directions for preparing more than one food item.
- Make sure not to cross-contaminate sur-

faces and cooking utensils with any uncooked food.

- Always store not-ready-to-eat meals as directed; frozen foods should remain frozen until cooked.
- Avoid time-temperature abuse, and keep foods out of the temperature danger zone (any temperature that falls between 41°F and 140°F).
- Do not keep meals longer than recommended; they are perishable, especially fresh unfrozen meals.
- Use a food thermometer to know when food products are fully cooked, thereby ensuring destruction of any foodborne illness-causing bacteria.

Source:

1. Englejohn, D. Jan. 2008. International Association for Food Protection. Timely Topics Symposium Presentations. Available at: <http://www.foodprotection.org/meetingsEducation/Timely%20Topics/Englejohn.pdf>

## Microbiological Quality Of Sushi From Sushi Bars And Retailers

01.apr.08

Journal of Food Protection, Volume 71, Number 4, April 2008, pp. 860-864(5)

Atanassova, Viktoria; Reich, Felix; Klein, Günter

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/iafp/jfp/2008/00000071/00000004/art00030;jsessionid=qm32g3cqfe3p.victoria>

Abstract:

Sushi is a traditional Japanese food, mostly consisting of rice and raw fish. Fish is considered a healthy food, but as with other animal products, consumption of raw muscle incurs potential health risks such as ingestion of pathogenic bacteria or parasites. In this study, 250 sushi samples were analyzed for their microbiological status and the prevalence of pathogenic bacteria. A comparison was made between frozen sushi from supermarkets and fresh sushi from sushi bars. Aerobic mesophilic bacteria counts differed for sushi from these two sources, with means of 2.7 log CFU/g for frozen sushi and 6.3 log CFU/g for fresh sushi. The prevalence of *Escherichia coli* and *Staphylococcus aureus* was higher in the fresh samples. *Salmonella* was found in four (1.6%) of the sushi samples, and *Listeria monocytogenes* were found in three (1.2 percent) of the samples. These results indicate that the microbiological quality of industrially processed sushi is higher than that of freshly prepared sushi. The quality of freshly prepared sushi strongly depends on the skills and habits of the preparation cooks, which may vary.

Affiliations: 1: Institute of Food Quality



**M**artin Mitchell, technical director of the Refrigerated Foods Association (RFA) and managing director of Certified Laboratories, compiles TechNews.

The information has been compiled from press releases, news articles and government announcements and policy clarifications. Additional information may be obtained by contacting RFA by phone at 770-452-0660 or online at [www.refrigeratedfoods.org](http://www.refrigeratedfoods.org).

and Food Safety, University of Veterinary Medicine Hannover, Foundation, in Hannover, Germany

## FDA Releases New Labeling Guide

01.apr.08

FDA and the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition have published a new guidance document, *A Food Labeling Guide* (<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/2lg-toc.html>) to help manufacturers deal with any issues that might arise during label creation. This guide replaces an earlier version published in September 1994 (and subsequently updated in 1999).

The guide's introduction notes that it is not attempting to answer every food-labeling question that might arise. However, most frequently raised questions have been addressed using a "question and answer" format, in which the vast majority of food labeling questions are answered.

The document goes on to note that "FDA receives many questions from manufacturers, distributors and importers about the proper labeling of their food products. This guidance is a summary of the required statements that must appear on food labels under these laws and their regulations. To help minimize legal action and delays, it is recommended that manufacturers and importers become fully informed about the applicable laws and regulations before offering foods for distribution in the United States."

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Anco Foods	19	126	Spanish Cheese	800-592-4337	201-641-3059
Ameg USA, Inc.	42	121	Olive Bars	800-276-3487	610-746-9580
Atlanta Foods International	33	159	Cheese	404-688-1315	404-223-6637
Beemster	31	181	Dutch Cheese	914-374-6891	
BelGioioso Cheese, Inc.	9	167	Cheese	877-863-2123	920-863-8791
BelGioioso Cheese, Inc.	53	101	Cheese	877-863-2123	920-863-8791
Bunge Oils	21	112	Oil	800-828-0800	314-292-4797
California Milk Advisory Board	69	149	Cheese	209-525-6875	209-525-6899
Cedar's Mediterranean Foods, Inc.	65	110	Mediterranean	800-280-7392	978-374-7356
The Cheeses of France	11	106	Cheese	207-775-4100	
Chloe Foods, Inc.	63	156	Olives	718-827-9000	718-547-0052
Cibao Meat Products	64	131	Hispanic Deli Meats	718-993-5072	718-993-5638
Colombo Importing U.S./Casa Italia	112	125	Italian Deli Products	800-308-2544	905-850-3999
Comte Cheese Association	75	140	Cheese	212-216-9671	212-689-0989
Conroy Foods	2	174	Condiments	800-317-8316	412-781-1409
Costanza's Bakery, Inc.	104	170	Breads	716-656-9093	716-656-9218
DCI Cheese Company	61	155	Organic Cheese	800-782-0741	920-387-2194
Del Monte Fresh Produce	92	185	Fresh Produce	800-950-3683	305-442-4409
George E. DeLallo Co.	140	165	Olives & Antipasto	800-433-9100	724-523-0981
George E. DeLallo Co.	79	166	Olives & Antipasto	800-433-9100	724-523-0981
Don Miguel	139	108	Mexican Food	877-364-4835	
Farm Fresh Pickles	40	186	Pickles	800-97-PICKLE	954-351-1009
Finlandia Cheese	23	116	Deli Sandwich Cheese	973-316-6699	973-316-6609
Fiorucci Foods, Inc.	119	176	Roasted Ham	800-524-7775	804-520-2681
Fiscalini Cheese Co.	74	129	Cheese	800-810-FARM	209-545-5008
FMP	127	100	Equipment	910-621-2882	910-621-7901
FoodMatch, Inc.	82	168	Mini Toast	800-350-3411	212-334-5042
Vincent Giordano Corporation	109	139	Roast Beef	215-467-6629	215-467-6339
Grass Point Farms	86	130	All Natural Cheese	715-669-7546	715-669-7583
Great Lakes Cheeses	71	122	Cheese	800-677-7181	940-834-1002
Harmel Foods Corporation	13	134	Deli Meats	800-523-4635	507-437-5119
Innovasian Cuisine Enterprises, Inc.	35	169	Ethnic Foods	425-251-3706	206-243-0363
InnoWare, Inc.	45	175	Packaging	800-237-8270	404-659-5116
Jennie-O Foods, Inc.	5	162	Deli Meats	800-328-1756	320-231-7100
Kangaroo Brands, Inc.	105	187	Pita Chips	414-355-9696	414-355-4295
Klandike Cheese Co.	56	109	Cheese	608-325-3021	608-325-3027
Kontos Foods, Inc.	103	103	Flatbreads	973-278-2800	973-278-7943
Laura Chenel's Chevre, Inc.	48	128	Cheese	707-996-4477	707-996-1816
Magic Seasoning	126	178	Seasoning Blends	504-731-3519	504-731-3576
Manda Fine Meats	114	113	Deli Meats	800-343-2642	725-344-7647
Mann Packing Co., Inc.	93	104	Produce	800-884-MANN	831-422-5171
Merit Paper Corporation	127	171	Packaging	800-346-1560	631-454-9170
G.L. Mezzetta, Inc.	81	153	Olives/Condiments	707-648-0105	707-648-1060
G.L. Mezzetta, Inc.	27	152	Olives/Condiments	707-648-0105	707-648-1060
Miatech, Inc.	94	173	Deli Service Cases	800-339-5234	503-659-2204
Michigan Turkey Producers Co-op Incorporated	110	114	Turkey	616-245-2221	616-475-4192
Montchevre-Belin, Inc.	48	160	Goat Cheese	310-544-0450	310-541-3760
John Morrell & Co.	111	188	Deli Meats	800-818-9587	513-346-7551
Nordian International Inc.	134	148	Jarlsberg Cheese	203-324-5620	203-325-3189
Nuovo Pasta Productions, Ltd.	89	120	Pasta	800-803-0033	203-380-4091
Organic Farm Marketing	86	130	All Natural Cheese	715-669-7546	715-669-7583
Pactiv	67	123	Packaging	800-476-4300	847-482-2299
Parmigiano-Reggiano & Prosciutto di Parma	121	180	Parmigiano-Prosciutto		
Peppadew USA	77	189	Deli Items	908-580-9100	
Piller Sausages & Delicatessens Ltd.	132	118	Deli Meats	800-265-2628	519-743-7111
Placon	101	172	Packaging	800-541-1535	608-271-3162
Plainville Farms	112	161	Deli Meats	800-724-0206	315-638-0659
Principe Food U.S.A., Inc.	29	177	Prosciutto	310-680-5500	559-272-6183
Queso Campesino	70	132	Hispanic Cheese	303-316-4251	303-316-4249
Redondo Iglesias USA	15	119	Serrano Ham	718-729-2763	718-937-3250
Refrigerated Foods Association	87	151	Association	770-452-0660	770-455-3879
Reser's Fine Foods	7	102	Sides	800-333-6431	503-646-9233
Rogue Creamery	76	190	Cheese	541-665-1155	541-665-1133
Rose Specialties	40	179	Mustards	503-246-0004	503-246-0005
Roth Kase	56	154	Cheese	888-KASE-USA	608-328-2120
Rovagnati USA	117	182	Deli Meat	973-772-4446	973-773-4433
Rubschlagger Baking Corporation	106	127	Bakery	773-826-1245	773-826-6619
Sabra Blue & White Foods	85	184	Hummus	718-932-9000	718-204-0417
Sandridge Food Corporation	97	142	Soups	800-627-2523	330-722-3998
Saputo Cheese USA, Inc.	55	124	Italian Cheese	800-824-3373	847-267-0224
Sartori Food Corporation	52	147	Cheese	920-893-6061	920-892-2732
Savello USA, Inc./Leancini	123	136	Italian Cheese	570-822-9743	570-822-6622
Savello USA, Inc./Leancini	122	137	Italian Cheese	570-822-9743	570-822-6622
Savello USA, Inc./Leancini	73	138	Italian Cheese	570-822-9743	570-822-6622
Savello USA, Inc./Leancini	49	192	Italian Cheese	570-822-9743	570-822-6622
Schorr's	40	186	Pickles	800-97-PICKLE	954-351-1009
SIAT Paris	135	117	Trade Show	704-365-0041	704-365-8426
Smithfield Deli Group	25	158	Deli Meats	757-357-1696	757-357-1606
The Snack Factory, Inc.	39	146	Snacks	888-683-5400	609-683-9595
Southern Pride	125	143	Equipment	800-851-8180	618-993-5960
Stefano Foods, Inc.	43	141	Pizza	800-340-4019	704-399-3930
Swiss-American, Inc.	54	115	Cheese	314-533-2224	314-533-2224
Unilever Foodsolutions	INSERT		Condiments	800-272-1217	
Valley Lahvosh Baking Co.	104	157	Bakery	209-485-2700	209-485-0173
Ventura Foods, LLC	99	150	Shortening, Oils, Spreads	760-447-9657	303-679-0095
Venus Wafers, Inc.	59	163	Crackers	800-545-4538	617-749-7195
Venus Wafers, Inc.	INSERT		Crackers	800-545-4538	617-749-7195
Volpi Foods	118	193	Italian Meats	800-288-3439	314-772-0411
Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board, Inc.	57	135	Cheese	800-383-9662	608-836-5822
Woolwich Dairy	47	144	Cheese	800-899-8689	908-647-8305

## Blast From The Past

# Piller's Sausages & Delicatessens Ltd.

**M**ounted on the wall in the boardroom of Piller's Sausages & Delicatessens Ltd. is a three-dimensional model that represents the original 1957 Piller's plant on Wismer Street in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. The building was little more than a cottage, but it was part of the very first Huber family business in Ontario. However, this is not where the Huber family business first started.

Hailing from the former country of Yugoslavia, the Huber family was dedicated to their cultural roots and heritage as ethnic Germans. But they left war-torn Europe to rebuild their family business in Canada and reclaim their previous success as German "Sausage Meisters."

In 1957, Wilhelm Huber opened a small butcher shop in Waterloo using family recipes and traditional European meat processing methods. Two years later, his brothers Edward and Heinrich joined the company, which became Piller's Sausages & Delicatessens Ltd.



As the Hubers established their business in North America, they maintained a simple, twofold approach to running their business: expand the company's reach into new and growing markets and constantly evolve to meet customers' changing tastes. At the same time, the Hubers always remembered their German training and lineage.

Today, Piller's Sausages & Delicatessens Ltd. is one of North America's pre-eminent producers of niche, cooked and smoked meats. It encompasses four production facilities and a state-of-the-art distribution center that processes orders for millions of pounds of European-style deli meats annually. The company has won numerous international awards, and continues to grow and evolve each year. For more than 50 years, Piller's Sausages & Delicatessens Ltd. has remained a family business dedicated to its employees, suppliers and many loyal customers.

Blast From The Past is a regular feature of DELI BUSINESS. We welcome submissions of your old photos, labels or advertisements along with a brief description of the photo. Please send material to: Editor, DELI BUSINESS, P.O. Box 810217, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0217 or e-mail [DeliBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com](mailto:DeliBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com). For more information contact us at (561)994-1118.

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