

DELI BUSINESS

MARKETING MERCHANDISING MANAGEMENT PROCUREMENT

FEB./MAR. 2009 \$14.95

The Deli Experience



ALSO INSIDE

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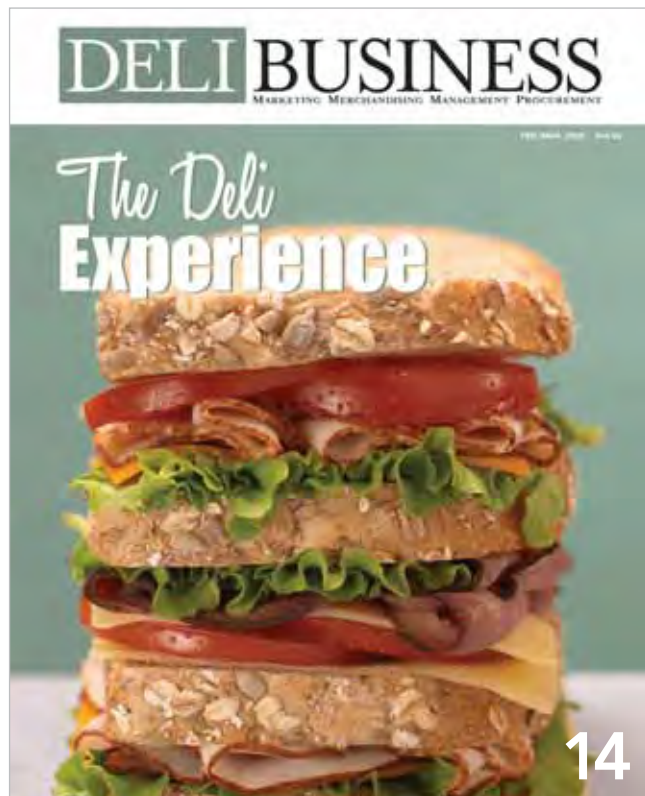
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PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

JAMES E. PREVOR
jprevor@phoenixmedianet.com

PUBLISHING DIRECTOR

KENNETH L. WHITACRE
kwhitacre@phoenixmedianet.com

PUBLISHER/EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

LEE SMITH
lsmith@phoenixmedianet.com

MANAGING EDITOR

JAN FIALKOW
jfialkow@phoenixmedianet.com

CIRCULATION MANAGER

KELLY ROSKIN
kroskin@phoenixmedianet.com

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

DIANA LEVINE
dlevine@phoenixmedianet.com

ART DIRECTOR

JACKIE TUCKER
jtucker@phoenixmedianet.com

PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT

FREDDY PULIDO JOANNA ARMSTRONG

NATIONAL SALES MANAGER

RICK PURCARO
rpurcaro@phoenixmedianet.com

ADVERTISING

JORDAN BAUM
jbaum@phoenixmedianet.com

ERIC NIEMAN

enيمان@phoenixmedianet.com

RESEARCH DIRECTOR

SHARON OLSON

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

ELIZABETH BLAND CHRISTINA DAVID ROBERTS
BOB JOHNSON CAROL M. BAREUTHER
JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN LISA WHITE
KAREN SILVERSTON JENNIFER CHASE ESPOSITO

SEND INSERTION ORDERS, PAYMENTS, PRESS RELEASES,
PHOTOS, LETTERS TO THE EDITOR, ETC., TO:

DELI BUSINESS

P.O. BOX 810217, BOCA RATON, FL 33481-0217

PHONE: 561-994-1118 FAX: 561-994-1610

E-MAIL: delibusiness@phoenixmedianet.com

PHOENIX MEDIA NETWORK, INC.

CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

JAMES E. PREVOR

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

KENNETH L. WHITACRE

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT

LEE SMITH

GENERAL COUNSEL

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EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT

FRAN GRUSKIN

TRADE SHOW COORDINATOR

JACKIE LOMONTE

DELI BUSINESS IS PUBLISHED BY

PHOENIX MEDIA NETWORK, INC.

P.O. BOX 810425,

BOCA RATON, FL 33481-0425

PHONE: 561-994-1118 FAX: 561-994-1610

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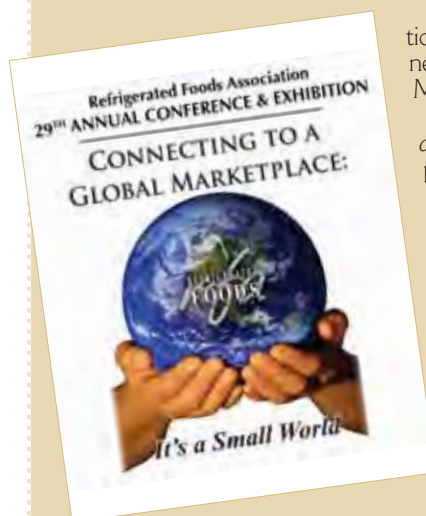
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PUBLICATION AGREEMENT NO. 40047928



RFA CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION



The 29th Annual Refrigerated Foods Association Conference & Exhibition will be held at Disney's Boardwalk Resort in Lake Buena Vista, FL, March 1 — 4, 2009.

This year's Conference theme is *Connecting to a Global Marketplace: It's a Small World* and the presentations will provide relevant and timely information that will help companies succeed in today's global marketplace for prepared, refrigerated foods. Expert speaker presentations will cover a variety of vitally important topics to today's refrigerated foods manufacturers — including commodity markets, food safety, import safety, supply chain logistics, fresh food trends and more.

For more information, visit the RFA Website — www.refrigeratedfoods.org/conference/index.html.

COMING NEXT ISSUE IN APR/MAY 2009

ECONOMIC UPDATE

A look at how the current economy relates to the supermarket industry and specifically to the deli/prepared food department.

FEATURE STORIES

Hispanic
Foodservice Concepts

PREPARED FOODS

Breakfast

MERCHANDISING REVIEWS

Greek Foods
Sandwich Programs
Chicken
Indian Foods

DELI MEATS

Value-Priced
Salami

PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES

Oils
Potatoes

CHEESES

Pre-sliced Cheeses
Italian Cheeses

PRE-IDDBA GUIDE

COMING IN JUNE/JULY 2009

The 5th Annual People's Awards saluting industry leaders who have made a positive impact on their company, the community and the people around them. Go to www.delibusiness.com to nominate your industry leader.

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DELI WATCH

Transitions



Jan Fialkow has been named managing editor of DELI BUSINESS and CHEESE CONNOISSEUR magazines, published by Phoenix Media Network, Boca Raton, FL. She has been with the company for five years as managing editor of PRODUCE BUSINESS and AMERICAN FOOD & AG EXPORTER magazines. Her previous experience includes many years in consumer publications and retail advertising.
www.delibusiness.com



Steven M. Margarites is the new president of Mount Kisco, NY-based Best Cheese Corp., the sole importer of Dutch Parrano cheese and the Legendairy and Uniekaas brands of Dutch Gouda. A 20-year veteran of the import cheese business, his previous positions include vice president of cheese department at Atalanta Corp. and executive vice president of Best Cheese.
www.bestcheese.com

Announcements



FRESH FOOD ROUNDTABLE FORMED

Several leading fresh-food associations and industry groups, including International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association and GSI US, have formed the Fresh Food Trade Association Roundtable to facilitate the exchange of information and to guide and support the use of GSI standards in U.S. fresh-food industries. The group's goals include expanded communications to address various supply-chain challenges.



ACQUISITION MADE

Emmi, Lucerne, Switzerland, has acquired Roth Käse USA Ltd., Monroe, WI, thus expanding its position in the U.S. cheese industry. Since 2006, Emmi has been a strategic partner with a minority stake in Roth Käse, which has shown strong growth in the U.S. cheese market, especially in the foodservice sector. Emmi has been successfully marketing Swiss cheese in the United States for many years.
www.rothkase.com

New Products



MAGAZINE LAUNCHED

Phoenix Media Network, Boca Raton, FL, publisher of DELI BUSINESS, has launched CHEESE CONNOISSEUR, a unique, lifestyle publication providing sophisticated, well-educated foodies and industry professionals with information about specialty cheeses, celebrity cheese makers and chefs, wines, travel opportunities and complementary foods and beverages. A trade/consumer hybrid, the new magazine will be available for sale in retail cheese departments and by subscription.
www.cheeseconnoisseur.com



SUSTAINABLE SQUARE PACKAGING

Wilkinson Industries, Inc., Ft. Calhoun, NE, adds more sustainable food packaging to its NaturesPLastic Collection with EcoServe deli square containers. The line includes six consecutive sizes for a wide variety of food applications. The new squares are available in 8-, 12-, 16-, 24-, 32- and 40-ounce sizes, and the same lid fits all size squares. The line is made from NaturesPLastic with Ingeo biopolymer providing a reduced environmental footprint.
www.wilkinsonindustries.com



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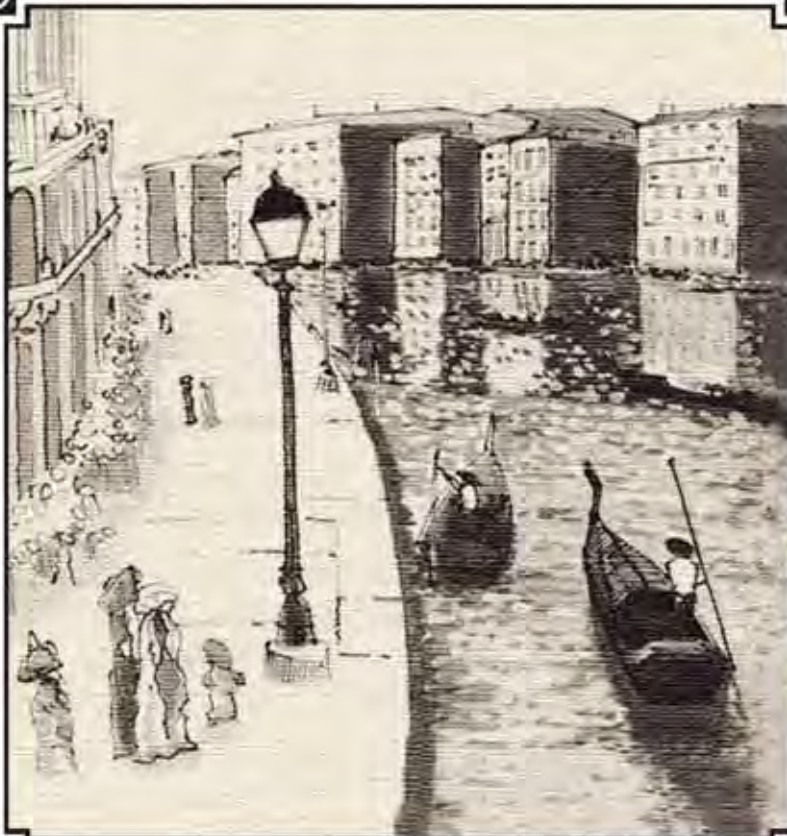
New York Style, Westchester, IL, part of Tulsa, OK-based Nonni's Food Company, has turned focaccia bread into a convenient snack. It bakes real focaccia bread, cuts the bread into sticks and then bakes them again until they're crunchy. Lightly seasoned with natural herbs and spices, the snacks are available in Roasted Garlic & Herb, Rosemary & Sea Salt, and Quattro Formaggio, featuring Parmesan, Romano, Cheddar and Blue cheeses.
www.newyorkstyle.com



BRIE LOG

Lactalis USA, New York, NY, introduced its new Président Brie Log and promoted it for enjoyment on Inauguration Day. The new Brie fits on a cracker and is easy to serve up at parties. The unique log shape, combined with a thin, soft edible rind, eliminates the clean up and difficult cutting found in traditional Brie, making it easy to enjoy the creamy taste.
www.presidentcheese.com

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Welcome to the family.

by Jim Prevor, Editor-in-Chief

How Consumers Perceive Brands

This issue's cover story presents some terrific consumer research done by Olson Communications of Chicago. It focuses on branding and consumer perceptions related to product attributes. The research is revealing, intriguing and easily misinterpreted.

Over the years, we've conducted and studied consumer research on various perishable products and perishable shopping venues. Virtually every research report has shown that the most important attributes consumers look for when selecting shopping venues are cleanliness, assortment or variety and price or value.

Depending on the economy, the topics in the news and the methodology of the study, these three values may change places but they consistently lead the pack.

Cleanliness actually has turned up as the No. 1 criterion in selecting a shopping venue in most of the research studies. A casual student of consumer research might think these results indicate that a wise supermarket operator should simply double down on the mopping crew. Perhaps. Each situation is unique, and sometimes more attention to cleanliness is just what the doctor ordered.

More likely, the enormous importance of cleanliness on such a broad base of consumers has made all the major competitors acceptably clean. Even though cleanliness is crucial, being cleaner may not offer a competitive advantage. Cleanliness becomes the ante, the price one pays to enter the game, not a competitive tool.

We thought of this as we read the research report by Sharon Olson. "Taste" and "price" show up as the key drivers motivating consumers to purchase product. The question is, "What does that mean?"

If I am buying hot dogs, I buy only kosher, all-beef hot dogs. This is not for religious reasons; it is because they typically have a different flavor profile than hot dogs made with pork and cereal.

Taste is crucial to me. I will never buy anything but a kosher hot dog, but I can't really say I have strong preferences of one kosher brand over another. So when consumers report taste is important, it is not 100 percent clear that they mean they can tell the nuances of Land 'O Lakes yellow American cheese versus Boars Head yellow American cheese. This may explain why the research shows consumers will quite easily replace a favored brand in the deli with an alternative. The unspoken part of that willingness to switch is the assumption that an alternative has a similar flavor profile.

This is a weak kind of brand affiliation. Marketers would like consumers to leave if the store doesn't have a favored brand. In my family, for example, nobody would consider any mayonnaise but Hellmann's. If our store were out, we would have to go elsewhere. If our store stopped carrying it, we would switch stores.

Mayonnaise, of course, is a jarred product and we can't open up a jar to see how another brand tastes. In this sense, the merchandising practices of the service deli often work against brand loyalty. At our local Publix, the deli clerk takes the order, slices a single piece, asks if this thickness is good and offers the piece as a sample. Often you can hear consumers ask about the ham that is on special and ask to try a slice. This ability to sample reduces the necessity of reliance on brands.

It is also true that on many items, such as prepared salads, many stores try to give the impression the product was made on site, so it is difficult for consumers to know what the brand is. Growing up on the north shore of Long Island, I had no idea what brand the salads were, but I remember little signs sticking up from the mayonnaise-based salads — "Made with Hellmann's" — and that was a mark of quality for my family.

Consumer responses grow out of their experiences, and we suspect branding could mean much more. Today many stores sign up with one brand as the dominant supplier to the deli, with signage making it look almost like a concession or franchise. Although other brands may be sold, they are typically store brands or fill gaps in the offer — such as kosher product. The main brand typically sells excellent product, but it is unlikely that one company will really make the very best Genoa salami and the best Cheddar cheese.

So a great retailer that wants to have buyers work item by item and find the best in each line could have a competitive edge, and if some marketing were done to explain to consumers why each brand was selected, we would likely see brand loyalty being engendered.

Building brands takes time and effort. We ask consumers why they do things, but most people are creatures of habit. One suspects the most likely reason for buying a particular brand is not rational; the answers researchers elicit are rationalizations to explain buying what Mom bought.

Is it trust that the quality and flavor will be right? Is it certainty that you will enjoy the product? Perhaps the answer is that food has an emotional component, and if giving your kids a tuna sandwich made with Hellmann's mayonnaise makes you remember your own mom handing you a tuna sandwich made with Hellmann's mayonnaise, the warm memory comes from paying a tiny premium for the tuna.

DB



James F. Prevor

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by Lee Smith, Publisher

Being A Consumer Advocate

Troubled times make it imperative for companies to address their customers' concerns. Your customers have to like you — or at the very least feel you address their needs better than someone else — because competition is fierce and unpredictable. Consumers are looking for reassurance that they are making sound choices, and many don't know how to cut their spending, especially when it comes to food.

Placing the customer first is an oft spoken mantra, but saying your company is a consumer advocate does not make it a fact. Customers will see through your insincerity faster than you will.

Why does a company aggravate its customers? Often because it assumes low price is the only value differential worth considering and because operational efficiencies determine what it can and cannot do. Efficient operation is crucial to keeping costs down and competitive, but when those efficiencies define customer policies, the end often doesn't justify the means.

I just returned from the Fancy Food Show so air travel is on my mind. Airlines now charge to check bags. I'd prefer the charge be added to the ticket price for four reasons. First, since my company pays for the ticket, I wouldn't have to put it on my expense account and wait to get reimbursed, and second, check-in at the airport would be much faster.

Then there's the third reason — airport security. I don't mind the security check; in fact, I find comfort in airport screening that keeps the nuts and terrorists off my plane. But many people are taking as much carry-on as they can get away with — an over-stuffed bag bursting its seams, a personal carry-on — read second suitcase — that obviously will never fit into the overhead compartment, all of which make the long security line longer and more confusing.

The last step is getting on the plane and finding your less-than-comfy seat. Extra bags that should be stored in the overhead compartments don't fit, which seldom surprises the offending passenger. He or she has figured out that if you get past check-in, you can check that extra bag at the gate and not pay the bag charge.

The irony is that as soon as I sit down and stuff my briefcase, pocketbook and winter coat under the seat in front of me because there's no room in the overhead compartment, the obligatory announcement starts chirping over the loud speaker: "We're your friends in the sky and we care about your safety and comfort."

My first thought is, "You are not my friend."

All of us need to determine whether we are friends of our customers. Do we first take into consideration their needs when new products and services are developed?

Do we communicate often enough, clearly enough, generously enough? Are their needs paramount?

Consumers have many ways to significantly reduce their spending on food. One of the most obvious is eating out less and cooking more. How many retailers are helping consumers ignorant in the ways of the culinary world? Very simple recipes using products cross-merchandised at the point of sale would help. A scrumptious Mediterranean chicken dish can be made if the consumer buys a small jar of roasted, glazed figs as a condiment for rotisserie chicken. Add a cucumber salad, olives, couscous or rice and fresh steamed carrots, and the average customer has a restaurant-worthy dinner at a fraction of the price a fine-dining establishment would charge.

Another way to reduce food bills is to eat more produce and less meat. Serving three or more fruits, vegetables and grains means someone doesn't need to eat half a roasted chicken or three pork chops to be satisfied, but presenting that option often raises the question, "Do you want the meat director to kill me?" For too many executives, protecting their kingdom is more important than serving their constituents. Of course, the system of rewards and benefits must change for senior executives to work together. Departments are competitive and rewards based on individual department performance. Without strong leadership, individuals struggle for dominance in a marketplace where retailers are struggling to stay relevant to their customers — customers who couldn't care less about departmental divisions.

The deli department will never be the bargain-basement department since most of its products are fully prepared, but that doesn't mean looking for ways to help consumers save money should be bypassed. Today's deli department is the restaurant alternative as well as a place to help consumers transition from a world where the oven was never turned on to a world where home cooking is a financial necessity.

While it may seem counterintuitive, profitable sales are a result not a goal. A true mission statement clearly expresses what your company intends to provide your targeted customer base. If your mission is strategically relevant, your focus clear and defined, and your execution excellent, the end result will be profitable sales.

Do you really think airlines focus on satisfying customers? Should they be surprised ticket sales are down, even with lower prices? **DB**



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The Deli Experience

Taste and price are the prime motivators for deli purchases, branded or otherwise

BY SHARON OLSON

Five years ago, Olson Communications, Inc., Chicago, IL, surveyed consumers about the role brands played in their deli department purchasing decisions. This year Olson did another survey to see how much or how little the power of brands has changed in making the deli a destination for loyal customers. This year, the company took a close look at the role branding plays in individual deli product categories. Across all categories, taste and value are the key characteristics consumers associate with favored brands.

Olson surveyed 302 consumers between the ages of 25 and 54 to explore their impressions of brands in the deli and the impact of branding on their perceptions and their purchases. After surveying consumers, the company interviewed some innovative retailers across the country to hear their reactions to the findings and learn more about successful brand building strategies.

Consumers were asked to rate 12 characteristics — past experience, store's reputation, local brand, national brand, imported, new product, taste, organic, nutritional content, ingredients, price and packaging — on their importance in purchasing major categories of deli products including meats, cheeses, prepared salads, entrées, soups and side dishes. Overwhelmingly, taste and price were cited as the primary characteristics in all categories. A majority of consumers also noted ingredients and nutritional content as important. Factors considered least important by consumers across all categories were imported, local brand name, organic and new product offering.

Although consumers had brand preferences, across all categories, more than half of consumers surveyed admitted they would purchase an alternate brand if their preferred choice were unavailable or if another brand were on sale.

A store's reputation, past experience and ingredients were the most often noted factors that drove brand preference for both



national and local brands. In open-ended questions, it became clear consumers consider some store brands on par with national manufacturer brands.

The study showed national brands had a strong following in meat and cheese categories. Consumers report national brands from manufacturers and national store brands among their favorites. Brand preferences were less developed in entrées, side dishes, soups and side categories, with a shift toward store brands. Tasting and past experience with the retailer drove preferences in these categories.

Deli Perspectives On Branding

Retailers report branding remains a strong, if sometimes elusive, element in their respective delis. "Giant Eagle customers are extremely loyal to their preferred brands," notes Voni Woods, senior director of deli operations for Pittsburgh, PA-based Giant Eagle, Inc. "That said, the Giant Eagle store brand is the dominant one in the deli case, through which most prepackaged products are sold in poly-bag formats with the store label."

David Casey, owner of Casey's Market in Western Springs, IL, says that at his locally owned meat and grocery store, the Boar's Head brand has garnered a strong following, even as other national brands in the sliced-to-order category have fallen off. Land O'Lakes remains his most popular and requested brand for sliced-to-order cheeses.

Other retailers have found certain brands engender different strengths of loyalty. According to Scott Zoeller, director of delicatessen sales and merchandising for Kings Super Markets, based in Parsippany, NJ, Kings recently switched from one national brand to the Boar's Head line and saw sales skyrocket. "We've found a 100 percent lift in purchases, in Boar's Head shoppers versus [the previous brand's] shoppers," he remarks.

However, Zoeller was quick to note the Kings Delight store brand of roast beef and turkey is merchandised as on par with the upscale national brand and has enjoyed a core buying base. "Our Kings Delight brand, which we've positioned higher, has stayed consistent year on year," he remarks.

The Store Brand Experience

Consumers noted past experience with a brand as a key driver, and store brands are emerging as sophisticated choices for discerning shoppers in terms of quality, value and convenience.

For example, Kings offers multiple tiers of products under its store brand, including deli meats positioned as similar to the most upscale national brand, yet priced more competitively, explains Zoeller.



Giant Eagle also uses the deli to showcase its store brand of lunch meats, cheeses and prepared foods, offering a double-your-money-back guarantee on any product within the Giant Eagle family of brands. "When customers know and trust your brand, an affordable price becomes just the additional benefit," notes Woods. "Given today's economic climate, customers continue to look for ways to match high quality with increased value, providing opportunities for new trial of and, often, repeat purchases of our own brand products."

Specialty and independent retailers, too, create a point of differentiation from their own brand. Casey's store roasts its own beef for sliced-to-order portions and reports it is more popular than the leading national brand.

For the future, according to Zoeller, stores would be well served to keep an eye on both store brands and national brands of prepared foods and deli items that can easily be made into meals and snacks. "We find the younger generation does not cook – their cooking is reheating," he comments. "When you have a fully cooked product that is as good as or better than making it on your own and you add to that value and food safety, it's something to look at."

Consumers were aware of many brands in each product category studied. Although there was widespread awareness, loyalty was elusive with an easy willingness to switch brands if favored brands were unavailable. With past experience playing such an important role in brand decisions, it is up to the retailer to gain its customers' trust and reinforce it with great tasting deli offerings that are perceived to be a good

value at any price point.

RESULTS BY CATEGORY

Deli Meat – Sliced To Order

Respondents were asked to rate the 12 characteristics on their importance in purchasing sliced-to-order meat in the deli. Overwhelmingly, taste and price were identified as most important to respondents. Three-fourths of respondents said taste of the product was very important and 58 percent said price was very important. The store's reputation, the respondent's past experience with the brand, and ingredients were each rated by 55 percent of respondents as important in purchasing sliced-to-order meat. Four characteristics were each rated as unimportant by approximately half of the respondents: imported, local brand name, organic and new product offering.

When asked how often they purchase the same brand of sliced-to-order meat, only 9 percent of respondents replied always. However, 53 percent said most of the time and 34 percent said sometimes in regards to how often they purchase the same brand. Only 3 percent of respondents said they rarely purchase the same brand and one respondent said he never purchases the same brand of sliced-to-order meat in the deli.

Respondents wrote in 54 brands of sliced-to-order meat they typically purchase.

Once respondents identified their favorite brand, they were asked how likely they would be to purchase another brand if their favorite were unavailable. Almost three-fourths said they would be likely to do so, and 14 percent said they would be very likely to do so. Respondents specifically named 41 different brands as their second choice. Seventy-eight percent of respondents said they would be likely or very likely to purchase whatever brand was on sale if their favorite brand of sliced-to-order meat were unavailable.

Deli Meat – Prepackaged

Characteristics that motivate respondents to purchase prepackaged meat were similar to those that motivated them to purchase sliced-to-order meat. Again, taste and price were most important to respondents. Sixty-three percent said taste was very important and 52 percent said price was very important. Past experience with the brand and ingredients were rated as important by 58 percent and 51 percent of respondents, respectively. Other characteristics rated as important included national brand name (47 percent), store's reputation (47 percent) and packaging (45 percent). Those characteristics rated as unimportant by several respondents were local brand name (46

percent), organic (44 percent) and imported (42 percent).

When asked how often they purchase the same brand of prepackaged meat in the deli, only 6 percent of respondents said always. However, most of the time and sometimes were each the response of 45 percent of respondents. Only 4 percent of respondents said they rarely purchase the same brand and none of the respondents said they never purchase the same brand.

If their favorite brand were unavailable, 70 percent of respondents said they would be likely and 10 percent of respondents said they would be very likely to purchase another brand. Twenty-nine brands were specifically named as respondents' alternatives to their favorite brand.

Cheese – Sliced To Order

As in the discussion of sliced-to-order and prepackaged meat, the most respondents rated taste (67 percent) and price (51 percent) as very important when purchasing sliced-to-order cheese. Past experience with the brand and the store's reputation were each seen as important by 58 percent of respondents and the product's ingredients were rated important by 54 percent. The factors of organic, new product offering,

local brand name and imported were each rated by approximately 45 percent of respondents as being unimportant.

Respondents who always purchase the same brand of sliced-to-order cheese in the deli comprised 7 percent of the sample. Thirty-six percent of respondents said they purchase the same brand most of the time, and 42 percent said they purchase the same brand sometimes. Only 12 percent said they rarely and 3 percent said they never purchase the same brand of sliced-to-order cheese. Respondents named 27 brands as top choices and 17 brands as second choices.

If their favorite brand were unavailable, a large percentage of respondents said they would be likely (63 percent) or very likely (19 percent) to buy another brand.

Cheese – Prepackaged

For the purposes of this survey, prepackaged cheese relates to cheese in the deli department, not in the dairy department. Although every retail store is distinct, prepackaged cheese typically offered in the deli department is likely to be specialty cheese such as sliced Fontina, crumbled Blue in cups, wedges of Brie, etc.

Respondents' views of what is important to them did not change when they rated the

importance of prepackaged cheese characteristics. Taste and price were again rated by the most respondents as being very important (63 percent and 50 percent, respectively). Approximately half of the respondents rated each of the following as being important when purchasing prepackaged cheese: past experience with the brand, store's reputation and ingredients. Local brand name, imported, organic and new product offering were rated as being unimportant to approximately half of the respondents.

Most respondents said they purchase the same brand of prepackaged cheese most of the time (41 percent) or sometimes (39 percent). Fewer respondents said always (8 percent), rarely (11 percent) or never (1 percent) in regards to how often they purchase the same brand. Respondents specifically identified 25 brands of prepackaged cheese.

If their favorite brand were unavailable, almost three-fourths of respondents (72 percent) said they would be likely or very likely to purchase another brand. Respondents named 12 brands as alternate choices.

Prepared Salads

Taste and price were again rated by the most respondents as being very important, 61 percent and 47 percent, respectively. Fifty-eight percent of respondents said their past experience with the brand was important. Half of the respondents said the ingredients in the salad were important and 45 percent said the store's reputation was important. Forty-two percent said national brand was unimportant when choosing a prepared salad, which raises these questions: Are consumers unaware of the national brands in this category or do they not care? If the reason is the former, are there opportunities to increase brand awareness and thus increase branded sales?

Other characteristics rated as unimportant by respondents were local brand name (47 percent), new product offering (43 percent), organic (42 percent) and imported (42 percent).

Very few respondents said they always (6 percent) or never (3 percent) purchase the same brand of prepared salad in the deli. Twenty-seven percent said they purchase the same brand most of the time and 46 percent said they purchase the same brand sometimes. Consumers named 15 brands of prepared salads. If their favorite brand of prepared salad were unavailable, 69 percent said they would be likely or very likely to purchase another brand. Six brands were named as alternate choices.

Prepared Entrées

Taste was rated by 66 percent of respon-

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dents as being very important, and price was rated very important by 47 percent. With a difference of 19 points between these two characteristics, it is evident that taste plays a more significant role than price when it comes to prepared entrées. Characteristics respondents rated as important were past experience with the brand (53 percent), store's reputation (43 percent) and product ingredients (42 percent). Factors rated unimportant were familiarity with the chef (63 percent), organic (49 percent), imported (48 percent), local brand name (47 percent) and new product offering (46 percent).

Only 24 percent of respondents said they rarely or never purchase the same brand of prepared entrées. More respondents said they purchase the same brand sometimes (44 percent) or most of the time (28 percent). Few respondents said they always purchase the same brand (4 percent). Ten brands were named for preference.

If their favorite brand were unavailable, 59 percent of respondents would be likely or very likely to purchase another brand. Five brands were noted as second choices.

Soups And Side Dishes

Most respondents rated two factors as

very important when purchasing soups or sides in the deli: taste (53 percent) and price (41 percent). In addition, 43 percent rated nutritional content as important, indicating this category could benefit from positioning and promotions that highlight its health benefits and play up the nutrition aspects.

Other factors rated as important by the most respondents were: ingredients (46 percent), store's reputation (43 percent) and past experience with the brand (42 percent). Characteristics identified as unimportant by respondents were imported (48 percent), organic (47 percent), national brand name (47 percent), packaging (45 percent) and local brand name (45 percent).

When purchasing soups or sides in the deli, few respondents said they always (5 percent) or never (4 percent) purchase the same brand. Most of the time and rarely were each reported by approximately 20 percent of respondents. Half of the respondents said they sometimes purchase the same brand. Eleven brands were named.

If their favorite brand were unavailable, three alternate brands were named. Seventy-one percent of respondents said they would be likely or very likely to purchase another brand.

ABOUT THE SURVEY

The survey was conducted by Olson Communications, Inc., Chicago, IL, via the Internet, to gather information on consumer purchases of sliced-to-order and prepackaged lunch meat, sliced-to-order and prepackaged cheese, prepared salads, prepared entrées and soups. Fifty-two percent of the respondents were male and 48 percent were female. Almost all the respondents were between the ages of 25 and 54 years of age: 25-34 years of age (38 percent), 35-44 years of age (36 percent), 45-54 years of age (25 percent). Only one person was 65 years or older. Five percent of respondents described their household income level as less than \$24,999. Income levels of \$25,000-49,999 and \$50,000-74,999 were each chosen by approximately 30 percent of respondents. Thirty-five percent of respondents said their income level was \$75,000 or more.

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A Boon For Tired-And-Pinched

Grab-and-go offers convenience, quality and affordable pricing when time is short and money is tight

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

Ready-to-eat foods and bundled meal deals can give delis an advantage at this time when consumers are seeking to stretch their dollars. “Delis offering prepared meals allow consumers the affordable indulgence they would normally seek at a restaurant, with a value that’s more palatable for this economic climate,” explains Shelby Weeda, president, Torrance, CA-based King’s Hawaiian Bakery, makers of breads and rolls.



While restaurants are reeling as a result of the recent economic meltdown, delis have an opportunity to sell more grab-and-go items than ever before. “We have several supermarket deli buyers who are touting grab-and-go items and meal programs as ‘economy

success stories’ and some are seeking to expand their offerings,” says Weeda. “Co-branded promotions attract new consumers to the deli and generate sales from products that would otherwise be outside the deli’s revenue stream.”

Cutting back on spending does not necessarily equate to cutting back on convenience or quality; it does mean many Americans are paying more attention to overall value, according to many in the industry. “Sales are strong as consumers continue to seek convenience and value,” notes Alan Hamer, vice president sales and marketing, Charlotte, NC-based Stefano Foods, makers of such handheld items as calzones, panini, stromboli, quesadillas and pizza. “This year the equation includes one new component, as we have noted a strong shift toward items with the greatest protein content. Perhaps this is a move toward getting the best meal value from every food dollar.”

Value may be increasingly important, but shoppers are still willing to pay a price for convenience. “There has been more demand for

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quick grab-and-go items," reports Dominick Frocione, vice president of sales, Cedar's Mediterranean Foods, Inc., Bradford, MA, which makes Mediterranean-style foods such as single-serving packs of hummus with pita chips, single-serving packs of tzatziki with chips and prepared taboulleh.

"Some of our Mediterranean salads, such as taboulleh and chick pea salad, are now being offered in grab-and-go sections since we have switched to a flat rectangular package. These are great items for a quick lunch or on-the-go meal," says Frocione. "People are working more and have less time to plan and/or prepare a meal, especially if they are cooking for just themselves, so I expect to see our single-serve items really take off this year."

Convenience Is Key

Single-serve sizes are especially important for lunches. "With more of us brown-bagging lunch to the office these days, the convenience size has become more popular than ever before," according to Howie Klagsbrun, vice president of sales, Brooklyn, NY-based Sonny & Joe's, makers of hummus in a number of flavors as well as pickles.

Handheld items that can be eaten on the go are seeing continued success. "We're see-

ing an increase in sales," reports George Kashou, vice president, Kangaroo Brands, Inc., Milwaukee, WI, which makes pocket breads, pita chips and Omelet Sandwiches — omelets with various fillings tucked into pita pockets that delis can heat and serve for foodservice. But convenience is not the only factor. "Consumers are looking for convenient handheld foods, but they're demanding taste, quality and nutrition. Quality and price are always important," he adds.

Omelet Sandwiches are priced to compete with fast-food breakfast sandwiches. "Delis can sell these at \$1.50 and still make their margins," says Kashou. Despite the price, Kashou maintains these on-the-go breakfasts offer the high quality consumers have become accustomed to. "They've been served on Continental Airlines for the past three years and we've been told they're the most complimented breakfast sandwiches they've ever served," he boasts. "We get hundreds of letters and e-mails from passengers saying how great they are."

Other manufacturers also attest to the concept that quality is a top priority when it comes to grab-and-go foods. "What we think is working in this economy is quality. People want to make sure they're getting

"CONSUMERS ARE LOOKING FOR CONVENIENT HANDHELD FOODS, BUT THEY'RE DEMANDING TASTE, QUALITY AND NUTRITION. QUALITY AND PRICE ARE ALWAYS IMPORTANT."

— George Kashou
Kangaroo Brands, Inc.

good value from any item, whether it's grab-and-go or not," says Warren Wilson, president, The Snack Factory, Skillman, NJ-based makers of Pretzel Crisps, which recently became available in 100-calorie packs and 2-ounce snack-size bags.

"The consumer is unwilling to compromise quality when deciding upon food sources. Nowhere is this more clearly expressed than the dramatic upgrade of foodservice offerings by convenience stores," notes Stefano's Hamer. "The key is easy preparation and great taste."

Over the past several years, technology and innovation have allowed manufacturers to introduce grab-and-go foods with increasingly higher quality. For example, Hamer notes, "Stefano's panini come in a unique package that enables heating in-package by conventional or microwave oven. Not only does this speed preparation and cleanup, but the package also retains heat, extending the window of consumption."

For consumers already in the store, grab-and-go meals save a stop at a quick-serve restaurant and the gasoline it takes to get there. Handheld meals, such as Kangaroo Brands' Omelet Sandwiches, have another advantage; supermarket employees like them for quick meals. "If the employees know they have a great, fresh, healthful breakfast sandwich available, that's a great choice for them," says Kashou.

Health Sells

Delis can also stay ahead of the competition by offering grab-and-go products with a

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healthful image. “The economy certainly has forced more people to eat at home, and I think that some of our grab-and-go items are best suited to those consumers who may not go out to lunch at a restaurant as often but still want a great-tasting and healthful treat,” says Cedar’s Frocione. “I stress ‘healthful’ because these are the educated consumers who really know what they want to eat and will shop for quality.”

“Grab-and-go sizes are a new product for us, but they’re selling nicely because people are looking for healthful, filling snacks for eating on the run,” says Wilson of The Snack Factory, whose sales have increased 35 percent in the last year. “Products need to be high-quality, healthful, filling and, preferably, offer some all-natural varieties to compete, such as our all-natural 100-calorie packs. People are changing their lifestyles and looking for more healthful alternatives for on-the-go eating.”

According to Sonny & Joe’s Klagsbrun, “We are still a nation on the run, working longer hours to make ends meet and we need to eat to stay alive. We are not throwing in the towel and slowing down. This might be where a more healthful ‘to-go’ item, such Sonny & Joe’s Hummus, will score.”

Variety will help a deli department stand out from the competition, says Frocione. “If a retailer can set itself apart from, say, a local restaurant or sub shop, it might see a big jump in customer count and sales.”

Klagsbrun also believes variety can lead to additional sales, noting, “The original will almost always dominate the entire category. However, newness equals stimulating trial equals sales.”

According to Wilson, The Snack Factory is always rolling out new items to keep interests piqued. “This year we introduced several new flavors, including Chipotle Cheddar, and a new product, Peanut Butter Covered Pretzel Crisps.”

“New items and flavors are key, since a big factor in grab-and-go should be variety,” adds Frocione. “People like to go out to eat so they can try different things they may not want to cook at home. If the goal of grab-and-go is to take business from restaurants, then retailers need to ‘change the menu’ on a regular basis — just like a restaurant.”

Bundling Makes Meals Easy

Cross-merchandising is an important factor in grab-and-go sales. Creating meal deals by bundling together meal components makes meal planning simpler for today’s busy, cash-strapped consumers, many of whom are inexperienced with home cooking but nonetheless eating more at home. “The more you can assist these less experienced home-



Comforting, convenient, high-quality grab-and-go foods can be sold for all meal segments.

makers, the better,” says Tom McGlade, CEO, Rubschlager Baking Corp., Chicago, IL-based makers of European style breads, including cocktail breads in four flavors.

“In-store delis are serving an evolving consumer — one who is focused on price and dining out less but still seeking convenience and quality in his or her meal options,” adds King’s Weeda. “For several decades, we’ve seen success in store chains that adopt meal-deal programs. Our supermarket customers nationwide have noted that they’ve seen continued growth and opportunities — despite economic challenges — working with branded vendors to develop meal solutions that are practical for busy deli buyers.”

King’s Hawaiian breads and rolls are often found as part of meal packages in supermarket delis. For example, they may be bundled with rotisserie or fried chicken and side salads. Other companies recommend offering items as giveaways. For example Kangaroo Brands offers retailers a deeply discounted price on its 100-calorie packs of Pita Chips when stores agree to give them away with sandwich purchases.

Another option is to use basic cross-merchandising techniques. “Many retailers build displays to help the consumer understand [how to build a meal],” notes McGlade. A retailer can simply place items together that can be used to create a meal or recipe and also conduct a demonstration or give away printed instructions. “Cheeses, tuna salad, chicken salad can be put out with cocktail breads,” he explains. A display set in a refrigerated section may include a recipe card, cream cheese and other spread ingredients plus breads to serve with them.

When creating these displays, industry experts say to keep in mind that the most popular recipes in times to come may be for comfort foods that are not only nostalgic but also quick, easy and inexpensive. McGlade believes that as more people serve more meals at home, they are reverting to the style of cooking they remember from their youth. “People are going back to eating the way they did 25 years ago, or even 50 years ago. More home-style,” he says.

McGlade reports that Rubschlager’s recipe for “Hankie Pankies,” or mini patty melts (available at its Website), is more popular than ever. The preparation calls for placing patties made from ground beef and breakfast sausage on slices of cocktail rye bread and topping each with a Velveeta-based sauce.

“Most of our comfort foods are the ones we grew up with as kids or perhaps are just easier to make,” says Sonny & Joe’s Klagsbrun. “As the economy gets tighter, people resort to emotional eating. We are preparing for this by creating recipes such as Hummus Mashed Potatoes and Roasted Red Pepper Hummus Soup to give customers a new spin on their comfort foods.

“We all know people who have been let go from ‘secure’ jobs,” he adds. “It leaves us wanting something sure at the end of a day. They’re called ‘comfort foods’ for a reason.”

Regardless of which recipes are offered, making home food preparation easier is sure to add to sales, according to many in the industry. “People are eating out less and entertaining more at home. It’s been a great year for us, despite the economy,” according to McGlade.

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THE ART OF WAR, Asian Food Style

In the battle for share of stomach, Asian food offers supermarket delis a strategic advantage

BY BOB JOHNSON

Industry insiders predict the Asian food category will continue to grow, both because many sub-categories of Asian food have become mainstream — Chinese food is virtually a staple — and because the U.S. population is becoming more diverse — once exotic cultures are entering the Great Melting Pot.

Deli department sales of Asian foods also figure to grow; in hard times, consumers look for more affordable alternatives to restaurant dining, and the deli is well positioned to capture this market segment.

“Know that you are likely competing with a Chinese restaurant in your strip center or very nearby,” advises Aaron Petrovsky, vice president of Charlotte, NC-based Hissho Sushi, a fast-growing supplier of sushi and sushi-related products. “Retailers should pick their battles — this is a tough situation given the alternatives. I went to our local strip center today and right next to a top supermarket chain I dined at a Chinese

buffet for \$7.89 total.”

As retailers map their strategy to meet this formidable competition and expand Asian food sales in the deli, they should make sure their tactics reflect these three factors.

Asian Food Is A Growth Category

Asian food sales have enjoyed healthy growth for well over a decade. Although the category becomes more familiar every day, it still resonates with consumers looking for something different or somewhat exotic. And it can be nutritious and economical.

“The Asian category continues to grow at double-digit rates,” notes Denise Woleben, marketing manager for Sun Valley, CA-based Okami Inc., which has been a pioneer in popularizing California roll sushi for more than a decade and also supplies a range of fish and shrimp products. “Ethnic foods are now mainstream and in many retail grocery categories. Rices, pastas, frozen entrées, sauces — they all feature many ethnic-

inspired products.

“The population is more diversified than ever, which means people are exposed to a wider variety of foods at earlier ages — and exposed to foods of many cultures,” she continues. “Sushi and many Asian food ingredients are now very mainstream — not just with Asians!”

The information revolution has helped Asian food go mainstream. The Internet and television cooking shows have exposed consumers to many types of Asian food and made recipes readily available.

“The biggest growth we are seeing in delis in merchandising Chinese food is in the cold behind-the-glass case, traditionally where bulk salads are sold,” reports Mark Phelps, president of Kent, WA-based Innov-Asian Cuisine, which produces a wide range of Asian meals and specializes in convenient, high-quality fully prepared and frozen dishes. “We see strong sales in our entrée kits, rices, noodles and Asian appetizers in the cold





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case. Retailers on rice or noodles and egg rolls are lower than entrées so we are anticipating the side sales will be stronger than entrées.”

According to Debra Warren, senior graphic designer at Seattle, WA-based Tai Foong, producer of a wide range of seafood products at many different processing levels to suit the client's needs, “We sell prepared entrées, an inexpensive way to have a taste of Asia at home. We are promoting prepared foods such as dim sum with our Asian sauces.”

“Sushi offers protein, carbohydrates and fat, with fish, rice and often mayonnaise, in a relatively unprocessed form,” Woleben of Okami explains. “There are no preservatives, no fillers and no stabilizers. It is a pretty complete meal in a compact form.”

The increasing availability of supermarket and club-store sushi has resulted in the consumer perception that sushi is a mainstream item, she continues. “Sushi is well-liked across all ages, genders and ethnicities. Most cultures like rice, fish and vegetables — sushi is a convenient and tasty way to combine these popular foods.”

Sushi Can Be An Affordable Luxury

Most of today's consumers have not gone through an economic downturn as serious as the one we are now experiencing. Since they have never endured extended periods of externally imposed self-deprivation, conventional wisdom says they will be looking for small, justifiable luxuries they can still afford. Indulging in favorite foods may provide just the immediate gratification they seek.

At restaurants, sushi tends to be relatively expensive — most people order several small items that might be inexpensive individually but that add up. In the deli, however, sushi can still be affordable. And the deli has an edge over the restaurant competition when it comes to convenience. “Sushi offers a quick meal, whether at a sushi bar or as a takeout item. It requires no further preparation and can be eaten as a finger food,” Woleben says.

But the major advantage for the deli during hard times is offering a lower price alternative. “Sushi as a prepared meal option is an affordable luxury item and it has high health benefits,” adds Hissho's Petrovsky. “To some extent, fresh sushi is a luxury item but grab-and-go sushi in the supermarket — the average meal is in the \$6 range — is still a more cost-effective option than dining in a stand-alone sushi restaurant where average tickets often exceed \$20 per person. Supermarket sushi provides customers with their ‘sushi fix’ at an affordable price — and the product quality is often the same or better.”

Markets with a potentially large sushi clientele should offer a range of ways to see

and buy the product. According to Petrovsky, a supermarket deli should offer “a full-service sushi bar staffed with a trained sushi chef and grab-and-go. On-site sushi chefs with extensive sushi menus and customer interaction are key for locations that have the sushi clientele. Regular specials, promotions, product sampling, colorful menus and introducing new products are all important for the operation to flourish.”

Not every store can afford the space and labor required for a full-service sushi program but, fortunately, successful programs come in a range of sizes. “Sushi is a highly fragmented industry with relatively low barriers to entry,” Petrovsky continues. “Supermarkets should feel comfortable and confident their sushi partner will perform and be responsive to their needs.”

Regardless of the size of the program, sushi can be marketed for a range of culinary occasions. “Sushi satisfies a variety of meal occasions,” Woleben says. “It can be served as the main dish or as a side dish for lunch, dinner, or as a snack. There are so many varieties of sushi — there's something for every taste.”

Variety Is A Key Strategic Position

Offering an exciting variety of flavors, suited for a variety of eating events, is key to maintaining or increasing deli Asian food sales.

“Offer a variety of flavors, products and price points. Make sure prices are clearly marked,” Woleben advises. “Realize that consumers are looking for a variety of meal occasions, often shopping on their way to work or during the day for breakfast, lunch at the office, lunch in the car, and for snacks throughout the day. Of course, there is also shopping for the dinner meal or PM snack.”

Alternatives for shoppers who are not ready for seaweed or raw fish are available to draw consumers into the category. “Vegetable and soy wraps provide an alternative to seaweed for people who don't like seaweed,” Woleben says. “Okami uses a roasted red pepper wrap for our new spicy tuna roll featured in a select number of club stores. These wraps are becoming more popular but are still new to many consumers.”

The theme of variety should extend throughout the Asian food category. “Differentiate your offering. Include a few mass-market staples but make the menu different — more Pan-Asian and more healthful, such as multi-grain rice and noodle options. If the volume is there, add an in-store service component,” Petrovsky suggests.

“In general, sauces are a great way to offer variety,” Woleben says. “For example, Okami's lettuce wraps feature chicken breast, shiitake mushrooms and water chestnuts that are enveloped in a rich sauce, and

also feature a delicious dipping sauce or drizzling sauce on the side. This element of chef-inspired sauces in retail products delivers restaurant-style quality at much lower pricing than at restaurants.”

Many customers will want help tying the varied items together into entire meal options. “Help customers with ‘the total solution.’ Show them how to build a complete meal from the products you merchandise,”



Woleben suggests. “Merchandise the entrées, side dishes and even beverages within the section so the customer doesn't have to go all over the store to assemble a takeout meal. The more variety in the components you offer, the more creative the consumer can be in composing a meal. Stimulate his or her desire to come back to try other items.”

Along with an exciting variety of foods, it is also important to present that variety in exciting ways. “Lighting, props, signage — all contribute toward drawing the customer in,” she continues. “Deliver to all the senses. Borrow ideas from the successful retailers and restaurateurs. Deli sections have all the ingredients for a rich sensory experience — use them!”

Retailers should never forget that advance planning can avoid shrink. “Most items should have an extended shelf life as it is tremendously difficult to efficiently manage the shrink,” Petrovsky recommends. “Some frozen products are just as good, take only a few minutes to prepare but are located at the back of the store. Market freshness at the front of the store. Chinese restaurants are very tough to compete with — they put out decent products at low prices. The key will be to differentiate with better products or focus attention elsewhere within the store.”

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Pasta Perfect

Pasta producers create restaurant taste that translates to at-home meals

BY JENNIFER CHASE ESPOSITO

If the deli positions itself as a dining-out alternative where consumers can find high-quality — and even cutting edge — meal components that can be assembled with a minimum of fuss, it stands to weather the economic turmoil. But the products offered must provide an equivalent level of taste and satisfaction.

According to the *2009 Fast Casual State Of The Industry Report* from Fast Casual Magazine, a publication from Louisville, KY-based NetWorld Alliance, 61 percent of the consumers interviewed said they'd be downgrading their dining habits in 2009 and 25 percent said they'd be dining at home more.

Consumers are savvier than in the past. Their dining experiences have exposed them to options previous generations couldn't imagine, and television-cooking shows have raised the bar on what can be whipped up — quickly — at home.

"Consumers want to create meals and have largely been educated about what they're eating — new cuisines, new bread, new whatever — at restaurants," says Carl Zuanelli, president of Stratford, CT-based Nuovo Pasta, a provider of fresh pasta.

With nearly 600,000 restaurants in the United States, there's a lot of cultural diversity to choose from, yet pasta continues to be a consumer favorite. "I can't imagine going out for pasta," admits Mary Ann Valente, president of Pasta Valente, Charlottesville, VA. Her mother Fran founded the company 26 years ago, basing her recipes on the hand-crafted pasta she made in South Jersey. "Our pasta cooks in three to five minutes. It takes longer than that to get to the restaurant."

Fans of homemade pasta will search high and low for quality, and if the local deli department makes the search easy, it will attract a loyal clientele.

"The deli case is becoming a specialty case, with imported cheeses, prosciutto and pasta," explains Zuanelli. "And having it all in one section allows consumers to recreate restaurant meals."



Additional Merchandising Opportunity

Specialty stores and small-footprint supermarkets can take advantage of high-quality products produced by small companies that often cannot afford the slotting fees required by large-chain frozen food or dairy departments. These products do well in small freezer cases positioned within or adjacent to the deli and cross-merchandised with specialty cheeses and refrigerated sauces,

The Natural Pasta Company (d/b/a Putney Pasta) in Brattleboro, VT, makes all-natural, frozen skillet meals and pastas, explains Rick McKelvey president. "I think in this economy, our consumers are eating out less and eating in more — and rewarding themselves with higher-end gourmet products. There's room being carved out at the store level for fresh products, fresh pasta, sauces, and other foods."

Putney Pasta's niche is providing authentic, natural, frozen gourmet products such as whole-wheat pasta, spinach pasta and ravioli with butternut squash and Vermont maple syrup.

Having spent five years at LifeFoods, a company heavily involved with vegetarian fare within deli departments, McKelvey would love to see Putney Pasta morph its products to another part of the store, simply because of the limitations of merchandising behind frosty-cold glass.

"Certainly, frozen and end-cap displays are very limited in the natural side of the business," he says. "I'm a bit jealous — I'd love to be in the game as to compete in the prepared-food arena."

DB

Dine-At-Home Development

On a chilly January night, Pasta Nostra in Norwalk, CT, is packed. The draw is the pasta. The restaurant's butternut squash ravioli is served on diaphanous slices of prosciutto, sauced lightly with silky squash purée and topped with toasted chopped hazelnuts and grinds of black pepper; the fettuccine is tossed with butter and Parmigiano-Reggiano, sal e pepe, and pan-seared artichokes. These are the kinds of dishes that inspired Pasta Nuovo's Zuanelli 20 years ago to found his own pasta company based on what he learned at Pasta Nostra making signature dishes, by hand.

A year after honing his skills at the nationally recognized restaurant, Zuanelli founded Pasta Nuovo and started manufacturing pasta for local restaurants. Today, the company's products are available in restaurants and refrigerated specialty cases in supermarkets across the country. "Until two years ago our business was 80 percent food-service," says Zuanelli.

Now consumers want restaurant tastes on at-home budgets. "The most important thing to understand is that stores are marketing products to consumers who are now no longer eating out as much — the product has to be the same quality or exciting enough to the consumer. And exciting isn't necessarily something that's brand new," he adds.

Nuovo Pasta employs five chefs who work on everything from recipe development to sales. "We look at what the culinary trends are, and that's not always the case for

consumer products," explains Zuanelli, who notes that currently au courant vodka sauce would not have been found in his Venetian grandfather's kitchen. "Typically, trends come from the restaurant world."

"It's a great time to be in business," adds Valente of Pasta Valente. "When we started, most of the mainstream stores did not carry fresh pesto or Alfredo. The best sauces retailed for \$3.99 and they weren't that great. Now the selection is great and the quality is outstanding. The price ceiling is significantly higher, and price sensitivity doesn't seem to exist to the extent that it did before."

Dealing With A Tough Economy

Dino Romanucci, president of Pasta Factory in Northlake, IL, says economic swings have not required the company's merchandising practices to change much through the years. He has three outlets — his restaurant, his manufacturing company and supermarket private labels — for merchandising his authentic product.

"When we had our first restaurant, my wife started making homemade pasta," says Romanucci, who grew up 130 miles northeast of Rome in Ascoli Piceno. "That was close to 30 years ago. People would come in and say, 'Hey, Dino — You think I could buy a pound of pasta? Fettuccine?'" In 1981, after it reached the point where Romanucci and his wife Anna were handcrafting pasta until early in the morning, every morning, they formed Pasta Factory.

The Romanuccis now focus on their

"WE LOOK AT WHAT THE CULINARY TRENDS ARE, AND THAT'S NOT ALWAYS THE CASE FOR CONSUMER PRODUCTS. TYPICALLY, TRENDS COME FROM THE RESTAURANT WORLD."

— Carl Zuanelli

Nuovo Pasta

manufacturing company, which sells to select Whole Foods, and their restaurant Pasta Shoppe Café, which sells Pasta Factory sauces, prepared pastas, Italian salads, sides, and baked dishes. Anna develops all the recipes.

"Regrettably, [today's economy] is worse than after 9/11," says Romanucci. Prior to that day, Pasta Factory was shipping truckloads of its products to Wal-Marts across the country and to various airlines. "Consumers have definitely dropped going to restaurants. We do see a little slight increase in [deli] sales, especially in sauces. Little by little, we're getting back into packaged frozen pasta."

"When customers come in, they're buying one pound of cheese ravioli for \$3.79," he continues. "If there are three people in the house, they're eating for less than \$10."

Nuovo Pasta sells to both retail and food-service. "Our restaurant sales are definitely a little off; we've shifted our weight a little more toward retail," says Zuanelli. "We do a little bit better at times like this with retail and consumer packaging."

"There is huge potential in my opinion for [merchandising] pasta," says Valente, who isn't directly involved with marketing her of Pasta Valente product but oversees the folks who created the company's 18-month strategic marketing plan.

The economic downturn that has negatively impacted restaurant sales can be a boon for deli departments. All the manufacturers reached for this article are seeing their retail sales increasing. What can stores do more to capitalize on this opportunity?

"It make sense to do more with specialty items in the deli areas to create restaurant meals at home," notes Zuanelli. "Even wine could be marketed that way — cross-merchandising within all sections, assembling all of the ingredients people want in one place." DB

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Belly Up To The Bar

More consumers are turning to deli department food bars rather than restaurants to satisfy their cravings for high-quality foods

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

The economic downturn has put a damper on eating out. According to the Washington, D.C.-based National Restaurant Association (NRA), while overall restaurant industry sales will increase in current dollars by 2.5 percent over 2008 figures, the numbers translate to an inflation-adjusted decline of 1.0 percent. No one wants to see any aspect of the food industry slumping, but consumers' belt-tightening behavior offers deli retailers an unprecedented opportunity to grab a bigger share of food dollars.

Consumers may be eating and entertaining at home more, but they are not necessarily cooking at home more, which may explain why deli patronage is increasing – 70.5 percent in 2008 compared to 68.9 percent in 2006, according to *What's In Store 2009* from the International Deli-Dairy-Bakery Association (IDDBA), Madison, WI.

Many shoppers who are denying themselves big-ticket purchases are as yet unwilling to forego purchases of small indulgences such as favorite foods purchased at retail. In fact, demand for high quality is at an all-time high as consumers search out good value for their hard-earned dollars. This opens the door for deli operators to draw customers by offering restaurant-quality foods and by enticing and encouraging them to purchase what they'd like, as often as they'd like, and as much as they'd like. Hot and cold food bars are at the center of this proposition. Savvy retailers are turning these condiment-turned-meal centers into dynamic profit centers with astute product selection and out-of-the-box merchandising.

George E. DeLallo Co., Inc., Jeannette, PA, began offering olive bars in deli departments about 20-plus years ago because the company saw a need to present olives to consumers in a more appealing manner, explains Anthony DiPietro, vice president. Besides presenting consumers many options of marinated olives, the bars also allowed them to shop on their own, making their own choices about quantity and variety



PHOTO COURTESY OF FOODMATCH

without the help of counter personnel.

Some 12 years ago, the olive bar morphed into the Mediterranean food bar and consumer choices broadened to include prepared vegetables and salads. "Whether called antipasti, tapas or meze, these options round out the offering and make the bar a destination point," adds DiPietro.

Once retailers recognized the bar's potential, the parameters changed; hot and cold foods from all ethnicities and appropriate for all courses began to show up on food bars.

According to Jim Christman, food equipment sales manager for Arneg USA, Inc., Nazareth, PA, a food bar "should be attractive, distinctive and stand out from other areas of the deli department. Decorations can change seasonally to maintain a fresh appearance. Use catchy signage to call attention to what's available."

Signage is a critical component of the sell. Mike Snell, vice president of sales for Blanc Industries, Dover, NJ, believes signage is "important, especially in self-service locations such as food bars. Customers today want to know more about the foods they eat and this information can persuade them to buy. For example, some retailers will affix a topper, or clip-on, to an item's sign label. It's a different color and calls out that the food is

low or high in a specific nutrient.

Akin to a restaurant showing a picture of a finished plate on its menu, deli operators can increase sales by teaching consumers how to marry items to put together a tapas platter for a family meal or at-home entertaining. Dean Spilka, president of Norpaco Gourmet Foods, New Britain, CT, recommends, "Use signage with photos or brochures at point of sale [POS] to give a visual presentation of different variations of tapas platters. Pictures tell a thousand words. Make sure the examples incorporate both best-selling items and newer or less often purchased items to encourage customers to sample."

When introducing a new ingredient to the food bar, "Highlight the item with POS on a stand-up easel that suggests recipes and how it can be paired with other items," recommends DiPietro.

Creative use of food-bar equipment can increase sales. "Combination applications such as full service/self service and combination hot/cold can achieve this," explains Carl Feldman, president of Atlantic Food Bars, Owings Mills, MD. "For example, by adding a refrigerated case for cold packaged soup to a hot, eat-it-now soup fixture, stores can develop loyal soup buyers. Once customers try and like a hot soup they bought for lunch,

they may be inclined to purchase a refrigerated package of the same soup to take home and eat later."

Location of the food bar is also critically important. Christman advises placement "in a high traffic area, near the meats and cheeses, for example, in order to drive impulse sales."

"Spot merchandisers that move easily around the store and end-cap fixtures located near the registers at the front of the store will also build impulse sales," adds Feldman. "This is how to snare a shopper who didn't come into the store with the expectation of visiting the deli."

Limitless Possibilities

The first food bars in deli departments contained solely olives. Today, the number of items on hot and cold food bars is limited only to the retailers' imagination.

The food bar itself has become a crucial part of destination merchandising within the store. Christman believes it can be the center of a complete meal segment solution. The key, he says, "is to have all the items you need in one place. For example, an olive cart should also have olive oil, pita, crackers and all the other accompaniments" for putting together a snack, side dish or entrée.

Mediterranean bars play to an increasing

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consumer interest in a cuisine touted as delicious, healthful and familiar — with exotic yet approachable undertones. The cornerstone to success is balancing the familiar with the exotic. Dominick Frocione, vice president of sales for Cedar's Mediterranean Foods, Inc., Bradford, MA, notes, "We would normally hope to see two to three offerings in a standard cold bar and more items in a complete Mediterranean bar. This would include hummus, chick pea salads, bruschetta, stuffed grape leaves and tabbouleh."

It's important to remember, he adds, "Olives have a longer shelf life compared to most other Mediterranean items, which can quickly dry out, so deli personnel may need to replenish the bar more often and order these products more frequently."

FoodMatch, a New York, NY-based producer and importer of Mediterranean specialty foods, offers deli operators a new and novel way to attract customers to shop the Mediterranean bar for a family dinner. Tara Brennan-Shaub, vice president of sales, explains, "Historically, customers shopped the bar for appetizers for a party. Our Pasta in Minutes and Market Plates by Divina promotions show customers how to shop the bar for a quick dinner at home." Nationwide, 200 to 300 stores test-marketed these promotions last year "with success."

The Pasta in Minutes promotion entails cross-merchandising 1-pound packages of pasta adjacent to the Mediterranean bar. POS materials such as shelf talkers and 11x17-inch signage with photos show customers how much of which items to pick up to make the dish featured. Customers go home, put the ingredients in a sauté pan, toss in cooked

pasta — and dinner is ready. The concept allows for easy variations. Shoppers can mix and match ingredients and buy more or less of an item to suit their individual preferences.

Market Plates is a similar concept. POS materials such as brochures and displays with takeaway cards provide upscale, easy-to-prepare recipes created from ingredients merchandised on the Mediterranean bar. For example, the fall/winter 2008 promotion included nine recipes. Among these were Provençal Cauliflower with Dry-Cured Black Olives, Roasted Tomatoes with Mediterranean Bulgur Salad, and Braised Fennel with Citrus Stuffed Olives. Customers could grab a rotisserie chicken, for example, to combine with these novel sides and enjoy a trendy restaurant-style meal.

Deli departments should not limit themselves to only a Mediterranean food bar. According to Phil Masiello, vice president of sales and marketing for Farm Rich Foods, LLC, Commack, NY, "There are salad bars and hot bars. Salad bars started with just lettuce and a few other vegetables and today have expanded to offer a variety of wet salads such as coleslaw, macaroni and potato salad. Hot bars are a different animal. Most are focused around chicken, generally fried chicken and the fixings to go with it, such as fried potatoes and macaroni and cheese.

"It's key for the bar to have a focus," he continues. "The two most successful examples our company has worked with are an all-chicken bar with fried chicken, rotisserie chicken, baked chicken, chicken pot pie and all the side dishes, and a wings bar where the retailer offered several varieties of flavored wings so customers could mix and match or

try something new."

Just how far should the food bar expand? There is no single answer to this question, says Atlantic's Feldman. "Retailers know their customers' shopping habits better than anyone else. However, there clearly is a point of diminishing returns when too many items are offered and shrink increases, as well as when too few items are offered as customers like variety. For example, offering less than four flavors of hot wings does not offer shoppers an irresistible urge to buy, while more than six flavors is probably overkill."

Fresh And Interesting Variety

Quality, value and price will always be key, says Cedar's Frocione, "but variety will keep customers coming back for new items and ideas. A big part of going out to a restaurant is trying new things, which is why the menu always changes and daily specials are offered. To be successful capitalizing on the shift away from dining out, a retailer should keep changing its menu."

DeLallo's DiPietro contends, "Retailers need to understand that the best-selling items are the bulk of the business. For example, kalamata olives are our No. 1 selling olive. Don't stray from these core items. At the same time, you have to regularly offer customers something new."

According to Brennan-Shaub, "We've seen success where a retailer has a cart with 16 pans. Five or six are filled with items such as roasted tomatoes, kalamata olives and beans, and they stay the same. They have another 10 to 12 pans that rotate with different products. The idea is to tempt consumers with something they haven't seen before and tempt them to buy, no matter how small the quantity. We've found that once they taste something, they're more likely to come back and buy again."

Peppadew USA, Basking Ridge, NJ, offers its Peppadew brand sweet picante peppers and pepper sauce for food bar display. Pierre Crawley, vice president of sales, notes, "Peppadew has added a beautiful red touch to the olive bar — beyond the traditional greens, blacks and browns of the olive set."

On the horizon, says Norpaco's Spilka, "The Latin influence is a growing trend. That means we'll see demand for chorizo and Mexican on the food bar."

Finally, the best way to keep the food bar fresh and profitable is to keep it clean. According to Cedar's Frocione, "You can't fill the bar in the morning and let it sit untouched all day. Product has to be refreshed, spills wiped up and pans filled regularly. That's added labor, but the investment pays off in visual appeal and impulse purchases that translate into incremental sales." **DB**

Package Deal

The future of packaging relies on equal measures of sustainability and affordability

BY CHRISTINA DAVIS ROBERTS

This is an extremely dynamic and challenging time for the food packaging industry. Consumers may be demanding grab-and-go and single-serve containers, but communities are increasingly sensitive to environmental concerns and sustainability. All the while, retailers and manufacturers are focused on packaging costs — moving targets buffeted by supply and demand for such commodities as petroleum and corn.

Domestic and international bans of foam packaging and charges for plastic grocery bags have increased demand for more ecologically friendly products based on renewable energy sources. This past summer's spike in petroleum prices helped equalize the price of environmentally friendly products and traditional petroleum-based packaging.

Different industries competing for the same commodities will continue to affect prices and availability. The history of petroleum prices should have been a harbinger of what would happen to any commodity that attempted to step in and fill that role. Corn — the current darling of alternative packaging producers — is critical for the production of food additives, animal feed, fuel alternatives and compostable packaging. Demand for corn to be turned into ethanol is blamed for everything from Third World hunger to rising food prices.

Seeking price stability, research and development (R&D) departments at packaging companies have been delving into alternative materials and manufacturing methods to reduce costs. Since new manufacturing processes use both different materials and fewer materials while yielding products as strong or stronger than their petroleum-based counterparts, satisfying consumer demands for more environmentally friendly products is an added benefit.

Alternative energy sources are likely to be found in the most unlikely places. For centuries the bulrush has served a useful natural purpose, drying out swamps and limiting



PHOTO COURTESY OF PACTIV CORPORATION

mosquito breeding grounds, but recently it has garnered attention for its use as a packaging material. Bulrush gathered in China will ultimately end up at the factory of Santa Barbara, CA-based Be Green Packaging LLC. The company is buying bulrush and turning it into fiber pots that will hold organic raspberries sold at Whole Foods markets.

Economic Influences

"The price of oil is very influential for sure," says Karen Roman, senior marketing manager of Lincolnshire, IL-based Reynolds Food Packaging, a division of Alcoa, "but as with any product ingredient, our basis is the law of supply and demand. In the case of plastic packaging, the supply and demand now is almost totally based on the growth and demand of take-out and grab-and-go packaging. With more consumers consistently looking to meal convenience, plastics packaging will continue to grow. The variable here lies also with today's consumers and operators looking to green packaging and sustainability. Deli business managers must continue to look for those packaging products that fit both cost and SKU compatibility demand from their own consumer base.

"It's no secret that today's economic climate will create both procurement and mar-



Packaging options are available for a wide variety of deli department needs.

keting challenges to present a marketable balance with cost and value. Knowing their menu offerings and consumer-base meal-planning demands and balancing both will be tomorrow's deli market challenge," she predicts.

Environmental Influences

Although the demand for packaging is predicted to remain strong, manufacturers are

working to reduce the amount of plastic in the actual package both to control costs and to appeal to consumers' increasing sensitivity to environmental issues. Saving money or stabilizing prices while at the same time meeting green initiatives is a win-win situation.

"People will always care about the environment. We are firm believers in sustainability, however, in a cost-conscious environ-




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ment, the challenges on environmentally friendly packaging to meet the needs of the operator's business model will be great. A combination of both is where the market is heading and where business models fit into an economically challenged environment. We believe the word of the next 12 months will be "balance," says Reynolds' Roman.

Individual cities, including Santa Barbara, Seattle, Oakland and Toronto, have banned or taxed certain packaging products. The legislation is ahead of the product development, particularly since retailers need to control costs and customers will pay only so much before rebelling. And although packaging companies are working quickly to reduce plastic in their products and find alternative products, they have not yet found reliably affordable solutions.

Tony Minish, sales manager, Fantapak International Corp., Troy, MI, believes there has not been enough due diligence into the idea of reusable shopping bags. "We're an importer. We sell poly bags – not grocery bags. There hasn't been enough thought given to the front bags. The reusable bags are not cloth. They're still poly – but they're woven poly. How much water will be used to wash grocery bags? Consumers should wash these bags if they're buying meat, espe-



Consumers seek convenience while communities demand environmentally friendly packaging.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BE GREEN PACKAGING LLC

cially if they leave the bags in the car for the next trip. If one drop of blood gets in the bag, it can contaminate the produce."

Where saving the environment was once pretty much confined to not littering, climatic issues and landfill shortages are now at the forefront. Municipal legislatures hope charging a nickel for each plastic grocery bag will reduce demand for them. Communities trying

to hold companies and consumers accountable for the local environmental impact of packaging are a warning to others across the nation, signaling that waiting for affordability is probably not the path to follow.

Packaging manufacturers are trying to maximize loads on shipping to save fuel. "Every one is looking at the full channel now to get everything in one step," notes Glenn Wiechman, manager, national accounts, Pactiv Corporation, Lake Forest, IL. "One of the things we try to do with packaging solutions is to reduce truckloads and save money on shipping."

Sealed Air's Cryovac Division, Duncan, SC, is focusing on three primary environmental initiatives — making changes in the way packaging is made, used and disposed of; measuring the impact packaging can have on sustainability across the total life cycle and value chain, and engaging in partnerships across the supply chain to lessen environmental impact. Product development that addresses not only resource and energy efficiency but also the total impact on the environment is underway.

"We are moving toward adding a third assessment area for new product development – carbon efficiency – and are working at utilizing and perfecting modeling tools that will accurately measure the complete environmental footprint of our packaging products and the products they protect," says Rachel Hadley, account supervisor for Atlanta, GA-based Weber Shandwick Worldwide, the public relations firm that represents Cryovac.

For decades, packaging companies such as Cryovac have focused their environmental efforts primarily on reducing the amount of materials and weight of products while meeting the market demands for price and perfor-



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mance. "This has produced measurable results in saving raw materials and energy conservation by reducing the amount of fuel our customers use to store and ship products. Over the past several years, we have broadened our efforts to include investing in the development of renewable materials and increasing the amount of recycled content used to manufacture products and strengthening our recover efforts," Hadley says.

"We felt a lot of pressure about a year or so ago to address green issues but we're

consumer," says Hadley. Cryovac is now focused on carbon efficiency, which measures the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions associated with the overall package and its contents. "Material efficiency' makes efficient use of raw materials and minimizes waste. 'Energy efficiency' reduces the amount of energy needed to manufacture and ship products, as well as the amount of fuel customers need to ship and store their products," she continues.

The shape and size of the packaging

products affect how much can fit on a truck or in a storage facility, affecting total cost. "Smart design includes the right size and right material," says Mitchell. "Examples of 'right sized' products include our Fresh 'n Clear 'scround' bowl and lid line and Crystal Seal. Both have a square design to use the case space most efficiently. Round containers often have wasted space in display cases. Our 'right material' can depend on the application of the product."

"Price is an uphill battle. Green packaging

"OUR ENVIRONMENTAL OBJECTIVES MUST BE ACHIEVED WITHOUT COMPROMISING THE PERFORMANCE OR VALUE THE PACKAGE BRINGS TO THE CONSUMER."

— Rachel Hadley
Weber Shandwick Worldwide

apprehensive because additives are what make a poly bag more biodegradable," explains Minish. "One of the biggest supermarket chains in Australia did its own 3-year study on biodegradable bags and found they contained more lead than conventional poly bags."

Pricing Influences

What the consumer is ultimately willing to pay for a product, particularly in a down economy, is a crucial piece of the puzzle. "Sustainability doesn't have to cost more the way some companies and consumers think it does," says Jennifer Mitchell, marketing communications manager for Placon Corporation, Madison, WI. "In most cases, we can save everyone money. Placon always considers packaging costs when designing new products. For example, our stock foodservice lines are designed to maximize stack height on pallets and cube trucks to allow the most product to ship in each trailer."

"There is no single solution to meeting the sustainable packaging needs of our customers. Our environmental objectives must be achieved without compromising the performance or value the package brings to the

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can increase prices by up to 20 percent," adds Fantapak's Minish. "We can source green packaging, but price is definitely an issue right now."

In the deli arena, retailers need to reconsider whether the cost of packaging is an expense or an asset that provides an opportunity to satisfy consumer desire for single-serve, grab-and-go, hot-case service, cold-case prepared foods, pre-sliced deli proteins and wrapped specialty cheeses.

"R&D will consistently focus on multi-application packaging for storage and inventory for containment, case and space management at consumer view points, and labor management so to virtually relieve training time. Deli managers can look to single-serve and what we are terming 'package footprinting' based on minimal SKUs required to maximize product to package applications," relates Reynolds' Roman. "Packaging should be utilized as the 'silent salesperson.' Some packaging will be used as containers, while others will still be used as case space managers. The balance will need to be the cost of convenience and value. Packaging will play both roles."

Recycling Influences

Petroleum cost fluctuations and increased

environmental concerns have spurred manufacturers to look to starch-based plastics as an alternative. Polylactic acid resin (PLA), made from cornstarch is not recyclable, but it is biodegradable in special facilities that supply a controlled composting environment. Many consumers see it as kinder than petroleum-based products to the environment because it's made from renewable energy sources. However, science is seeking other plant-based starches that won't pull food plants out of the supply chain.

"Recyclability of a product is very practical but the consumer must be constantly educated to maintain consistency," notes Roman. For example, if PLA is recycled with polyethylene terephthalate (PET) packaging, it will contaminate the PET stream and reduce its viability as post-consumer material. "The reuse of product, the better use of space, time and energy will also be beneficial, if kept practical," she says.

"Once the consumer purchases and is finished with the [PET] package, it can go back into the recycling stream to be used for other packaging or most often non-packaging applications," says Mitchell. "For almost 20 years, Placon has incorporated recycled content into its retail packaging so it only made sense that it would eventually expand

to include our food packaging as well. Our EcoStar food-grade recycled PET material — recycled symbol #1 — contains a minimum of 35 percent recycled content. Our

"THE ECONOMY HAS SLOWED DOWN SOME INITIATIVES, BUT WE ARE CONVINCED THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT IS HERE TO STAY."

— Hanna Sjolund
Innoware Plastic Inc.

new Fresh 'n Clear 'sround' bowl and lid line is the first to be available in this material. We are working to convert our other PET lines into the EcoStar material."

Manufacturers are investing in new equipment and infrastructure to be ready once the economy regains its footing. "The economy has slowed down some initiatives, but we are convinced the environmental movement is here to stay," says Hanna Sjolund, marketing manager for Alpharetta GA-based Innoware Plastic Inc. "We are making a strategic shift towards greener solutions and packaging alternatives. We recently initiated the use of PET resin in our containers as a response to consumer demand for recyclable take-out packaging alternatives. This comes less than two years following the launch of our ECO line of containers made with [Minnetonka, MN-based] NatureWorks Ingeo resin, which is a completely bio-based biodegradable material. We are seeing increased demand for our ECO line of containers. We are also seeing an increased demand for packaging that can be reused or recycled such as PET and PP [polypropylene]," she continues.

"Know your consumer better than you ever have — their purchase patterns and buying habits as to their meal planning needs and budget constraints. This economic climate will be driven more by a common sense approach to marketing and procurement," says Roman.

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A Slice Above

The pre-sliced deli meat segment continues to thrive as consumers seek value and convenience in the deli department

BY LISA WHITE

An increasing number of consumers are discovering the benefits of pre-sliced deli meats for reasons that include lower price points, broader selection, improved quality or convenience.

The 2005-2008 *Counter Intelligence Deli Consumer Study* from Jennie-O Turkey Store Inc., Willmar, MN, found 61 percent of deli consumers surveyed in 2008 said they had purchased pre-packaged deli meats in the self-service case in the past six months, up from 55 percent in 2005.

Consumers in the survey believed sliced-to-order deli meat was of the highest quality, but several drivers prompted them to forego the deli counter and purchase pre-sliced, pre-packaged meats. The study found 31 percent of shoppers bought pre-sliced products because of added convenience, 29 percent because of better quality than found in the meat department, 21 percent because of better value and 21 percent because of added freshness.

"The sliced category is growing stronger than any other deli meat category," relates Lorenza Pasetti, president of Volpi Foods, St. Louis, MO. "With the challenging economy, the convenience factor and abundant thin slices in each package make this product a good value for consumers."

Product Selection & Quality

As the do in the full-service segment, retailers are gravitating toward providing multiple tiers of pre-sliced meat quality. The first tier includes a relatively expensive, super premium brand, the second tier mid-level private label meats and the last tier value private-label meats that appeal to price-conscious consumers.

Springdale, AR-based Tyson Foods continues offering private-label pre-sliced meats due to an increasing demand from both retailers and consumers, according to David Gerle, senior director of lunchmeats.

Increased interest in upscale and higher-quality pre-sliced meats is due to added exposure of these products through televi-



PHOTO COURTESY OF VOLPI FOODS

sion, consumer travel and, over the last 10 years, additional emphasis on the pre-sliced category due to increased value.

"The percentage of people's income being spent on food at home is now the lowest it has ever been," says Jim Carfrae, vice president of marketing at Santa Maria Foods Corp., Toronto, ON, Canada. Yet, consumers are spending more on indulgences such as high-end pre-sliced meats, even though they are purchasing and using them in smaller amounts. "It makes more sense for retailers to dedicate six inches of space for every item sold to higher cost items that bring in more revenue," he adds.

Santa Maria's consumer research reveals consumers want to try new products and learn about different food items. Consequently, it makes sense that those less familiar with gourmet or exotic pre-sliced meat will be more comfortable trying it in a prepackaged, pre-sliced version before purchasing it at the full-serve deli case.

Consumer perception of quality also is important. For example, many shoppers would consider pre-sliced meat positioned next to the full-serve deli to be of higher quality than prepackaged deli meat sold by the cheese section.

According to Gerle, many retailers want to offer the same quality of meats in both full-service and pre-sliced sections. Retailers are looking closely at their pre-sliced offerings and adding more options, resulting in less labor and shorter waiting times at the full-service counter.

Today, retailers are apt to offer pre-sliced and prepackaged versions of meats offered in the full-service case. "Retailers may supplement their pre-sliced meat sections with broader flavor options that don't command the volume required for display in the full-service case," Gerle adds.

However, the challenge in expanding an in-store pre-sliced meat section is the added labor and costs involved in slicing and pack-

aging these products at store level. In this case, expanding a pre-sliced meat section can decrease margins. As consumers look to get the most value for their food dollars, many pre-sliced meat manufacturers have kept prices affordable.

Cost notwithstanding, shoppers who purchase pre-sliced meat tend to be loyal to the category. "Consumers who buy pre-sliced meats typically will continue purchasing these products regardless of price. Retailers focusing solely on price will sacrifice qual-

ity," Santa Maria's Carfrae says.

Shelf life is another consideration. Pre-sliced, prepackaged meats in vacuum packs typically have a shelf life of a few weeks versus only a few days for meats sliced and packaged at the full-service counter.

Packaging Issues

The major innovations in the pre-sliced meat segment are on the packaging side. From press and sliding zippers to tubs and modified atmosphere packaging (MAP), a

wide range of options is available.

High-value MAP packaging has seen many improvements, although critics say meat will discolor when exposed to excessive ultraviolet light if there are not enough film barriers. MAP packaged product may also shift and purge. Vacuum packs, popular in the pre-sliced segment, offer a shorter shelf life than MAP.

Carfrae is not a big fan of resealable packaging for pre-sliced meats. "Once the package is open, air is let in. The resealable properties of the zipper don't keep the air out. This gives a false sense of freshness," he says. The company uses gas-flushed packaging, along with a firm tray, to keep its salamis intact and in place.

Larger packaging formats, which appeal to consumers looking for value and the added product to carry them through the week, have become more prevalent. Jennie-O's Deli Favorites 1-pound value pack targets value-oriented consumers and families. According to Jeff Peter, sales and marketing analyst, the line is sized for the target demographic with children in the household.

Principe Foods, Los Angeles, CA, has changed its packaging format to a larger layout but with the same amount of product. Sherrie Zebrasky, retail advisor at Principe, notes the average full-service deli meat purchase is ½ pound, so pre-sliced packages typically run between six and eight ounces.

Combination packs that offer a variety of sliced deli meat types have become more popular, as well. Volpi Foods recently introduced a trio package that includes mortadella, Genoa salami and coppa.

Consumption of higher-end deli meat is typically less per serving, so packaging sizes are often in the 3- to 6-ounce range.

Sandwich Situations

Expanded sandwich programs can increase pre-sliced meat revenues. Manufacturers say delis all over the country are positioning their sandwich programs to compete with chains, such as Subway and Quiznos.

"Retailers are emphasizing their sandwich programs and gaining trial with their shoppers. This is the case in both the pre-made and made-to-order sandwich categories," according to Peter.

Jennie-O's 2005-2008 *Counter Intelligence Deli Consumer Study* reports purchases of pre-made sandwiches increased 6 percent between 2005 and 2008, with 30 percent of consumers purchasing these items in 2005 versus 36 percent in 2008. By comparison, made-to-order sandwich purchases increased 4 percent in the same period, with 13 percent of consumers buying these products in 2005 versus 17 percent in 2008.

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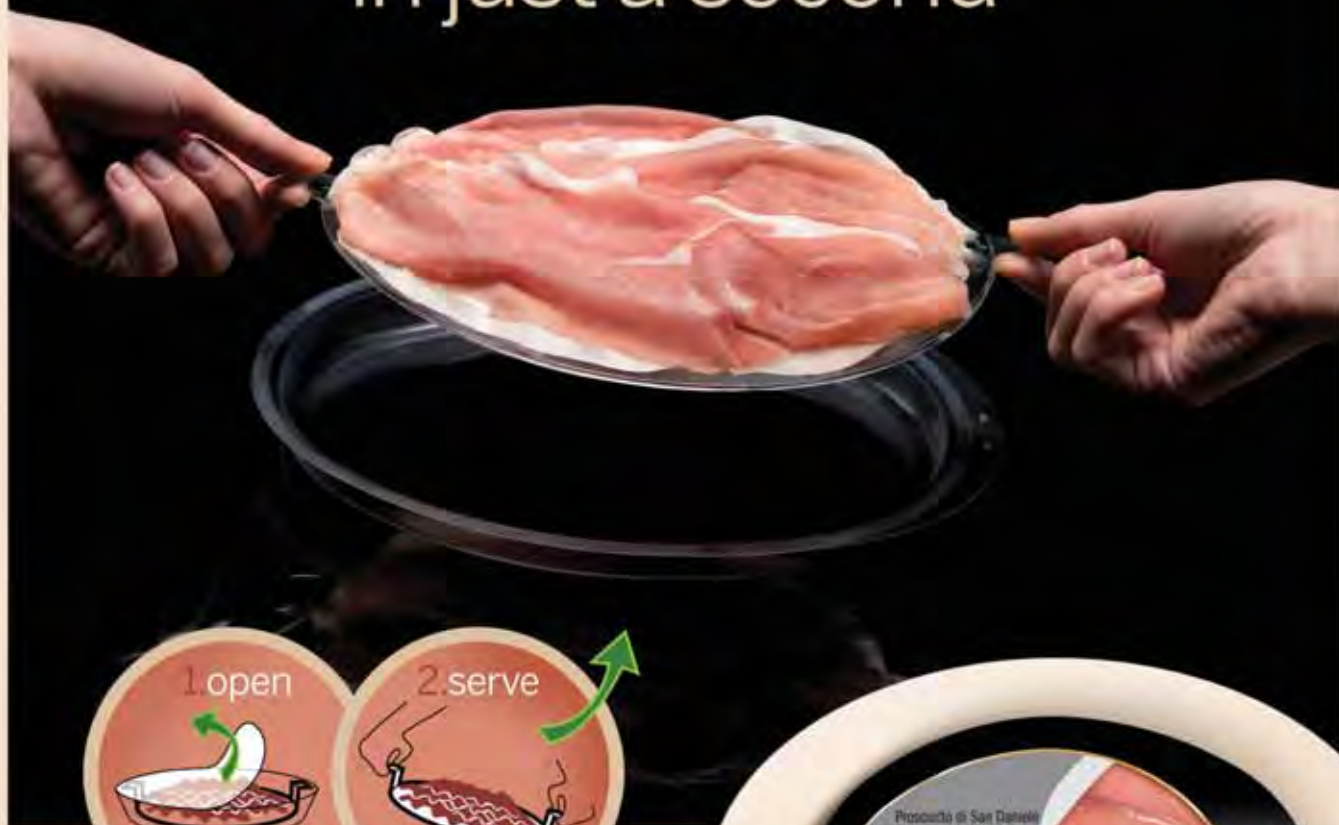
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Home Cooking – Without The Cooking

Rotisserie and barbecue bring in foot traffic — and profits

BY CHRISTINA DAVIS ROBERTS

Value is once again paramount to consumers seeking to economize during the recession. Deli departments can lure in business by promoting comfort foods such as rotisserie chicken and barbecued meats. By showcasing these practical, healthful prepared entrées, delis can position themselves as the place to go for families that want to avoid or minimize the cooking and cleanup involved in a home-cooked meal.

The economic downturn is causing a major shift in buying habits that smart retailers can use to their advantage. Consumers accustomed to instant gratification may not be able to buy that new TV or camera, but they can still satisfy many of their food cravings. “Shoppers have adjusted their sights downward and pulled in the reins on indulgences, but we are seeing that they will spend a couple dollars more for the higher brands or particular products if they really prefer them. For them, it’s worth it if a product is a little better or they can justify it as an alternative to something more expensive, such as going out to eat,” says Pat Ford, vice president of international marketing for Raleigh, NC-based Ford’s Gourmet Foods, makers of Bone Suckin’ barbecue sauce. “Customers may not be able to buy that new car, but they can still buy that \$8 ham or other specialty food item and be a winner at that level. It’s their small victory.”

“Supermarkets are in a better position than ever to capture their current customers’ dollars, given that time is still in short supply but people are watching their restaurant expenditures,” relates Laurie Friedrich-Bargebuhr, president of Friedrich Metal Products, a Brown Summit, NC-based manufacturer of roaster and smoker ovens. “Smart retailers will recognize that everyone is now in the restaurant business, including clubs and convenience stores. However, people’s expectations of what certain foods should taste like have been raised,” she says, noting that retailers will not be able to get away with half-hearted efforts in foodservice.

Delis seeking to differentiate themselves





from competitors should offer a selection of store-branded products that give consumers reasons other than price to shop their store. Upscale markets are using rotisserie equipment for spiral hams and smoker ovens for turkey breasts to widen their offering. By fully utilizing the equipment to cook ribs, pork butt and brisket, stores can address the meat preferences and tastes of their customers.

The goal is to fulfill the needs and wants of a store's demographics. "Since every section of the country has its own idea of what barbecue is, retailers need to be aware of what their customers expect with respect to how heavily smoked the food should be, what type of sauce is used, what side dishes should accompany it," according to Friedrich-Bargebuhr. "Once a flavor profile is established, the retailer needs to be able to assure consistency. Equipment can make the difference here."

Merchandising Ideas

The aroma of rotisserie chicken and/or barbecued meats tantalizes taste buds even before shoppers step foot in the department. Always have something cooking and have a fan that moves the aroma into the store, recommends Ford. "It doesn't have to be a large volume, just enough to get the smell out into the store to help pre-sell what's already prepared in the case."

Pulled pork still warm from the deli hot case may signify freshness but, says Jack Griggs, marketing director of Southern Pride, a Marion, IL-based manufacturer of gas-fired wood-burning smoker ovens, meats prepared in-store to be re-heated at home can also be sold in the deli cold case alongside baked beans, coleslaw and other sides. He adds that since consumers often purchase cold-case

foods for use at a different time than hot-case foods, retailers would do well to diversify not only the product offered but also their locations within the department.

A sample table at the front of the store allows consumers to taste different flavors or a flavor of the day. "Once people eat something, they are in the mood to buy," relates

Ford, who adds that the employees chosen to staff the table should have an outgoing personality and be trained to convey a product's unique aspects, not just its price. "You're looking for that person to not only deliver a sample but to also romance the product and give a little story about it, pointing out one or two messages about the product so when customers go home, they have something to tell their family about why they bought it."

Ford believes showing customers how to get every bit of value out of their purchase — for example, providing ways to create meals and use leftovers — can increase sales. "We are getting an increasing number of hits on our Website and the most popular pages by far are the recipe pages. Stores are also downloading recipe cards from the Website and handing them out to customers," he says.

"A lot of grocery stores are in a perfect position to sell pick-up catering of meat and sides for business lunches and parties to gain another market," recommends Griggs. He suggests sending a catering menu flier to all businesses within a specified radius of the store and promoting the catering service in-store by putting fliers at the checkout counters and in customers' bags. A yearlong schedule of seasonal catering specials could include Easter hams, Memorial Day smoked

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ribs, Fourth of July pork chops, Labor Day pulled pork, Thanksgiving and Christmas smoked or roasted turkeys and New Years' Eve prime rib. "A special item for the holidays is a good excuse to remind customers that you have a great catering service year-round offering everything consumers and businesses need for parties," he adds.

Whole rotisserie chickens are a natural for bundling programs. "A customer can buy a chicken and some additions and it's one of the least expensive prepared meals a family can eat," notes Ed Sussman, president of Melville, NY-based Merit Paper, a manufacturer of bags for prepared foods in the hot case. "With a side of mashed potatoes, vegetable or even just a salad, it's real food at a

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RESTAURANT
EXPENDITURES."**

— *Laurie Friedrich-Bargebuhr*
Friedrich Metal Products

real value. We are also now seeing other food items being offered for meal deals, such as a bag of wings, a rotisserie ham, half chicken, hot potato wedges — whatever the store wants."

According to Sussman, the bags lend themselves to branding, offering a place for a supermarket's own ingredient labels and highlighting the freshly cooked in-store nature of rotisserie. The convenient bags have a clear plastic coating designed to maintain visibility by reducing condensation. The built-in handle highlights the grab-and-go

Up In Smoke

Higher-end stores are differentiating themselves from low-cost leaders by offering an increasingly wider variety of unique, prepared-in-store products to appeal to a wider segment of shoppers. "Many cuts of meat, fish and poultry become value-added when smoked," explains Laurie Friedrich-Bargebuhr, president of Friedrich Metal Products, Brown Summit, NC. Smoking adds an entirely new dimension of flavor without adding calories.

Smoked fish is a premium product with an extended shelf life. Intense flavor means consumers can purchase small portions — often — and get a big bang for the buck. Smoked salmon is popular for breakfast scrambles, as an accompaniment to cream cheese and bagels and as an ingredient in pasta dishes, while other types of smoked fish can be used as hors d'oeuvres with crackers or as an ingredient for dips and other dishes.

Some delis are going beyond the basics — smoked chicken, ribs, pork and fish — and experimenting with smoked cheeses and nuts sold under their own label in the cold case. Commercial smokers can also be used to add mesquite flavor to steak, brisket and meatballs.

In the current economy, "Supermarkets fight harder to give consumers a reason to come in. They need ways to differentiate themselves," says Maurice Lee III, president of Smokaroma, Inc., a Boley, OK-based manufacturer of smoker ovens. "Consumers respond to these products prepared in-store as being fresh since they can verify with date labels. Supermarkets need to offer a wide variety to be competitive and get customers in the door."

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nature of the product. Retailers can customize the graphics, SKU and ingredient panel on the bag. Because the chickens are packaged by the retailer, the bags help create a private-label image that enhances perceived value especially now that customers are increasingly moving to house brands to save money.

Deli departments are trying to create more ways to efficiently increase profits. Some are purchasing new equipment, others are expanding the use of existing equipment to offer additional products and still others are streamlining operations and expanding product offerings. "Frankly, it's tough for some delis to deal with raw meat and take it through the whole process," notes Ken Feinberg, senior vice president of Edina, MN-based Curly's Foods, Inc., a manufacturer of pre-cooked retail barbecue products sold branded in retail tubs and also available for deli hot cases. Delis can display sauced or unsauces smoked ribs; a nearby display of barbecue sauces allows consumers to personalize their choice. Although ribs sold by the pound reap a higher ring than rotisserie, they can be bundled into meal deals as well.

Getting The Most From Staff

Department staff has a profound effect on sales, so associates should know about individual products and why the store sells them. Sharing product information is important, but getting associates used to answer-

ing "personal" questions, such as what flavors are their favorites and have they tried a product, can increase sales. A manufacturer, distributor or sales rep may be willing to present a class that can both educate and excite deli personnel about its products.

Training can also include helping consumers get every bit of value out of their chicken or barbecue purchase by offering ideas for leftovers. Associates could mention that the meat can be shredded for burritos or added to a salad or stir-fry, for example. "Tell them where to find the burrito wraps so they know how they will use every last piece of the chicken or barbecue beef. Employees need to know where other items are in the store so they can tell consumers how to extend the use of their meat. Have the complementary products close at hand, or tell the consumer specifically that burrito wraps are in aisle six," Ford of Ford's Gourmet recommends.

Consumers do not want to wait in line, particularly for lunch, and they won't come back if they have a bad experience. Getting them in and out quickly requires both appropriate staffing and filled displays during peak periods. Prepackaged hot rotisserie products appeal to the grab-and-go lunch crowd. Complete meal options, such as a quarter or half chicken with a side of coleslaw or a prepackaged salad topped with rotisserie chicken, also get consumers back to work quickly. Bottled beverages should be nearby for a one-stop shop.

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Good Cheeses Make Good Neighbors

From traditional classics to unusual innovations, Cheddars can please every palate and every pocketbook

BY KAREN SILVERSTON

Cheddars are the “good neighbors” of the cheese department. They’re kind to kids, popular with adults, well behaved, love to party and will introduce you to all their friends. Even with an English accent, they’re not snooty. Finely clothed Cheddar can mingle or go solo. Some Cheddars have even been known to sneak out for a smoke.

“Cheddar is the most popular cheese in America but it’s not an American original — we’ve adopted it. It has proliferated so widely and is so appealing there’s no way to put the genie back in the bottle,” says Doug Jay, president of Atlanta Foods International, Atlanta, GA. “From a retailer’s point of view, it makes sense to have a large, varied display of Cheddar. Offering different price points allows you to match the Cheddar to the event. At the midrange, the flavor profiles are unique, and complexity increases along with price. Obviously the flavor profile differs as you move up to a cheese such as the Cabot Clothbound [from Cabot Creamery Cooperative, Montpelier, VT].”

Dave Leonhardi, cheese education director for Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board (WMMB), Madison, WI, also notes the wide appeal of Cheddar. “You’re going to tap the entire audience that walks through the doors if you have a nice Cheddar variety. Stores might offer different formats, especially for consumers who don’t go to the service counter. My daughter will tell you she wants it sliced this thick and how many slices she wants. My mother ‘doesn’t want to bother the help.’ Some younger people might not even own a shredding board.”

“People can be very particular about their Cheddar, and in this category they have a lot to choose from,” relates Erin Shirkey, brand manager for Adams Reserve New York Extra Sharp Cheddar, produced in Adams, NY, by Hiram, OH-based Great Lakes Cheese. “They want it colored or white, sharp or mild, or they want it from a specific place such as New York, Vermont or Wis-



PHOTO COURTESY OF TILLAMOOK COUNTY CREAMERY ASSOCIATION

consin — each place having a flavor profile all its own. Our Adams Reserve is a naturally aged, World Gold Medal-winning Cheddar from New York. It has a price point you can afford everyday, yet its quality is special-occasion worthy.”

According to Jim Straughn, president of Massillon, OH-based MDS Foods, suppliers of Cheddars from New York, Wisconsin, California and Canada, including the Amish Classics, Yancey's Fancy and Canadian Reserve brands, “The regional category has become more predominant and is becoming a strong marketing tool for us. Our customers' consumers are becoming more attuned to various regional profiles and have different preferences and expectations. Some are also looking for an aged profile.”

Cheddar is always on display at Earth Fare, Inc., a Fletcher, NC-based chain with 15 stores in four southeastern states. “Typically, we merchandise an everyday Cheddar in the produce department. It's important to have a pantry cheese,” says Courtney Tyler, specialty director. “We believe it's also important to get our customers tasting the original. It's a different use. Many people have never seen Cheddar in a big 50- or 60-pound wheel. We have Sid Cook's paprika-rubbed Apple Smoked Cheddar [from Carr Valley

Cheese Co., Inc., La Valle, WI] and a wonderful local Cheddar, too.”

Classic And Outside-The-Box American Cheddars

Whether producing Cheddars from time-tasted family recipes or creating new variations unique to their areas, American Cheddar makers are producing some of the finest Cheddars in the world.

Tillamook County Creamery Association, Tillamook, OR, has a 100-year-old Cheddar recipe and has also developed two new Cheddars, 2-year Vintage White Extra Sharp and 3-year Vintage White Extra Sharp, both of which followed 2005's Vintage White Medium Cheddar. All three won awards at the 2008 American Cheese Society (ACS) competition in Chicago, IL.

Tillamook heat shocks, rather than pasteurizes, milk for its Cheddar. “A large percentage of our volume comes from our Medium Cheddar, aged 60 days or more. Because we naturally age all our Cheddars, we have roughly 10 percent of the nation's Cheddar inventory aging in our facility at any given time,” notes Jay Allison, vice president of sales and marketing.

Cheddar has been Wisconsin's leading variety since 1880 and the state's Cheddars

now fill every niche — artisan, farmstead, large production, block, cylinder, mammoth, organic, humane, sustainable, grass fed, raw milk, single herd, seasonal and cave aged. The bandage-wrapped Snow White Goat Cheddar from Carr Valley captures the spirit of traditional Cheddar and won Best of Show at the 2008 ACS.

“Cheddar is a comfort cheese and so versatile with the different ages for snacking and cooking,” says Steve Ehlers, co-owner of Milwaukee, WI-based Larry's Market, which sources exceptional handmade local Cheddars for its international and domestic artisan cheese case. He carries a 1-, 2-, 4-, 6- and 8-year Cheddar from Widmer's Cheese Cellars, Theresa, WI; a 10- and 12-year from Hook's, Mineral Point, WI; Avondale Truckle, an English-style truckle from Brunkow, Fayette, WI; Bleu Mont Dairy cave-aged Cheddar from Willi Lehner, Blue Mounds, WI; Carr Valley's Snow White; and a small-batch Cheddar from Jeff Wideman, Maple Leaf Cheese, Monroe, WI. Wideman “won first place in the World Championship [Cheese Contest, Madison, WI] and the ACS. It's aged about 12 months and has a full, creamy texture and nice mouthfeel.”

“Cheddar is a dynamic category for us. We pay quite a bit of attention to it because

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of the range and variety," explains John Stueland, deli category manager, Lunds and Byerly's, a 29-store chain based in Edina, MN. Stueland selects according to demographics, price points, styles and regions. He separates the Cheddars into American, Canadian, British, Australian and local, which he defines as coming from Minnesota, Wisconsin and Iowa. "We merchandise on style, geographical location and theme, and do independent promotions. Any one producer or product can be merchandised in multiple sets. From a merchandising perspective, other categories of cheese may not be that versatile as to how we tell the story to the customer," he explains.

A new addition at Lunds and Byerly's is Fini, a Cheddar made and aged in Wisconsin, then sent to finish in open air for six to 10 weeks in the sandstone caves of Faribault Dairy Company, Faribault, MN. "The caves transform Fini to a new and unique flavor profile. We like it because it's American, it's Cheddar, and it's made with Wisconsin milk and finished in Minnesota caves. Faribault's local, and there's hometown pride in Minnesota and Wisconsin working together," adds Stueland.

"In the next five years, I think we'll see two completely different styles of Cheddar

as opposed to what was strictly the American version, ripened in Cryovac bags," says Tim Smith, category manager for specialty cheese and gourmet foods for The Kroger Company, based in Cincinnati, OH. "It used to be Cheddar was Wisconsin 40-pounders in varying degrees of sharp. Now Beecher's Handmade Cheese [Seattle, WA], a company relatively young in the cheese world, does a cloth banded Cheddar, and Grafton Village Cheese [Grafton, VT] and Cabot Creamery do their own cloth banded Cheddar. American producers are coming into their own. They're moving away from their traditional roots and rediscovering Cheddar's past. Also, the experimentation we saw solely for English cheeses is starting to come out here. Faribault and Grafton are doing their own experimentation and they've combined to create Grafton Duet, which is based on the English Huntsman."

Grafton Duet layers Grafton's Premium Cheddar, aged one year, with Faribault Dairy's St. Pete's Select Blue cheese, aged 100 days. "It has been a tremendous success. We've been selling this locally, on our Website and in our own retail shops," relates Wendy Brewer, Grafton sales and marketing account executive. "Our new cave-aged 2-pound cylinder and cave-aged clothbound 20-pound

wheel are both made from raw milk." Grafton's signature cheese, Classic Reserve, won a silver medal at the 2008 World Cheese Awards (WCA) in Dublin, Ireland.

Fiscalini Cheese, Modesto, CA, and Mariano Gonzalez, cheesemaker at Fiscalini, have set a standard for American Cheddar. "Mariano has been involved in starting the clothbound movement from his beginning days at Shelburne Farms in [Shelburne,] Vermont," says Heather Fiscalini, director of sales and marketing. "He had made it his passion to emulate the English style of Cheddar in this country — clothbound Cheddar made using raw milk, cheddaring and milling the curds, and aging the Cheddar. He has produced Cheddar that equaled and surpassed traditional English Cheddar at the World Cheese Awards in London, England. Inside, you see fissures and lines, signs of the cheddaring process, and the crystallized protein — the tyrosine crystals. Mold on bandaged Cheddar isn't wrong. It forms on the outside of all bandaged cheese and gives it unique flavor."

Classic British Imports

According to Maria Walley, director, Cheese From Britain USA, Cincinnati, OH, "The bandage protects the cheese and pro-



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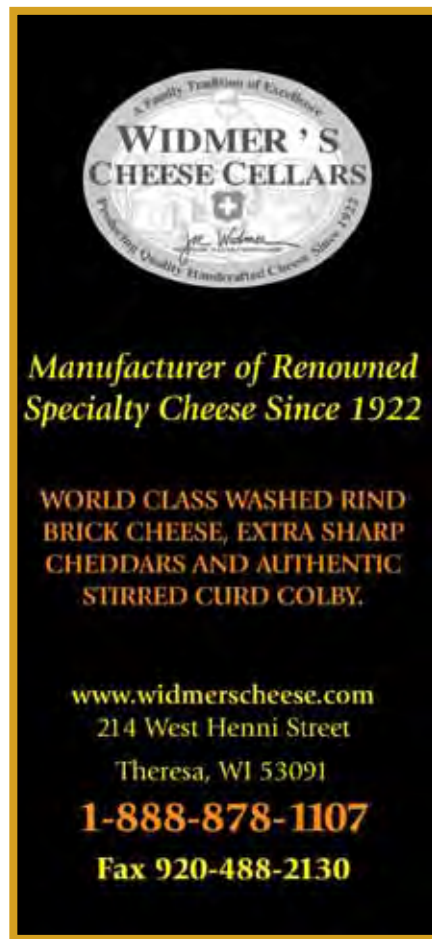
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vides a breathable, sensitive barrier. Aging a clothbound differs from Cryovac. It acquires earthy flavors and aromas from the wood shelves it ages on and the natural molds in the maturation room air." Cheese From Britain supplies many Cheddars including Denhay Farm (Dorset), Green's of Glastonbury (Somerset), Isle of Man Creamery (Isle of Man), Keen's Cheddar (Somerset), Quicks Traditional Mature Cheddar (Devon) and Singleton's Cheddar (Lancashire).

"English farmhouse Cheddar is made in block and traditional, where traditional is a clothbound cylinder. Traditional is more prestigious because it is handmade and limited in quantity. Traditional English Cheddar could tide a family over the winter," says Walley. Most English producers are looking for complexity and a longer finish rather than sharpness in the flavor profile. They tend not to age Cheddar beyond two years. The better Cheddars are usually eaten at about 12 months to two years. The milk may be pasteurized or raw and may come from the cheesemaker's own herd and local farms.

Farmhouse Cheddar's heritage dates back to the 15th century in southwest England — Devon, Dorset, Somerset and Cornwall. "When I first started making cheese, there were about 36 farmhouse Cheddar makers in Somerset," relates Rich Clothier, managing director of Wyke Farms, Somerset, England. "Now there are only eight of us. In the whole of Britain's southwest, there are fewer than 20." Founded in the 1900s, Wyke Farms makes Just Delicious Extra Mature and Ivy's Vintage Reserve Farmhouse Cheddar. Once a small family farm, Wyke today is the only independent company in the Top 10 U.K. cheese brands and produces over 26 million pounds of Cheddar per year.

"Cheddar has been abused. The fact that we can make it anywhere in the world and classify it by fat, moisture and salt removes the soul. It's really about flavor and texture, not constituent percentages. It would be like comparing cars by their metal and plastic percentage, but that's not the difference between a BMW and a Fiat," he explains.

When Clothier's grandmother started making cheese, there was no mild Cheddar. "It would be like saying, 'I'll have a mild Parmigiano-Reggiano, please.' Somerset farmhouse tends to be strong Cheddar — really mature, masses of flavor, quite a firm body and texture. For me, it is a rounded balance of sweetness, butteriness, nuttiness and milky notes with a hint of acidity coming through. When you eat the cheese, the flavors should build up in your mouth but no note dominates," he adds.

"A good vintage Cheddar should be really short textured, firm bodied, starting to get

creamy and crumbly, and with some crystals maybe starting to precipitate out of the cheese so it has some of the crunch to it but at the same time softer, smooth and pleasing in the mouth rather than dry or rubbery. It looks thin bodied but melts in the mouth and makes the mouth water. It should be broken off onto a crusty roll, but not sliceable," Clothier continues.

Wyke Farms used to make clothbound but now ages in blocks in a vacuum pack. "We try to replicate the maturing conditions we had in a cold stone barn on the farm. One of the big differences between our sort of Cheddar and the U.S. [sort] is we mature our Vintage for up to 15 to 16 months. We still use my grandmother's recipe from 1902. The only thing we do better today versus 100 years ago is control the variables. We have a more consistent milk supply and better access to refrigeration so we get more prize-winning vats," explains Clothier. Wyke Farms Cheddars have earned numerous medals in competitions, including WCA in



PHOTO COURTESY OF WYKE FARMS

London and Dublin.

Montgomery's Cheddar, the gold standard for clothbound Cheddar, is made at Manor Farm in North Cadbury from the farm's unpasteurized milk and traditional pint starters, using animal rennet to set the curd. Montgomery's deep and savory 54-pound Cheddars, aged a year or more, are usually best from 14 to 20 months or so.

"The larger format clothbound Cheddars are slightly more difficult for cut and wrap, but we think a serious retailer needs both clothbound and block," says Greg O'Neill, co-owner of Pastoral Artisan Cheese, Bread and Wine, Chicago, IL, a 2-store operation offering more than 150 artisan cheeses. **DB**

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Going Dutch Is Still In Style

Holland revives vintage cheese styles and creates new trends

BY ELIZABETH BLAND

In the fashion world, Holland conjures up images of clunky wooden shoes, winged hats and long aprons. Although such attire is not everyday wear in modern Holland, nostalgia and tourism demand the occasional traditional costume just as cheese lovers demand aged cheeses made with authentic centuries-old Dutch techniques. On the flip side, Holland is known as a progressive and exploratory country in its social models, and this tendency also shows up in its newer versions of flavored cheeses.

In the midst of these extremes are the cheeses most closely associated with Holland throughout the world — the creamy, milky young cow's milk wheels and balls coated in colorful wax. They show up on party trays and in dishes across the United States and Latin America. While the mild cheeses remain top sellers, some industry leaders postulate that their popularity may be threatened by the demand for more complex flavors, especially in the United States where consumers continue to gravitate toward novel — yet ancient — styles of cheeses.

"Recently, 'red wax' and 'yellow wax' commodity cheeses are going out of style to make way for the specialty cheeses from Holland," says Michael Blum, director of Beemster Cheese USA, Jersey City, NJ. "Consumers are coming of age with their tastes and demand cheeses such as Beemster, which have not only an amazing quality but also a rich history and are not factory made." Beemster offers a broad range of Dutch cheeses from the Beemster polder — a polder is a low-lying tract of land enclosed by dikes — in northern Holland, an area of land 20 feet below sea level. The cheeses include 18-month Classic, 26-month X-O-, and several flavored and seasonal varieties. Beemster recently released its aged Minis — individually wrapped 5-month-old miniature cheese bars for upscale snacking.

David Voremberg, president of Jana Foods, Secaucus, NJ, believes quality plays a key role in Dutch cheese sales but he believes age is also important. "There is a definite trend toward aged cheese and, to a



noticeable albeit lesser degree, flavored cheese," he explains. A staple of Jana's Dutch line is the Masterpiece collection by K.H. de Jong, the most famous being the aged Rembrandt. "Since de Jong is a member of a vertically integrated cooperative, all steps, from milk production to aging and packing, are subject to the highest verifiable and consistent quality controls."

According to Todd Druhot, cheese buyer and director of the cheese importing program at Atlanta Foods International, Atlanta, GA, "We're still selling pallets of mild, creamy Gouda, but I've seen larger growth in the aged Goudas. The Rembrandt in that line far outsells all the others."

Voremberg notes that in spite of Rembrandt's popularity, its fellow artist-themed cheeses — Da Vinci, Vincent and Mondrian — are "rapidly catching up."

Atlanta now imports Reypenaer, an aged Gouda from the van den Wijngaards, a fam-

Regarding cheese fashion, old or new, Jana's Voremberg adds: "We never experienced Dutch cheeses as being out of style. We have seen steady growth and believe Dutch cheese speaks to all demographics, ranging from those for whom 'real' Gouda is an eye-opener to sophisticates who seek out well-aged specialties."

Mix And Match

What happens when you cross a Dutch Edam ball with Latin culinary flair? Thom Phiebig has the answer. As president of Galaxy Dairy Products, Inc., Ramsey, NJ — and supplier to Arthur Schuman, Inc., Fairfield, NJ — Phiebig has extensive experience with specialty cheeses as well as cheeses sold in larger quantities in the United States and beyond.

"Puerto Rico sells the 4- to 6-month Edam cheese. It's a huge market," he notes. Phiebig describes Queso de Bola Relleno, which translates as stuffed cheese ball. "They



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JANA FOODS

carve out the top of the cheese and slice it off like a pumpkin." The chefs remove the cheese from the center of the ball, heat it up with chicken and sometimes vegetables, and then return the contents to the empty Edam ball. "They eat it right out of the bowl. They've been doing this for years."

**"DUTCH CHEESE
SPEAKS TO ALL
DEMOGRAPHICS,
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FOR WHOM 'REAL'
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SOPHISTICATES WHO
SEEK OUT WELL-AGED
SPECIALTIES."**

— David Voremberg
Jana Foods

ily with over 100 years of cheesemaking experience and a century-old warehouse that still uses no refrigeration for maturation. "The Reypenaer is natural aged instead of heat aged," explains Druhot, noting that the fluctuations in temperature and humidity add complexity and texture to the cheese. "These guys have been doing it for so long and it's pretty unique. It's really high end, so at first we had some sticker shock, but it's really taken off well." The Reypenaer cheeses currently available are the 1-year Reypenaer and the 2-year Reypenaer VSOP. The producers also have an aged goat Gouda that will be available for export next year, Druhot reports.

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Dutch cheese is not new to Latin America. Dutch explorers traveling the world centuries ago settled in warm climates, bringing with them cheese customs that worked their way into the local cuisine. Dutch cheese is now popular in many Latin countries, including Venezuela, Uruguay, Argentina and Cuba, where Gouda is a staple. While these countries purchase imported Dutch cheese — some through North American suppliers — many also make their own versions and, ironically, now sell them to U.S. importers.

With the growing Hispanic population in the United States and the versatility of younger Dutch cheeses for consumers of all ethnic groups, importers continue to rely on this style for their base Dutch domestic and even export sales. “We’ve always sold a lot of Dutch and it’s always seemed to be mostly the mild and creamy types,” says Druhot, who also notes that Atlanta’s specialty cheeses are steadily moving to the front lines.

Goats On The Runway

“The goat keeps going up,” says Voremberg of Jana, which imports Cablanca, a

white-waxed goat cheese with an equally snowy paste. “People are looking for something different.” According to the producer, K.H. de Jong, Cablanca makes a perfect entry level firm goat cheese for consumers who normally shy away from more assertive goats. It has the characteristic tang of goat’s milk but is milder than unpasteurized goat cheese and certain soft goat cheeses. It is a perfect complement to salads and other light dishes and can be used for melting.

New on the radar is Beemster’s Premium Goat. The company’s master cheesemaker realized the goat’s milk from the polder was as distinct as its cow’s milk, and after much experimentation — and the approval of 550 farmers in the Beemster polder co-op — Premium Goat was born. Handmade from the select milk of only 11 farms, it matures for four months, yielding a silky texture and lightly aromatic flavor. In spite of its relatively young age, it has the flavor profile of a cheese far beyond its months, yet is smooth compared to some aged Dutch goat cheeses, according to Blum. “Premium Goat is a very high-quality cheese and it is competitive

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price-wise. We’ve never had a goat’s milk cheese. This is something very new.”

Accessorizing — The Final Touch

As the pursuit of the exotic increases, previously unconventional cheeses become standard. Now common on U.S. shelves is Van Dijk’s quirky Dorothea “potato chip” cheese flavored with potato skins, basil oil, coriander oil and garlic. Dutch celebrity chef Cas Spijkers created the recipe in 1993 for Holland’s annual “Most Unusual Food” contest. He based the blend on two of Holland’s favorite foods, cheese and potatoes. The cheese won first prize and has been in high demand ever since.

Also in the Van Dijk line are Dorothea Cornelia, a goat cheese flavored with coriander, and Dorothea Marigold with sprinkles of orange and yellow petals throughout. The Van Dijks have been making goat cheese since 1976 on a family farm in southern Holland near Eindhoven. In this area, a single herd of 500 goats grazes freely on the pastures of natural grasses and wild herbs.

From the de Jong line comes a true fireball of a cheese — Red Hot Dutch, which is a cow’s milk Edam ball flavored with red-hot chili peppers. Other uniquely flavored cheeses on the market include Nagelkaas, which translates as “nail cheese,” named for the nail-shaped cloves that decorate its paste. One of the most visually striking cheeses is Veldhuizen Kaas’ bright green Basiron pesto cheese, popular for its flavor as well as its festive color.

A quality cheese always calls for celebration, and a chic Dutch cheese dresses up any cheese board, setting the tone for an elegant tasting. With so many fancy cheeses to choose from — and so many more on the horizon — Holland has proven itself a fashion icon in the world of modern cheese. **DB**

Dutch, American Style

The once seafaring — and now flying — Dutch have brought their cheese recipes and traditions to the United States over many centuries. Their contributions to the U.S. cheese palette have resulted in a boom of award-winning and creative domestic Dutch-style cheeses as well. Among the most prominent producers of Dutch-style cheeses are the Winchester Cheese Co. of Winchester, CA, Tumalo Farms of Bend, OR, and Holland’s Family Farm of Thorp, WI.

Jeff Smoot, Winchester general sales manager, cites import prices as part of the reason for the increased demand for domestic Goudas. “Lately, I’ve gotten a lot of interest in Gouda because the European cheeses are going up and up and up,” he explains. “Our cheeses have become more affordable.”

While the cheesemakers name the young- to medium-aged cheeses as the best sellers, they enjoy toying with new recipes and ages. Smoot tells of a super-aged Gouda aptly named King Tut. “It’s about as hard a piece of cheese as you would have found in King Tut’s tomb.”

Marieke and Rolf Penterman, originally from Holland, conducted an extremely successful experiment in 2008 at Holland’s Family Farm. “The Marieke

Smoked Cumin Gouda was an experiment. We had only one wheel. We didn’t even know ourselves how it tasted,” according to Marieke Penterman. “We sent only one wheel to the smoker, and it went to [the American Cheese Society competition].” It won 2nd place in the Smoked category — a cheese not even tasted by the cheesemakers themselves.

Oregon has its own version of Dutch-style cheese from Tumalo Farms. According to Flavio de Castilhos, company founder and creator of cheeses flavored with local beer, rainbow peppercorns, and desert rosemary, “We do not promote Gouda. We do not promote Dutch cheeses. We promote Tumalo Farms. I would define it as a Dutch-style cheese.”

Behind the scenes are the smaller, less commercially known cheesemakers who supply Dutch-style cheeses primarily to local farmer’s markets and area retailers. Eichten’s Hidden Acres of Center City, MN, is prominent on the Midwestern scene. The cheesemakers, Ed Eichten and Eileen Eichten Carlson, specialize in handmade Gouda free of recombinant bovine growth hormone (rBGH). They expanded the line to include 13 varieties, among which are Peppercorn Garlic, Tomato Basil and Olive Tapenade. **DB**

New X-Ray Technology Improves Produce Safety

29.Dec.08

Michigan State University
Mark Fellows, Bradley Marks
<http://news.msu.edu/story/5777/>

Michigan State University researchers Bradley Marks and Sanghyup Jeong are helping a technology startup company improve the safety of leafy greens and other foods.

Marks and Jeong are proving X-rays can kill bacterial pathogens such as *E. coli* 0157:H7 and *salmonella* on delicate vegetables and extend shelf life. Irradiation from other sources has been used for years to protect ground meat and other products, essentially pasteurizing food without cooking it. "Our work to date has shown that X-ray technology is very effective in killing the bacterial pathogens without causing undesirable changes in product quality," Marks said.

They apply a dose higher than medical X-ray imaging yet less than competing irradiation methods. Less protective shielding is necessary, so the equipment is more compact and food companies can install it at processing plants. Currently, food must be transported to specialty facilities, eliminating irradiation as an option for much fresh produce.

Marks and Jeong work in the MSU Department of Biosystems and Agricultural Engineering and collaborate with Elliot Ryser, a microbiologist in the Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition. They are using MSU's unique biosafety level-2 pilot processing facility to validate technology being commercialized by Rayfresh Foods Inc. of Ann Arbor.

"The problem the leafy green industry faces is there is absolutely no kill step in the process of cleaning, rinsing and bagging the product. There is nothing they can do," explained Peter Schoch, Rayfresh CEO. The potential for widespread contamination is compounded by the mingling of greens from different sources in processing plants, he said.

Food irradiation – which does not render food radioactive – today uses gamma rays from radioactive material or machine-generated electron beams, Schoch said, both of which tend to cause cellular damage and visually degrade food. X-rays promise a gentler, more scalable solution. Rayfresh recently landed its first contract to build an X-ray machine to treat ground beef for Omaha Steaks, which inspected the prototype at MSU. The university's validation work was pivotal in winning that first order, Schoch said.

More information is available at www.fda.gov/consumer/updates/irradiation082208.html.

FDA To Reconsider Plastic Bottle Risk

24.dec.08

New York Times

Julie Scelfo

http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/24/dining/24chem.html?_r=2

Weeks after its own advisory board accused the Food and Drug Administration of failing to adequately consider research about the dangers of bisphenol-A (BPA), found in many plastic baby bottles, plastic food containers and metal can linings, the agency has agreed to reconsider the issue.

FDA's draft risk assessment in August, finding the chemical safe as it is now used, stood out against a tide of recent scientific opinion. The National Toxicology Program, part of the Department of Health and Human Services, has said there was reason to be concerned BPA could harm the brain, behavior and the prostate gland in fetuses, infants and children. Canada added the chemical to its list of toxic substances this year and plans to ban BPA from polycarbonate baby bottles.

In September, a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that adults with high levels of BPA in their urine were more prone to heart and liver disease and diabetes.

More than 200 animal studies have linked ingesting minute amounts of BPA to a range of reproductive problems, brain damage, immune deficiencies, metabolic abnormalities and behavioral oddities such as hyperactivity, learning deficits and reduced maternal willingness to nurse offspring.

FDA's position that current human exposure to BPA in food-packaging materials provides an adequate margin of safety appeared to be based on two large multigenerational studies by research groups that received funding from the American Plastics Council, according to a letter sent to FDA by Rep. John D. Dingell and Bart Stupak, Democrats of Michigan.

Although FDA had reviewed other studies, only the two multigenerational ones met its guidelines for determining safety for human consumption, said Dr. Mitchell Cheeseman, deputy director of the agency's Office of Food Additive Safety.

FDA Requires More Disclosure Of Bug-Based Colorings

06.jan.09

MediaPost Publications

Karlene Lukovitz

http://www.mediapost.com/publications/?fa=Articles.showArticleHomePage&art_aid=97750

FDA has released a final rule requiring

Martin 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.

foods and cosmetics containing insect-based colorings, called carmine or cochineal extract, to list these by name on labels.

Currently, FDA allows these colorings, extracted from the dried bodies of cochineal beetles, to be included under "artificial colors" or "color added" on labels. The new rule, published in the *Federal Register* of Jan. 5, 2009, takes effect 24 months from that date.

The extracts used by some food and cosmetics manufacturers as an inexpensive way to produce colorfast reddish and orange hues have been found to produce allergic reactions such as sneezing, difficulty in breathing, hives, headaches and anaphylactic shock in some individuals, according to medical documentation cited by the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI).

CSPI petitioned FDA in August 1998 to require clear labeling disclosure, conduct scientific studies and, if appropriate, ban the colorings. The new rule was proposed in January 2006, and the commentary period ended in May 2006.

While there is "no complete list" of foods and beverages using the colorings, they are known to be ingredients in some fruit drinks, yogurts, ice creams and candies, according to CSPI executive director Michael F. Jacobson. Data on the colorings' use in cosmetics is even less available, although FDA has cited the awareness of at least one instance in which such ingredients in a cosmetic led to an allergic reaction, according to Jacobson.

While describing the new rule as "useful progress," CSPI maintains it falls short. CSPI contends the colorings should have been banned because "the only way people can determine that they are sensitive to them is to suffer repeated reactions, including potentially life-threatening anaphylactic reactions." At minimum, CSPI contends, FDA should have required labeling specifically indicate these colorings are "insect-based."

Blast From The Past: Vincent Giordano



When Vincent Giordano Corporation of Philadelphia, PA, began, it made domestic prosciutto and was called Vincent Giordano Prosciutto. After the then-existing ban on imported prosciutto was lifted, Vincent and his son Guy branched out and began making roast beef, corned beef and pastrami.

Vincent was in charge of sales and Guy handled operations and growth. It took Guy months to convince his father to buy their first industrial oven, which at that time cost more than his father's house.

A classic company tale involves the addition of a second office in the mid-1970s. When Guy told Vincent that he was going to have the phone company come in and rewire, the always frugal Vincent knocked a hole in the wall adjoining the two offices and passed a phone through the hole. Today that new office is one of the oldest parts of the plant and the hole is framed, a constant reminder of the philosophy of the company founder.

Our thanks to third-generation Justine Giordano for gathering the information for this *Blast From The Past*.

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. For more information contact us at (561)994-1118



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