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COVER STORY



CONTENTS

AUG./SEPT. '11 • VOL. 16/NO. 4



MERCHANDISING REVIEWS
MEXICAN FOOD MANIA 31
A variety of trends keep this category's sales strong

PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES
READY FOR THE HOLIDAYS? 36
Creating a buzz for the holiday season is crucial to successful sales in the deli

PREPARED FOODS
SOUP CAN BOOST SALES 42
Soup offers consumers a delicious, nutritious, low-cost way to feed the family

31

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COMMENTARIES

EDITOR'S NOTE

Old Ways No Longer Work.....10

PUBLISHER'S INSIGHTS

Affineur or Fromager?12

MARKETING PERSPECTIVE

There's Hope For The Brown Bag.....61

IN EVERY ISSUE

DELI WATCH8

INFORMATION SHOWCASE62

BLAST FROM THE PAST62

FEATURES

THE TAILGATING OPPORTUNITY.....19

Delis can use football season to promote their wares

VIVA ITALY!.....26

Italian imports are receiving increased marketing support from producers and Italian agencies

REGIONAL FOODS GENERATE PROFIT....47

Honing in on regional tastes can increase register ring

CHEESE CORNER

FLAVORED CHEESES

FINDING THEIR NICHE.....50

High quality and bold flavors draw consumers

THE CAVES OF ROQUEFORT.....56

The story behind a unique cheese can entice consumers to buy



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CARL BUDDIG LAUNCHES NATIONAL BE A READER CAMPAIGN



Carl Buddig & Company, Homewood, IL, has introduced a new national cause marketing campaign to nourish young minds and support literacy efforts nationwide. The *Be A Reader* campaign kicked off with a new Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) partnership to raise a minimum of \$100,000 for children's literacy programs.

On-pack graphics promoting the partnership will be featured on specially marked packages of Buddig lunchmeats through May 2012. Funds raised through the campaign will support RIF's literacy education

and efforts to provide free books to underserved children.

Consumers will be encouraged to join the campaign and participate in fun reading activities through two national consumer promotions. This fall families can participate in a sweepstakes for a chance to win a Scholastic book library and other prizes.

Throughout the yearlong *Be A Reader* campaign, RIF and Buddig will host local reading celebration events and book distributions to provide free books and literacy resources to young children who rarely experience the thrill of owning their own books. *Be A Reader* kicked off in June in Chicago with a book distribution and read-aloud event featuring award-winning author/illustrator Jarrett Krosoczka, author of the popular Lunch Lady book series.

To learn more about the *Be A Reader* campaign, participate in reading activities or to make a donation, visit www.RIF.org or www.Buddig.com.

COMING NEXT ISSUE IN OCT./NOV. 2011

COVER STORY

What Happened to the Traditional Deli?

FEATURE STORIES

Packaging
Food safety

MERCHANDISING REVIEWS

Food Bars
Fried Chicken
Asian Foods/Sushi

PREPARED FOODS

Pizza

PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES

Bread

DELI MEAT

Salami
Branded

CHEESES

Italian
American Cheese Society
Cross-Merchandising

COMING IN DEC. 2011/JAN. 2012

DELI BUSINESS will present its annual look at retail trends and help deli operators position themselves for the upcoming year.

CORRECTION: In *Wisconsin Cheese: A Reason To Be Proud* in the June/July issue of DELI BUSINESS, we incorrectly identified the photo on page 86. The photo of Mindoro Blue was submitted courtesy of Swiss Valley Farms, headquartered in Davenport, IA. We apologize for the confusion.

SUBSCRIPTION & READER SERVICE INFO

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Gourmet Foods International
Denver, CO (720) 274-2888

www.atlantafoods.com

New Products



SANDWICH WEBSITE

Unilever Food Solutions, Lisle, IL, has created SandwichPro.com, featuring insightful tidbits based on its years of experience and product offerings. It includes Sandwich Stats: quick-read charts on consumer preferences and areas of growth/decline; Know Your Customers: survey results on sandwich attitudes, favorite ingredients and other consumer preferences; Quality Ingredients: information on specific sandwich components, such as condiments or vegetables; Trend Reports: new ideas and developments, "hot and not" assessments of sandwich types. www.SandwichPro.com



RICOTTA SALATA CHEESE

BelGioioso, Denmark, WI, introduces Ricotta Salata, awarded a silver medal at the 2011 U.S. Championship Cheese Contest. Known as "The Italian Feta," it starts as a milky ricotta. Salt is added and it's hand scooped into cheesecloth and pressed into wheels. During the 60-day aging process, the cheese texture becomes dry and crumbly, producing a wheel that is easy to slice, cube, crumble, shave and grate. Available in whole wheels, random weight retail wedges and 5-ounce retail cups of pre-crumbled cheese. www.belgioioso.com



INDUSTRIAL SIZE BOWLS & LIDS

Placon Corp., Madison, WI, has introduced 80- and 160-ounce industrial sizes to its Fresh 'n Clear line of food-service products. The new oversized bowls offer an opportunity to showcase more food product. Built with Placon's EcoStar material, the entire line is constructed of EcoStar food-grade recycled PETE containing up to 100% post-consumer recycled content. Bowls available in clear or black; tight-fitting, leak-resistant lids can be embossed to provide name or brand recognition. Flat or dome lids. www.placon.com



SANIGARD SHELIVING

Focus Foodservice LLC, Lincolnshire, IL, introduces FPS-Plus Polymer Shelving with SaniGuard Anti-Microbial Protection, produced to provide the same flexibility and durability of standard shelving with the added benefit of resisting the growth of stain and odor causing bacteria. The SaniGuard Anti-Microbial Protection will not wear away or wash off during the shelving's useful life. It has also been tested by independent laboratories and has been proven effective. Shelf panels, available in vented or solid styles, assemble and disassemble easily without tools. www.focusfoodservice.com



CULTURED BUTTER LOG

Vermont Butter & Cheese Creamery, Websterville, VT, has introduced a 4-ounce log of Cultured Butter with Sea Salt Crystals. The butter is made in small batches with local rBST-free cream from St. Albans Cooperative of 500 family farms and delivered just hours after being separated. Over the years the line of butter has extended to include lightly salted and sea salt crystal versions in multiple shapes and sizes for foodservice and retail. The sea salt crystals are added twice during the churning to maintain the signature sea salt crunch. www.vermontcreamery.com



TATER TOPPERS

Future Food Brands, Ltd., Carrollton, TX, has introduced Santa Barbara Bay Tater Toppers, dairy-based potato toppings. Almost 25 percent of all in-home dinners include potatoes, so having easy-to-use toppings available in seven distinct varieties — Loaded Potato, Bacon Ranch, Butter and Herb, Chili Cheese Fries, Broccoli Cheddar, Wasabi Ranch and Four Cheese & Roasted Garlic — helps spread flavor without spreading cost. Most products that save consumers prep time cost more upfront, but 9-ounce Tater Toppers retail for \$2.99. www.futurefoodbrands.com



NEW FLAVORS PACKAGING

Venus Wafers, Hingham, MA, has added Rosemary and Seeded Whole Grain flavors to its Nejaimes Lavasch line. The entire line has an updated package design. Nejaimes Lavasch is available in four sizes — a half-sheet Deli Style, a full-sheet Restaurant Style, 5-pound bulk and Single Serve Packs. New flavors include Rosemary (Deli Style) and Seeded Whole Grain (Restaurant Style and 5-pound bulk); existing flavors include Multi-seed (Deli and Restaurant Style, 5-pound bulk and Single Serve), Sesame (Deli and Restaurant Style, 5-pound bulk). www.venuswafers.com



REDUCED-CHOLESTEROL CHEESE

Alliance Enterprises of SE Wisconsin, LLC, Sturtevant, WI, introduces an all-natural cheese with 1/3 less cholesterol and no additives for purchase or private labeling. Patented Benelact technology reduces cholesterol while retaining taste, functionality and nutrients and can be used to make full-fat, reduced-fat and fat-free cheeses. The technology adds no chemicals, plant sterols or preservatives. Cholesterol is isolated and extracted using traditional dairy equipment already in most dairy plants. All other aspects of the product remain intact. www.benelact.com

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

New Products



CORN-FUSION CRISPS

Kangaroo Brands, Milwaukee, WI, a leader in deli food innovation, is adding another great-tasting baked snack to delis. Corn-Fusion Crisps are made with two All-American grains, corn and wheat, plus the best ingredients and Kangaroo's one-of-kind unique baking process. Kangaroo vice president and owner George Kashou explains, "After a pretty exhaustive look at snacks and how people eat them, we decided there's a place for darn good tasting baked snack made from both wheat and corn."

www.kangaroorbrands.com



HOT, SPICY PRETZEL CRISPS

The Snack Factory, Princeton, NJ, introduces two new flavors to its Bold and Spicy category. Jalapeño Jack combines naturally spicy jalapeño flavors with creamy, mildly tangy Monterey Jack cheese. Chipotle Cheddar pairs the unique smoky flavor of chipotle peppers, robust creamy Cheddar cheese and zesty spices. A new Bold and Spicy packaging design has been created to make the fiery characteristics stand out. Only 110 calories per serving. Suggested retail price of \$2.99 per 7.2-ounce bag.

www.pretzelcrisps.com



WOOLWICH CRÈME CHÈVRE

Woolwich Dairy, Orangeville, ON, and Lancaster, WI, announces a new product line, Crème Chèvre. Featuring three flavors — Plain, Vegetable and Herb & Garlic — each starts with a base of Woolwich's ultra fresh, soft unripened goat cheese blended to a light, creamy consistency using all-natural ingredients. Kosher-certified, Crème Chèvre can be used as a dip, spread or mixed into dressings and sauces. Package graphics are whimsically illustrated. Recyclable 5.3-ounce tub; suggested retail price of \$5.99.

www.woolwichdairy.com



WEIGHT WATCHERS MEALS AND DELI SALADS

Greencore USA, Newburyport, MA, introduces the first Weight Watchers mainstream, low-calorie to-go meals and deli salads in the U.S. Refrigerated meals include chicken and mushroom Alfredo with fettucini; meatloaf with garlic mashed potatoes; and chicken with BBQ sauce with mashed sweet potatoes. Salads include seafood in a lemon-dill dressing; chicken with dried cranberries; rainbow pasta with garden vegetables; potato in a creamy mustard dressing; macaroni with bell peppers and chives; and coleslaw with fresh carrots and onions.

www.greencore.com

Announcements



SANDRIDGE WHITE PAPER

Sandridge Food Corporation, Medina, OH, has released availability of an executive white paper entitled *A Focus on Freshness*. The white paper takes an objective look at the challenges facing both processors and refrigerated foods buyers at retail grocery and foodservice operations, and provides best practices for mastering those challenges. Sandridge is offering the free white paper for download at its website. The white paper explores freshness in refrigerated food processing in terms of processing, operations and business practices.

www.sandridge.com



SUMMER-LONG PROMOTION

Arla Foods USA, Basking Ridge, NJ, has launched *Upgrade to Greatness*, an in-store promotion for its Dofino Havarti lasting until the end of September. It challenges consumers to upgrade their same-old sandwiches to great with Havarti. Dofino will offer POS materials, sweepstakes to win \$500 for groceries, and new recipes. A free recipe booklet, *Seven Summer Recipes*, provides one delicious new meal idea for each day of the week and features family-friendly ideas for pasta, salad, and sandwiches to support across-category purchasing in stores.

www.DofinoUSA.com



NEW FACILITY

Haliburton International Foods, Inc., Ontario, CA, is adding a second southern California manufacturing, development, research and distribution location. The first phase, to be completed this year, is construction of a refrigerated and frozen foods warehouse and distribution facility. The second phase, expected to be completed in June 2012, will be additional manufacturing space including additional product development and pilot plant capabilities and a new state of the art culinary kitchen. The final phase will be new corporate headquarters.

www.haliburton.net



AWARD-WINNING CHEESE

Westland Holland Cheese Inc., New York, NY, announces Old Amsterdam cheese has been awarded the Superior Taste Award for the third time in a row from the International Taste and Quality Institute, Brussels, Belgium. This award is like a Michelin star for the food and drinks industry. Old Amsterdam won the Superior Taste Award with three stars. This means the cheese has been qualified in the highest category. Old Amsterdam also won the Crystal Taste Award for products crowned with three stars for three consecutive years.

www.oldamsterdam.com

by Jim Prevor, Editor-in-Chief

Old Ways No Longer Work

To be master of one's own fate is inspiring and burdensome. Deli executives at retail know this because, more than in any other department, they are the masters of their own fate and the fate of the department they run.

The deli department offers the flexibility to adjust product offerings to stay in line with the latest trends. If Mexican cuisine is hot, one rolls out the Mexican food bars, but if the winds of fashion blow from China, one sets up wok stations. If the trend is back-to-basics and home-style cooking, the rotisserie does chicken and meat loaf. And if people want a walk on the wild side, cook duck or add some zesty flavorings to the chicken.

Of course, riding the trends to success is easier said than done. It is hard to know which trends are here to stay and thus justify investment. Plus there is an institutional imperative to keep doing things long after doing those things stops making sense.

The deli has undergone transitions many times. Few sell the pimento loaf and other processed products that were once mainstays, and the move to whole muscle meats helped the deli remain relevant. Same with cheese. Once it was enough to sell just a few slicing cheeses; now a deli without a decent specialty cheese selection isn't much of a deli at all. Not all that long ago, the "appetizing" department was proud of its smoked fish selection, and a good deli director knew how to de-bone herring as a matter of course.

Yet the transition ahead for delis may be more difficult than the transitions that have gone before.

The core products — sliced meat and cheese for sandwiches and cole slaw, potato and macaroni salad, as well as old standbys such as tuna and egg salad — are all caught in declines that will not easily be arrested. Prepared foods, once seen as the savior for the department, have less appeal in economically tough times.

Three big challenges confront the deli:

First is the change in what kinds of foods people will be consuming. The government's efforts to encourage higher produce consumption sync well with consumers' interest in fresh foods, local foods and knowing who produced their food. Yes, delis sell salads and prepared foods are made with lots of produce, but much of it is processed in a way antithetical to the ethos of the day, which is increasingly seeking raw food and less processing, not vinaigrette poured over cucumbers to make cucumber salad or dressing added to carrot/raisin salad.

Second, beyond the food itself, consumers are seeking alternatives to the ubiquitous homogeneous presentation. They are losing enthusiasm for mass-produced products shipped everyday and displayed according to a plan-o-gram.

This issue is one of great difficulty for supermarket chains. After all, what supermarkets traditionally specialize in is really mass procurement and distribution. Sure, everyone in the trade has long known that micro-marketing is important, but mostly that has been a matter of adjusting assortment around the edges to meet the needs of ethnic or religious groups or to accommodate a demographic.

It is a different matter entirely if the issue becomes a rejection of homogeneity itself.

Third, part of this movement to things artisan and to knowing who is behind one's food is a yearning for contact and community. It is a desire to connect with real people. Yet this high-service approach is exactly the opposite of the trend to more self-service product.

One can imagine many ways to address these three overlapping trends. Delis could have large full-service, attended salad bars, in which human beings wearing gloves prepare customized salads at the direction of shoppers, a system common in college foodservice.

The food is fresh, each salad unique and, as with one's favorite barista at the coffee shop, one builds a relationship with individuals who make one's salad.

Yet even to suggest such an approach is to raise a cloud of objections. The labor costs are too high, the volume too low. Consumers, whatever they say in surveys, really care about price, and the objections go on and on.

Still, the old ways won't hold. People who eat a salami sandwich for lunch each day or for whom tuna fish on toast is a daily experience are dying off, and the success of the deli will depend on capturing the imagination of a new generation — a smart-phone generation conditioned to hold the whole world, literally, in the palm of one hand.

The best operators, such as Wegmans, have already adapted as they transformed their delis into festivals of fresh foods. They have used the shapes of crusty breads, the aromas of baking pizza, and the colors of fresh fruits and vegetables to create an environment in which there is warmth and a sense of place.

Success will require delis to become good at things they have not been particularly good at in the past. That is going to be a significant challenge, but the rewards for those who rise to the occasion are vast and the fate of those who refuse to do so will be dire.

DB



James F. Prevor

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by Lee Smith, Publisher

Affineur or Fromager?

As the American cheese culture becomes more sophisticated, the terms *affineur* and *fromager* are being heard more often. Both are French words that are often misunderstood and thrown about with wild ambiguity. They are, in fact, not interchangeable and their meanings quite different.

All too often, we hear of retailers proclaiming to be *affineurs*, aging their own cheeses and developing cheeses “their way.” Rarely is this true. Retailers are not *affineurs*, nor should they try to be. What we need are better *fromagers* (or *cheesemongers*). Retail operations must develop the skill sets and accommodations needed to keep cheese in prime condition. Selling cheese is more than putting it on the shelf to be sold before it goes bad.

This year I wanted a working vacation to learn more about cheese. I met Hervé Mons at an American Cheese Society Conference a few years ago and learned about MonS, a company specializing in *affinage*. I hoped for the opportunity to work for MonS in the medieval village of Saint Haon-le-Chatel in France. Hervé Mons is recognized as one of the world's most esteemed *affineurs* and MonS is known for providing the finest cheese shops and restaurants in Europe with cheese of outstanding quality. His brother and partner, Laurent Mons, is one of France's finest *fromagers*. MonS also owns a number of *fromageries* or cheese shops and I thought I would be able to spend a few days brushing up on my retail sales skills.

First, *fromager* and *affineur* are greatly respected positions representing different responsibilities. *Fromagers* work with cheese and *affineurs* work cheese. A *fromager* works with cheese to present it in the finest fashion possible. He or she has an intimate knowledge of each and every cheese as well as its individual care and handling. A *fromager* also understands customers and can describe the characteristics of the cheese, how to use the cheese and its best food and beverage pairings. The *fromager* knows what cheeses should be displayed on straw or wooden racks, how each cheese should be cut, whether it should be left in its wrapper or box or have its wrap removed. Some cheeses may need more airflow or cooler temperatures. Others may need higher humidity levels.

Affinage is the art of working cheese until it reaches its fullest potential. It is the second stage of cheese development and requires a true partnership between cheesemaker and *affineur*. An *affineur*'s most important responsibility is finding cheesemakers to collaborate with because great *affineurs* must start with great cheese.

For three weeks, I worked as an intern under the watchful eyes and close supervision of the *affineurs* in

the MonS caves and tunnel, a 185-meter long railroad tunnel that has been converted into an aging tunnel. In the caves, I worked with the small cheeses — fresh Chèvre, bloomy and washed rinds — carefully tending to these little treasures. Each day the cheeses were turned and put on fresh straw or paper and moved from cave to cave depending on their needs — more airflow, colder, drier, more humidity, etc. Over a period of days, magically the cheeses turned into little jewels.

In the tunnel where the large cheeses are aged, I saw the same kind of transformation as rinds developed. Every cheese in the tunnel is turned a minimum of once a week, some two to three times a week. They are rubbed or patted, washed or just turned. The boards the cheeses are set on are washed as needed and the tunnel cleaned from top to bottom every day.

As my stay extended, I realized I was only seeing the top layer of the art of *affinage* and, as I became more comfortable and started to get to know my cheeses, I began to get a feel for when they needed to be turned and whether I needed to pat or rub the rinds. I also started to recognize different molds I had never noticed before and started asking questions about whether they were good or bad, indigenous to the cheese's *terroir* or part of the tunnel flora.

I also started to hear casual conversations that gave clues into the true art of *affinage*. The conversations were about talking to cheesemakers, about how much rain or lack of rain the cheesemaker faced. Sometimes changes in the make process were needed and the cheesemaker needed to know about them. It all goes into knowing what the cheese needs — each cheese is treated as a unique, living entity.

It was then the meaning of “working cheese” became apparent. *Affinage* is finding the right cheesemakers and forming a partnership based on trust and respect rather than just the mechanics of turning cheese.

For that reason, retailers need to work with great *affineurs* while at the same time developing greater competencies training associates and buyers in the art of being a *fromager*. Wooden racks and spritzing cheese do not make an *affineur* — the reason that truly great cheese is an everyday event in France is due to the *fromagers* who work in the cheese shops.

We need to adjust to the cheese and not ask the cheese to adjust to us. **DB**





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Annual Conference & Competition

*Cheese & Fromage:
Common Cultures*

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American
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WWW.CHEESESOCIETY.ORG



KID Stuff

The deli can play an active role in childhood nutrition

BY JAN FIALKOW

The health and wellness of American children has become a hot-button issue. Epidemic levels of childhood obesity and type-2 diabetes have sparked intense media coverage. First Lady Michelle Obama has made childhood obesity her signature issue and, although some in the media ridiculed her early forays into growing organic vegetables on the White House grounds, her persistence in promoting her *Let's Move* campaign has helped bring the topic into mainstream discussions.



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Americans treat children and their food consumption in a manner that borders on irrational. We let infants tell us when they're hungry and when they've had enough. After all, you can't make an infant drink more milk than he wants. And most parents are comfortable with the idea that little Johnny is letting them know when he's full.

Yet when a baby is weaned and introduced to "real" food, many parents want to control how much she eats. By the time little Mary understands language, food can become a battleground — mom or dad is setting the parameters on quantity, time and frequency. If we take as a given that mentally healthy infants and toddlers will neither starve nor gorge themselves, why do we insist on taking away their food autonomy? Are we not setting them up to depend on external cues to guide their eating? Cues that fast-food restaurants and manufacturers of highly processed foods are chomping at the bit to provide?

Not every child is going to gain too much weight or suffer from the attendant maladies of obesity. But that doesn't mean appropriate-weight children are eating a healthy diet — it just means they're not consuming more calories than they expend. Many parents of children whose weight falls within healthy parameters may not be aware their kids are developing bad habits that could get them in trouble later in life. Many parents of overweight kids know their children are in trouble — but may not know how to help them.

"Things are good until they're bad, healthy until they're not," says Lisa Carlson, nutrition manager, R&D, Unilever Food Solutions, Lisle, IL, "Children are the appropriate weight until they're not. Many times we don't notice that weight is increasing."

Learning from Other Departments

There's a reason we grew up being told to eat our vegetables and grab a piece of fruit for a between-meal snack. Long before science took over nutrition, people knew fruits and vegetables made their bodies work properly. They didn't have to know why it happened, just that it did.

Fresh fruits and vegetables are the healthiest food categories humans can consume; it may not be easy, but you can be healthy following a vegetarian or vegan diet. That's not the case if you eat only meat, only fish, only dairy, only the foods from any department situated on the supermarket perimeter. Unless that department is the deli — because the deli has the ability to draw the best from all these categories and serve them up in new, different and delicious ways.

The fruit sector of the produce industry markets a product that kids instinctively like. Fruit is sweet, juicy and delicious. And much of it comes in child-sized portions, à la grapes, cherries and orange sections. It's no wonder, then, that Sunkist Growers, Sherman Oaks, CA, has been a leader in marketing to children. From specially designed packaging to lemonade stands tied to cause marketing, Sunkist has been a pioneer, one the deli department can emulate.

Manufacturers can promote their prod-

ucts to children but parents are the purchasers. When parents understand a product is good for their child, they tend to look more favorably at the producer. According to Lance Freeman, marketing associate at Sunkist, parents are very concerned about childhood obesity and looking for tools to combat it. "Parents look at the news. They see their kids, other kids. Nutrition is where we make the push. It's still toward moms — dads to some degree, but mostly moms.

"How do you put the nutritional information out there? You need to be transparent," he continues. "Transparency gives the perception that you're not trying to hide anything. At it's simplest, it means just having the information available. Restaurants have full nutritional information. People like having it — they may not chase it down, but they

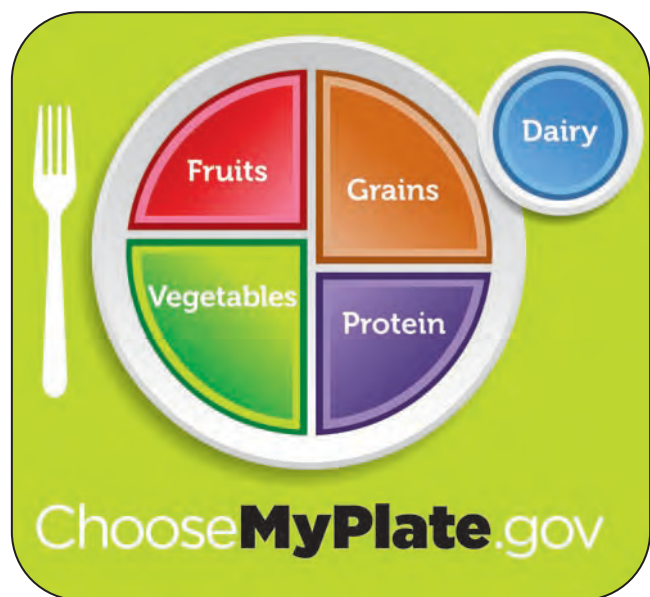


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Club EATalian

The Italian Ministry of Economic Development and the Italian Trade Commission have teamed up to present an educational program called Club EATalian, which showcases healthy alternatives to meals based on highly processed foods. Geared to kids and their parents, Club EATalian can help promote easy ways for American families to incorporate authentic Italian food products into fast, fresh and nutritious meals. And that means many of the foods sold in the deli will fit into this healthy way of eating.

The focus is on teaching elementary and middle-school kids about nutrition and food preparation consistent with an Italian emphasis on the Mediterranean Diet. It also conforms to the new My Plate approach to eating from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Tactics and tips for getting children more involved in and interested in healthy fresh foods include:

Touching, feeling and exploring the different colors, fun shapes and tastes of food ingredients.

After shopping, including kids in food preparation through simple tasks such as sprinkling cheese on pasta or arranging sliced meats on an antipasto platter.

Adding new ingredients to a favorite food, such as pizza, to vary colors and add nutrients.

DB



like the idea that it's there."

According to Unilever's Carlson, "Five to ten years ago, nutrition was about 'stealth health.' Operators weren't flashing health information. Healthy was thought to be not tasty. Now there's more transparency. Stealth health is still there but we're also transmitting information. For example, you can offer California chicken raisin salad. It sounds healthy — California, chicken, raisins, salad — but it can — and should — be backed up with good nutritionals."

Delis have an opportunity to make nutritional information for non-packaged items available. Packaged foods didn't offer nutritional information until required by law to do so; a deli that gets out in front of the pack and lets consumers know the nutritional content of its prepared foods — before a mandate is invoked — can benefit from both the goodwill it generates and the repeat customers it engenders. "Wegmans has said they're going to put calories and nutritional information on their hot tables and cold tables. It's not required — they're doing it because they should," Carlson adds.

Sunkist's experience in the produce department reinforces some basic marketing tenets about marketing to kids and their parents. "Ease of purchase is important," states Freeman. "The more difficult it is, the less the chance they'll buy it. If it's easy to buy a good-for-you item, you can create repeat customers."

This is applicable to self-serve and behind-the-case deli items. Entrées, sandwiches and sides portioned for child-sized appetites — especially with back-to-school looming — at competitive prices will position the deli as a destination for parents who want to pack school lunches their kids won't trade or throw away. Even something as simple as a display of whole-grain small rolls, pitas and slider buns with signage announcing they're the perfect size for kids' lunches — and whole-grain for better nutrition — can create a buzz.

Freeman also supports the perennial standby, demos, noting, "Sampling works — it can get kids to try something different. Parents are more open to a purchase when kids are eager to eat something."

Make sure the demonstrators in your department are engaging both kids and parents. Don't preach the nutritional benefits of the sample — work them in tangentially. For example, ask the child, "Would you like to try this yummy cheese?" Then turn to the parent and add, "It contains calcium for strong teeth, Mom." Or "Would you like to taste this pizza? It's made with whole-wheat crust and tastes delicious, Dad."

Sunkist has also had success offering

child-friendly recipes. "Recipe booklets targeting kids — that means recipes kids are interested in — are helpful. When kids are included, there's a buy-in," Freeman continues. In addition, kids who participate in preparing a recipe are more inclined to eat — and enjoy — the end result.

The Deli's Role

Getting kids into the deli each time they go the supermarket with mom or dad is

going to take commitment. Kids plead to go the bakery for a free cookie — tasty, perhaps, but not particularly healthy. Why aren't they pleading to go the deli? Would they if the deli offered small ready-to-serve healthy treats? Small cubes of cheese, pretzels wrapped with sliced deli meat, even tiny cups that can be filled with a soup or side of the child's choice might be the way to tantalize those youthful taste buds.

The trick here is to make the kids' sam-

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ples both tasty and healthy. The deli won't gain a good-tasting-good-for-you aura if the goodies are traditionally high-fat, high-sodium, highly processed foods. And kids won't be asking to go the deli if the sample comes with a large dose of preachy nutrition info.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's

new My Plate approach to healthy eating can be a good jumping off point for choosing what kinds of items to promote to kids as healthy choices. "We have an opportunity to educate children and teens about healthy options," says Unilever's Carlson. "The USDA's new My Plate, which has just

replaced My Pyramid, will be part of the new push. Essentially, half the plate is filled with produce, a quarter is filled with grain — and if they're whole grains so much the better — and the last quarter is filled with protein.

"The deli is positioned to fill the plate appropriately with its prepared foods, salads, sandwiches and soups," she continues. "All these are components of that plate. Soup can easily be a produce serving. Deli salads and sides — in the right proportions — can fill the produce and grains portions. And delis now have more whole grains than ever before."

Offering prepared-food containers with compartments at hot and cold food tables can reinforce the My Plate concept and subliminally limit portion sizes. Smaller size containers — distinctively colored and targeted toward kids, perhaps — can also draw kids to the deli. And why couldn't the deli take a page out of the fast-food playbook and offer a small toy with the purchase of a healthy meal?

"The choices we make are based on the choices we have," relates Carlson. "Delis can put more fruit in salads. They can dress salads lightly. They can marinate proteins before cooking instead of saucing them after cooking. They can include healthful fats in appropriate amounts. Moderation is key." **DB**



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The Tailgating Opportunity

Delis can use football season to promote their wares

BY BOB JOHNSON

When fall arrives, millions of Americans will be flocking to football games every week, from Friday night at the local high school to Saturday afternoon at the university campus to Sunday afternoon at the professional stadium.

Many of them will be getting together before the games for tailgating feasts. And most of them won't approach the deli to supply those feasts unless special efforts are made to draw their attention.

Tailgating season offers a unique opportunity for displays that can attract new consumers to the deli. "If you're a retailer, there's a real opportunity for displays. The secret is to have everything from A to Z — have extra bags of ice, paper cups and paper tablecloths, and then get into the food stuff. Retailers have to tie it together," says Jeff Weber, brand manager for Old Wisconsin Sausage, Inc., Sheboygan, WI.

Old Wisconsin, which makes a variety of sausage and bratwurst products, shelf-stable sausage snack bites and snack sticks, has POP materials — such as posters of a slice of summer sausage on top of a cracker — oriented specifically to the tailgating market. "We have products we seem to be able to market to people who are on the way to the game. Football is a very important season for us," Weber says.

Tailgating season is also an opportunity to get deli products into displays that will be prominent for months in other areas of the store. "The single biggest opportunity is to get involved with the Frito Lay and Pepsi displays they put up at the beginning of football

season and keep up until the end of football season. If you can get a spot with dips, chips and other items, you can capture impulse sales," says John McGuckin, executive vice president for sales at Sabra Dipping Company, Farmingdale, NY. Sabra is best known for its hummus products, but the firm has recently branched out to include salsas and other dips with the goal of becoming a full-service deli dip supplier.

For many deli department products, this requires a portable cooler to serve as a 'cold case' outside the deli. "The trick is to get a spot cooler in the middle of the display — something that's portable and large enough for three or four cases. You need a source of electricity or a battery. We're working with a manufacturer on some affordable coolers," McGuckin says.

Some producers offer displays specifically targeted to merchandising for tailgating and other football-related social eating events. "For the past several years we've been offering a football-themed header for Beano's deli condiment shippers," says Weyd Harris, national sales manager at Conroy Foods, Pittsburgh, PA. "These attractive headers draw the customers' attention to our products and fit in well with other football events. It's a great way to tie in breads, deli meats and cheeses with other football-

themed products such as paper plates, napkins, cups, etc., making a complete tailgating destination in the deli department." Conroy Foods produces a wide variety of sauces and condiments under the Beano label.

Other producers are introducing new products and displays in time for the next tailgating season. "We're creating a special bold-and-spicy shipper to coincide with the launch of our new bold and spicy line of Pretzel Crisps," explains Perry Abbenante, vice president of marketing at Princeton, NJ-based Snack Factory, which produces pretzel crisps in a wide and growing variety of flavor profiles. "The line will start shipping in August and the displays, which are perfect for tailgating season, will follow shortly thereafter. The idea of the displays was a direct result of wanting to tie in to fall football/tailgating promotions."

An effective display should combine products that can be taken together to a tailgating event. "You want strong and simple

tie-ins — deli meats and cheeses, hummus and vegetables, hummus and salsa. A hot bar with brats, chili, pulled pork or any kind of hot meat can tie in with tailgating,” advises Salem Kashou, marketing manager for Kangaroo Brands, Milwaukee, WI. “Merchandising depends on how well the retailer displays them. Stack them properly and keep them faced out.” Kangaroo produces a variety of pita chips and pita breads.

Done well, merchandising to the tailgate crowd can serve to introduce the deli to new consumers. “I think it’s a big opportunity. I think if you can get deli products to other areas of the store, the opportunity for impulse sales and capturing consumer attention is enormous. Once they try the products, they may come over to the deli to try them again,” Sabra’s McGuckin says.

The displays can feature foods that add a special touch to tailgating and complement the main event from the grill. “Our product is a nice table cheese, a finger food-type thing you can have in combination with the grilled meat. The other thing you could do with the cheese is make a cold pasta,” says Sue Mercx, retail marketing manager at Plymouth, WI-based Sartori Foods, a fourth generation family-owned



cheesemaker that uses local Wisconsin milk to make a variety of cheeses, including flavored and artisan cheeses. “Chunk up some

cheeses and put it on cutting boards with pairing guides, recipes and cards with information about the cheese,” Mercx suggests “

Service for Many

Consumers shopping for a tailgate party are looking to feed a large group of people. And that means they need items that are large enough to serve the entire party. “Anything 10 ounces and above works, something large enough to share. Tailgating is a shared event,” McGuckin notes.

Tailgating often involves grilling a piece of meat large enough to serve a substantial number of people. “We think it makes sense to spend more on a higher quality meat in a large enough quantity that you can grill it, slice it and serve a lot of people. I see it in the market that quality is reigning supreme,” says Jay Theiler, executive director for marketing at Boise, ID-based Snake River Farms, which produces a range of gourmet beef, pork and sausage products.

Tailgating embraces popular trends that deliver on familiar concepts, for example, the now ubiquitous slider, and manufacturers have been quick to jump on the bandwagon. “We have a new itsy, bitsy pocket that’s great for sliders or small sand-

The Package As Merchandiser

BY BOB JOHNSON

As tailgate season approaches, packaging can be an important merchandising feature.

“The packaging can really help, especially if you have something unique. The shapes can send across a unique branded message,” says Cheryl Miller, director of operations, Flair Flexible Packaging of Appleton, WI. Last year, Flair rolled out a unique 6-inch by 8-inch pouch in the shape of a jersey as part of a promotion geared to fans of Canadian hockey teams.

Another relatively new item is a flexible pouch with a spout that allows the contents to pour freely. “It’s functional and easy to use for the consumer,” Miller explains. Another of the pouch’s advantages is it uses a relatively small amount of material that ends up in the dump. Flair has standup pouches with spouts sized to dispense salsas, pesto, tapenade and other food products.

Many of the latest developments in packaging are designed to increase food safety and freshness in packages that can be used in eye-catching displays.

According to Herb Knutson, director of marketing for Inline Plastics, Shelton, CT, “Once closed, these clear clamshell containers are tamper-resistant, tamper-evident and leak-resistant. After the container has been closed, the only way to get into it is to remove the tear-strip [Safe-T-Gard] hinge. The new feature is a pop-up hanging tab that appears when you close the container. This allows the containers to hang on racks or stands in different strategic areas in a store to promote impulse purchases.”

A version of this package is designed to hold half a sandwich. “We also have just introduced a new Safe-T-Fresh Sandwich Wedge clamshell container with the same Safe-T-Gard tear-strip hinge. The

tight seal on these containers helps food stay fresher longer in stores and helps for storing leftovers,” Knutson adds.

The single largest football feeding-frenzy comes right after tailgating season as tens of millions of people gather to eat at Super Bowl parties. “The biggest demand is for the Super Bowl, when you get more demand for larger party-type packs. There are a lot of tray options for sandwiches, wraps or vegetable party trays,” notes Dave Fosse, director of marketing at Lindar Corporation, Baxter, MN.

“There are a number of themed packages for deli products out there that are shaped like a football or a football helmet,” he says.

One way to serve customers hosting a large social gathering is to use packaging that incorporates smaller packages within it. “You can have individual servings within the larger package,” Miller notes. **DB**

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wiches," relates Kangaroo's Kashou.

Turkey and roast beef remain the most popular sandwiches, but both lost market share in the final quarter of 2010 while chicken and barbecue beef and pork gained ground according to sales surveys conducted for the Sandwich Pro.com website from Unilever Food Solutions, Lisle, IL.

"The trends are all very current. Chicken, roast beef and tuna sandwiches won't go away — they're the classics — but the

trends are updated every three months," says Megan Warmouth, project manager of Chicago, IL-based Gordon Hanrahan, Unilever's advertising agency.

The Sandwich Pro website also includes suggestions for sauces that add zing to sandwiches or hamburgers and can be made fairly easily at the deli — such as Buffalo Bleu sauce made by adding crumbled blue cheese and hot sauce into mayonnaise, or an Italian accent made by mixing roasted garlic, basil

and tomatoes into mayonnaise.

Traditional . . . and New Twists

Many traditional tailgate items have an easy connection with the alcohol that frequently flows freely before the game. According to Old Wisconsin's Weber, "We have a nice tie-in with tailgating. The summer sausage, snack bites and snack sticks are all shelf-stable. They can be used to stir a Bloody Mary or on a stick in another adult beverage. If you go to a University of Minnesota, Vikings, Packers or Chicago Bears football game, you're going to find Old Wisconsin there."

Upscaling the meat at the center of the tailgate experience is gaining increased interest. "Artisan products such as the Kobe beef frankfurter are picking up momentum as are the artisan specialty sausages," Snake River's Theiler says. "The key is talking to the consumer about making the tailgate party special. With the economy battering people, the one area they won't cut back on is their food."

There are also opportunities to indulge in healthier versions of traditional favorites. "We have a new Corn-Fusion Crisp," relates Kashou. "It's a blend of corn and wheat, and it's a baked chip that is healthier than fried. You can tie those in with fresh salsas or gua-

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Winging It

BY KRISTINE HANSEN

Consumers love wings. Considered old standbys that lend themselves to modern updates, these perennially popular poultry products have the ability to express global, eclectic appeal with just a few minor tweaks.

For deli operators seeking a new dish that can differentiate their department from the competition, wings offer considerable untapped potential. It's as easy as switching up the dipping sauces and seasonings. Whether the focus is on spicy, salty or sweet, it's easy to achieve a variety of cultural emphases.

The possibilities go well beyond ranch dressing, honey barbecue sauce and Blue cheese dressing, a trio of options that are the traditional go-to dipping sauces for wings. "We think consumers want more than that," says Joe DePippo, president of New Oxford, PA-based Hain Pure Protein Corp., which offers natural organic and antibiotic-free chickens raised on family farms in Pennsylvania's Amish Country. Recently Hain created flavorings to help promote its wings. One of these new introductions is Asian curry marinade. "There's been a tremendous reception to the recipes we've developed," he adds. The company plans to introduce additional flavor profiles as well as additional bread-ing options that will offer a variety of textures.

DePippo says several deli operators are aggressively marketing the idea that wings can reflect any cuisine consumers are interested in. They just need the right dipping sauce. He believes one way to accommodate a substantial number of options is to offer a wings bar that transcends traditional Buffalo wings. Consumers can mix and match the sauces they like best, along with several varieties, including smoked, grilled and/or baked. The hot bar should also include a variety of boneless wing options, which he notes, continue to grow in demand. Wings are expanding beyond their traditional snacking and center-of-the-plate roles. DiPippo cites, as an example, serving them atop of a salad of fresh greens.

According to William Rakow, corporate chef at Menomonee Falls, WI-based Alto-Shaam Inc., which manufactures commercial ovens, merchandisers and display cases, wings are really hot right now. An extensive travel schedule allows him to scope out the cooking and presentation

trends taking hold in specific areas of the country. "You see what's hot, what's not and what's going to stay around for a long time. Wings are always going to be hot. They're always going to be around because they're always a favorite."

Specific flavor profiles may be associated with particular regions of the county but he encourages retailers to be expansive in their choices and include regional favorites even in stores outside the geographic area. To create a taste of "Milwaukee, you could use beer," he suggests, adding, Texas might inspire smoky barbecue flavors, the East Coast a Philly cheese steak cheese sauce and California a cool avocado sauce.

Globally, Mexican, Korean, Chinese and Mediterranean offer culinary inspiration when it comes to revamping dipping sauces, adds Rakow. Hawaiian wings might fold pineapples into the sauce, Thai wings might focus on hot peppers and

Korean wings might be accompanied by Kimchee sauce. "You could have a sauce bar with different kinds of sauces," he explains.

A growing number of consumers ask for a healthy selection using as many all-natural ingredients as possible. "We want to make sure it's the cleanest, shortest possible ingredient legend. We're trying to give the customer a great-tasting, whole-muscle product," explains DePippo. Hain, which retails at Whole Foods Market stores and select regional retailers in the eastern half of the United States, offers antibiotic-free, sustainably farmed and vegetarian-fed chicken.

Smoking wings, instead of frying, is another way to bring a new product that health-conscious eaters will enjoy into the deli. "Use a shot of smoke in a smoker or an oven to give the meat a smoky flavor," advises Rakow. "You're not frying it, though — it's much healthier." **DB**



camole. Right now the deli gets none of the corn chip sales and this is an opportunity." Corn-Fusion Crisps, available in sea salt or chili lime, offer a healthier chip alternative.

"After a pretty exhaustive look at snacks and how people eat them, we decided there's a place for darn good tasting baked snack made from both wheat and corn," explains George Kashou, Kangaroo's vice president.

For local stores, or the local franchise of national or regional stores, much of the merchandising for tailgates can be accomplished outside the store. Pat Ford, owner of Raleigh, NC-based Ford's Food Inc., maker of Bone Suckin' Sauce and related products, offers these recommendations. "I suggest joining the local schools' athletic booster clubs. Local high schools usually have a board at the end of the field and also will put you in the sports programs. We sponsor other non-competing companies' softball teams, fishing teams and soccer teams. This allows us to put up field signs and let the players wear our company logos on their jerseys.

"I suggest handing out samples of the product or small gift certificates to the store to the sponsored team so they can try it and then you have a dozen or so brand ambassadors," he continues. "And don't forget Facebook ads that allow you to market directly to specific schools or teams for low-cost target marketing."

Spicing Up the Party

Condiments and seasonings offer a wide range of products that allow tailgaters to add their own touch to the food. "We like to suggest a variety of offerings," Beano's Harris says. "When you tailgate, it's a food fest and food should be available for an extended time. We suggest using a variety of different condiments to satisfy everyone's taste. Create a condiment table and let your guests be creative. Beano's 8-ounce bottle is the perfect size for tailgating." Beano's many flavors of condiments include Buffalo sandwich sauce, horseradish, honey mustard, deli mustard, wasabi, Southwest, chicken wing sauce, original submarine dressing, and smoky bacon sandwich sauce.

Seasonings allow the deli to offer options that will help take many tailgate foods to the next level. "We blend dry seasonings and the delis use our blends," says John McBride, vice president for sales and marketing at Chef Paul Prudhomme's Magic Seasoning Blends, New Orleans, LA. "It's a series of 21 different flavors and they can use them if they have an initiative of meats, salads or appetizers for tailgating."

The company does cross-merchandising in other areas of the store, including the meat counter, and has had success in the deli with

rotisserie chicken cross-merchandising. The slogan for this cross-promotional program is "Life's too short for dull chicken."

Condiments and seasonings provide a relatively easy way to personalize tailgate food without entailing a complicated purchase. "The beauty of condiments is that everyone can have their own dish their way. Start with a main item and then allow everyone to make it is theirs. This saves money by allowing the family to purchase a larger portion of

the most expensive part of the dish, usually a meat item, and then 'doctor it,'" says Ford.

He believes condiments lend themselves to tailgating cross-promotional merchandising. "I suggest doing a buy-two-and-get-one-free-of-something-else. You can combine this with another brand and then you can share the cost. People like to buy in threes. It's a good number for sales and usually they'll purchase something they haven't tried before to get the free item."

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Viva Italy!

Italian imports are receiving increased marketing support from producers and Italian agencies

BY LISA WHITE





Genuine Taste Has No Imitation *Asiago PDO* *&* *Speck Alto Adige PGI*



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The PDO and PGI symbols were designed under European Law to designate regional foods using geographical indicators. The legislation for these seals was formed in 1992 to ensure that only products that originate within the specified European Union regions are allowed to establish themselves as such.

The laws apply to a wide range of products produced in Italy, including authentic Speck Alto Adige and Asiago. These two products from Northern Italy embody European agricultural production that is characterized by the PGI and PDO quality seals.

To qualify for a PGI or PDO seal, a product must comply with the European Union's standards with regard to the name and description of the product, the definition of the geographical area, the methods of preparation, factors relating to the geographic environment, the inspection bodies, details of how the product is labeled and any legislative requirements that must be met. For more information, recipes and events, please visit www.genuinetaste.org



Campaign financed with aid from the European Union and Italy

The social landscape of Italy is changing. As in the United States, more women in that country are working outside the home. This has been good for Italy's economy, but not for the domestic sales sector of the Italian food industry.

According to Nancy Radke, director of the U.S. information office for the Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano Reggiano and president of Good Food Creative, Syracuse, NY, "The modern Italian woman is faced with the same challenges as American women." In an attempt to meet those challenges, Italian women are not purchasing as much Italian food to prepare at home as they did in the past. American women, however, are turning to imported Italian foods as the base for quick and easy at-home preparation. "As a result, consumption of specialty Italian food is declining in Italy, while U.S. consumption is on the rise," Radke concludes.

The latest U.S. Census Bureau statistics show Italian exports to the U.S. totaled \$26.4 billion in 2009. According to the Italian National Statistical Institute, Italian exports to the U.S. were up 10.5 percent from 2009 to 2010.

The allure of Italian food remains strong,

and U.S. supermarket delis are capitalizing on these products.

Colangelo & Partners in New York City has seen increasing interest in the Italian products it promotes. These include Asiago Fresco cheese, a recent import aged 20 to 40 days, traditional Asiago cheese and speck, a specialty ham originally from Italy's Tyrol region. "Speck has a different flavor than prosciutto, and more retailers are working it into the deli case," says Dario Chiarini, project manager.

Presliced Italian meats, such as prosciutto, have also received increased attention in recent years. This has been attributed to a lack of deli staff well-versed on properly slicing these items. "There's a lot of road still to cover here," says David Biltchik, advisor to the Consorzio del Prosciutto di Parma and chairman of Consultants International Group in Washington, D.C. "Many stores are having difficulty finding associates who know how to slice this product, so it's presliced and packaged in Italy under control of Italian inspectors."

Presliced prosciutto has a relatively short shelf life at 120 days. When compared to domestic processed meats that have more staying power, these products are not as

attractive to supermarket chains looking to limit shrink. Yet presliced U.S. sales in club stores are strong. "Costco customers are willing to pay the premium, and the price is competitive," Biltchik notes.

The increasing availability has brought presliced prosciutto to places it hasn't been before. "Innovative packaging and the success of prosciutto in Costco has been great for this category," says Ruth Lowenberg, senior vice president at Lewis and Neale, a food marketing communications agency in New York City. "The increase in demand for presliced prosciutto also is due to the convenience factor."

On the flip side, sliced-to-order prosciutto has taken off in supermarkets positioning their deli as a gourmet or boutique department with high-end offerings, but they have to find someone skilled in the art of slicing prosciutto di Parma and other Italian cured meats. "If the deli doesn't have a person slicing who knows what they're doing, the customer won't return," Lowenberg adds. "It needs to be done correctly because the customer is paying a lot of money for these products."

Still, the increased availability of presliced imported Italian meats has helped ensure quality and consistency in this category.

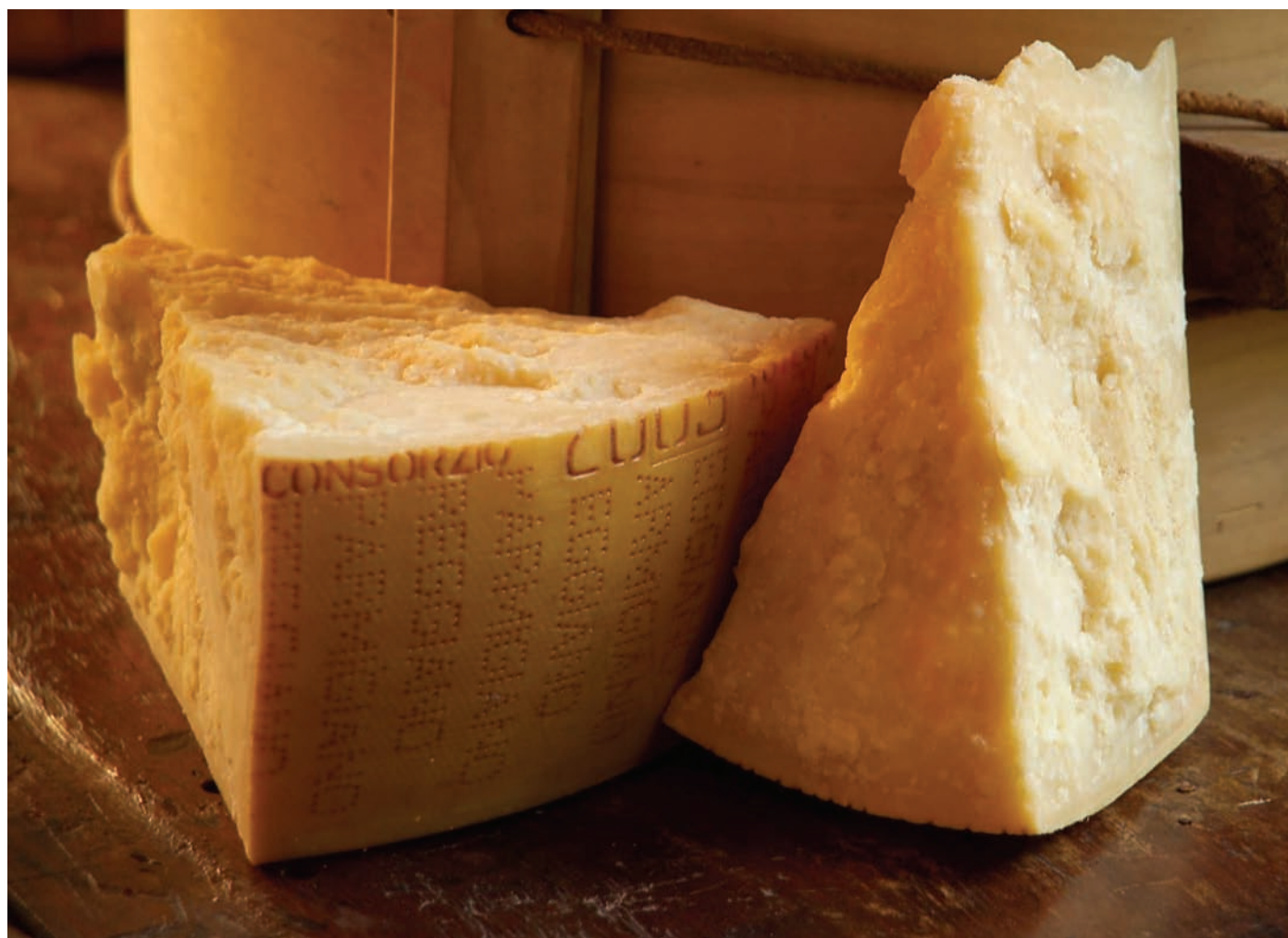


PHOTO COURTESY OF CONSORZIO DEL PARMIGIANO REGGIANO

According to Alberto Minardi, general manager at Principe Foods, based in Los Angeles, CA, "Deli retailers, particularly broad-line departments, are approaching Italian specialty meats with more confidence than ever before. As a result, we're seeing a huge increase in presliced sales from the wall deli."

Italian items such as prosciutto are becoming more the norm as a snack or appetizer, but retailers can further promote their use. "These departments can take a more comprehensive approach, where they incorporate products such as prosciutto to upgrade the deli's sandwich program," Minardi says. "More retailers understand the need to get these products into their profit center, which is an important segment due to margins, action and interaction with customers."

Although overcoming the higher price tag garnered by Italian imports can be a challenge, the more expensive items tend to sell well in the deli during holidays and for occasions.

"Gorgonzola and Taleggio cheeses aren't cheap, but they aren't out of reach for most people," says Margaret Cicogna, a consultant with Elizabeth, NJ-based Atalanta Corp., and who purchases and markets specialty Italian cheeses. "Buffalo mozzarella from Italy is very popular in the U.S." Having a good selection of these products for the fall and winter holidays as well as in the summer months for graduations and wedding showers is key.

"The weak economy has not been as much of a detriment for Italian imports as we thought it would be," Colangelo's Chiarini says. "As the message gets out, these products will [become more profitable] in the U.S. deli."

Increasing Visibility

Italian imports in today's delis are receiving increased attention. Both the European Union and Italian government have provided promotional and financial assistance in order to get these products to the forefront.

"From the trade side, there's always something new to introduce in America," Chiarini explains. "Italian regions convince food producers to come here and sell their products, which has helped a bit. However, the projects can be too sporadic, where there's a buzz about a product that quickly dies off." For a while, promoters of Italian products felt imports were stagnant, but now this category has leveled off.

It's important to have knowledgeable people behind the counter when selling specialty products. "Delis need someone to talk about these products to customers and romance them," Lewis and Neale's Lowenberg advises.

This is especially the case with pricier

items such as prosciutto di Parma, which can cost \$20 a pound or more. "Although it's the most expensive piece of ham behind the counter, if it's sliced correctly, anyone can afford a quarter pound," Minardi explains. "It's important to make customers aware of this because they're ready for more than generic ham."

In marketing these products, the challenge is two-fold. Many Italian producers don't have

the funds to help market their products and some American consumers are reluctant to purchase unfamiliar items, especially those from overseas. "However, little by little, more consumers are becoming curious about these items, and that is a step in the right direction," Chiarini says. "The combination of consumers becoming more intrigued by these products and purveyors promoting their message is a step in the right direction."

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The Legends from Europe

BY JAN FIALKOW

A major 3-year advertising promotion called *Legends from Europe* began in February of this year and will run until February 2014. Its objective is to raise awareness in the U.S. about high-quality PDO — protected designation of origin — products from Italy. The promotion features two hams — prosciutto di Parma and prosciutto di San Daniele — and three cheeses — Parmigiano Reggiano, Grana Padano and Montasio. Montasio, from the Friuli region, is the least well known in the United States.

According to Ruth Lowenberg, senior vice president, Lewis & Neale, New York, NY, “These five legends epitomize the high quality of premium European products that depend on history, terroir, regionality and core production principles for their well-deserved success in the marketplace.”

In this promotion, producers that

might ordinarily be conceived as competitive joined together and went to the European Union for funding. “Its unity is its strength,” she adds.

There are five aspects of the promotion. The first is retail — reaching out to supermarkets and specialty stores. Included are tasting programs that prove “the true meaning of quality is getting your money’s worth,” Lowenberg says. There will also be training for deli managers and handlers that also involves tasting. Store personnel will be able to taste both hams and the three cheeses side by side. “These will help them learn the similarities and the differences. Anyone who has to answer questions from consumers should be able to explain the differences.”

The second aspect will be training in culinary schools so young chefs will gain familiarity with the products. The third

aspect, an advertising program geared to the trade, will keep these products in front of the key people.

The fourth aspect involves media. A website, www.legendsfromeurope.com, will let people know where the tastings are being held and the training taking place. There will also be traditional media events such as dinners showcasing the products.

In the fifth aspect, continues Lowenberg, “The five legends will be teaming up with two wonderful TV chefs, Maryann Esposito of *Ciao Italia* on the East Coast and Joanne Weir of *Joanne Weir’s Cooking Class* on the West Coast. They’re underwriting their [PBS] shows for three years and will be doing tours with both of them. They’ll also be involved with social media.”

Anyone who would like to participate in the promotion can find details and contacts on the website. **DB**

As marketers of these products, supermarket delis need to be aware of merchandising support and marketing dollars that are available. “I’m continually surprised when I reach out to a store and don’t get a response,” Colangelo’s Chiarini says. “I provide free marketing support. For those delis just getting acclimated to the category, they need to jump on these opportunities as a basic starting point.”

The Italian Trade Commission provides literature and other assistance to help get Italian imports on Americans’ radar. “The Italian Trade Commission has done a great job promoting these items in the U.S., and sales have increased as a result,” Atalanta’s Cicogna says. “There have been events in New York, California and Texas.”

However, the Italian Trade Commission has a number of requirements, including documentation of marketing expenses and justifying spending, to ensure funds are well spent. “There’s a lot of money available through European government programs,” says Good Food’s Radke. “What’s hard for stores to adapt to is that the money doesn’t come to them to do with as they wish.”

“It has to do with the nature of how these marketing programs are written,” she continues. “For supermarkets to access these funds, they’re required to offer a higher

degree of accountability than they may have been used to in the past.”

Retailers are considered a partner with the Italian agencies and are expected to invest their resources wisely. This includes holding regular product demonstrations with tastings that are well documented.

Funds are still available for promotional programs, but are not as flush as they have been in the past. “There has been a long period of time where the euro has not favored exports,” Radke says. “There also are a lot of cost factors on the European side that have been more impactful for PDO products.”

PDO designations were established by the European Union in order to assure consumers that the products they consume are produced in the region of reference, with its specific soil and climate conditions that affect the quality of the product. Because producers can’t source ingredients from other areas, they have to pass along costs for items made in specific areas. Retailers can no longer absorb these costs, so prices of imports have risen.

“Retailers continue to struggle with this,” Radke continues. “We’re at a point where prices are high for these products, but they will eventually go down. It’s all about supply and demand.”

What has helped is the collaborative effort of those selling and marketing Italy’s

meats and cheeses, such as prosciutto and Parmigiano-Reggiano. As the result of a recent combined effort, various consortiums, along with the European Union, will conduct fairly extensive marketing and tastings at stores around the country. [EDITOR’S NOTE: See *The Legends from Europe* sidebar above.]

“This is interesting, because it has some competitors working together,” according to Consultants International’s Biltchik. “The reason being is that, in terms of marketing in a foreign country, all of the producers are in the same boat and want to achieve the same goal.” That is, convincing consumers that Italian imports are worth paying extra money.

Some say these objectives will be difficult to reach due to confusion at the store level. “Because the price of our products is considerably higher than domestic items, marketing becomes very important,” Biltchik continues. “We need to make retailers understand the value and increased sales potential as well as the margins. People need to understand that these are authentic products and are worth more.”

This is why importers of Italian products emphasize tastings at the store level, in addition to educating store personnel. “Deli departments have an enormous responsibility to help consumers understand what these products are about,” Biltchik notes. **DB**

Mexican Food Mania

A variety of trends keep this category's sales strong

BY LISA WHITE

It's not a surprise that Mexican meals have become mainstream — they offer a variety of taste profiles, are easy to prepare and offer consumers value.

U.S. Mexican food retail sales exceed \$5 billion annually, according to Packaged Facts, a New York City-based research firm. Supermarket delis have capitalized on the popularity of these items by incorporating a broadening selection in the product mix.

Because Mexican food continues to be the most popular ethnic food segment in the country — it has a 42 percent share of ethnic food sales, according to Datamonitor, a provider of global business information with offices around the world — this is a very smart move.

The growing population of Hispanics, who currently comprise 10 percent of the U.S. population, ensures that this food segment will continue to grow in the future.

Supermarket delis need to be aware of a number of notable trends in this category. In the past, displaying a couple of Mexican items in the deli would suffice, but that's no longer the case. To bring more attention to the category and become a destination for these sought-after products, it's key to offer a broad selection of Mexican items.

"The must-have items for Mexican food delis are salsas, rice, beans and marinated meats," says Jorge Aguilar, deli sales manager at Haliburton International Foods, based in Ontario, CA. "What's really hot right now is having a variety of fresh salsas, meat marinades such as carne asada and chicken tinga, and, of course, side dishes such as rice, beans, pasta salad and roasted vegetables."

In addition to a variety of salsas and cooking sauces, Haliburton offers side dishes using rice, pasta and fire-roasted vegetable blends, such as Elote Mexican corn (corn on the cob), roasted edamame and Oaxaca rice. The company's new fire-grilled shrimp is available as an individual item or pre-packaged with a vegetable blend.

Because popular items such as burritos and chimichangas are easily transportable,



PHOTO COURTESY OF MISSION FOODS

delis should be sure to address different day parts. "Breakfast burritos are not just for breakfast anymore," says John McCarthy, category manager at Reser's Fine Foods, headquartered in Beaverton, OR. "Mexican staples, such as burritos, enchiladas, quesadillas and taquitos for kids, lend to a variety of flavor options. Flan and other desserts provide added cross-merchandising and meal-deal opportunities."

Healthy Has It

Although Mexican food has not traditionally been considered a healthy option, the

ingredients that comprise many of the products can be considered better-for-you food. For example, it would be difficult to find a sandwich program today that doesn't incorporate wraps utilizing tortillas. "In this regard, the Mexican category has become very mainstream," says Robin Tobor, director of marketing for Mission Foods, based in Irving, TX. "Supermarket chains now offer wrap sandwiches along with pinwheel party trays."

Mission will be introducing deli wraps for shelves and knee-knocker areas in delis this fall. Its website now includes recipes that are simple for delis to execute. According to

Tobor, "These are meant to inspire deli operators and provide ideas on what they can do with our products." Although wraps are not traditional Mexican items, consumers tend to categorize them as such. "There's a growing trend toward merchandising wraps and better-for-you tortillas in the delis," says Joe Ketchum, vice president of sales and marketing at Olé Mexican Foods, headquartered in Norcross, GA. The company's Olé Xtreme Wellness line of wraps is new this year to the

knee-knocker shelves.

True Blue Authentic

With the country's growing Hispanic population and increased mainstream interest in Mexican foods, authenticity has become a differentiating factor. "Mexican foods have increased in popularity with the success of ethnic food trends that feature authentic flavors and quality ingredients," says Kristyn Lawson, vice president of sales



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at Los Angeles, CA-based Yucatan Foods, which recently introduced spicy guacamole made with a blend of garlic and peppers, and ranch guacamole. Its guacamole kit geared for in-store guacamole programs includes chunky avocado pulp and halves for behind the service case glass.

Where Mexican cheeses and sausage have traditionally been sold packaged in the dairy and meat cases, some retailers are attempting to move them to the deli where they're selling from bulk packages. "This is likely due to the fact that 82 percent of the cheese sold in supermarkets in Mexico is sold in the deli," Ketchum says.

According to Johanna Hulme, marketing manager at City of Industry, CA-based Pociño Foods Co., "Ham, head cheese and pastрами are staple Mexican deli items. One of the things Hispanic markets excel at is providing various cuts of meat and pre-seasoned items. The best way to broaden a deli's demographic is to expose customers to new foods, experiences and flavors. Fortunately, Hispanic foods are not a mystery."

Retailers can differentiate their delis by providing authentic prepared foods that are difficult to prepare at home. "Carnitas, which is Mexican-style roasted pork, and Mexican meatballs are typically dishes that are very labor intensive to prepare. By offering pre-prepared items, we can save Hispanic consumers time in the kitchen, while providing the taste they grew up with," Hulme adds.

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The Fresher the Better

Hispanic consumers, especially first and second generation, are more apt to prepare foods from scratch, which is why offering fresh product is key in a Mexican food display. "What you see more in the supermarket delis are Hispanic dairy products, such as cheese and creams, in addition to meats that are sold by the pound," says Felix Alejandro Fajardo, marketing manager at Rizo Lopez Foods, located in Riverbank, CA. "Hispanics look for freshness on these types of products."

Another fresh product gaining popularity in delis is pre-stirred yogurt, which is eaten with fruit. "Hispanics tend toward more fresh items in the deli than in the dairy department," notes Cindy Jensen, director of sales and marketing at Queso Campesino, headquartered in Denver, CO. The company recently partnered with a large Mexican cheese company and will be expanding its line and exporting to Mexico.

Offering bulk Mexican cheese behind the counter for cut-to-order programs appeals to those consumers who typically purchase these items at Mexican supermarkets. "Usually in smaller Mexican markets, these cheeses are put in the counter. Kroger has begun offering Mexican cheeses in the deli, and it is doing very well," Jensen explains.

A Value Proposition

With Mexican foods, consumers have come to expect value, especially in products targeted to Hispanic consumers. "Hispanic consumers are price savvy and price conscious, so they will go for value first, with flavor a close second," Pocino's Hulme says. "Value is the driving force in this segment."

This is why it's important to provide specials, meal deals and couponing whenever possible. Delis that keep a close eye on emerging trends and provide the proper selections of products can increase profits and register rings. "There's interest and desire for new and different Mexican products in the deli. And if these items taste wonderful, they will be accepted," claims Reser's McCarthy.

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Ready for the Holidays?

Creating a buzz for the holiday season is crucial to successful sales in the deli

BY LISA WHITE

Is your deli department a destination for the holidays? If the answer is no, you may be missing out on a profitable opportunity. "Approximately 70 percent of Americans say that food is the most important aspect of the holidays," says John McCarthy, senior retail marketing manager at Reser's Fine Foods, Beaverton, OR.

This has never been truer than during the difficult economy, when people are re-evaluating their entertaining budgets. "With the economy the way it is, a lot more people are entertaining at home to cut costs," notes Dave Brandow, director of sales and marketing at Piller's Sausages & Deli, Waterloo, ON, Canada.

By kicking off unique items for the holidays, retailers can expand their everyday offerings. "This is the perfect opportunity for retailers to introduce what they have to offer, so that the customer will make those purchases all year long," according to Giuliana Pozzuto, head of marketing for George E. DeLallo Co., Jeanette, PA. "The push isn't just for one-time purchases but for customer loyalty and trust in your deli."

For delis that offer the appropriate products, get the word out early and merchandise items effectively, the holidays can be a cash cow. Consumers looking to impress guests are less likely to watch their holiday spending as closely as they do during the rest of the year. "People are more willing to splurge during the holidays and also to try something new," says Camille Collins Black, marketing director at Les Trois Petite Cochons, Brooklyn, NY.

Fall and winter holiday entertaining is seasonal and offers many opportunities besides the actual date of the holidays. "What we've found is there are different venues and times for entertaining," says Jim Daskaleas, vice president of product development at Walker's Food Products Co., North Kansas City, MO. "We're such a split-up society, so lots of families opt for celebrating the holidays at different times and not just





around Thanksgiving and Christmas.”

Determining when to begin marketing holiday offerings often depends on geography. “In an online poll, people in Philadelphia said they plan their meals more than a month in advance,” Reser’s McCarthy explains. “By contrast, 25 percent of Bostonians said they need only one to three hours to shop and plan holiday meals.” Regions also differ in terms of the type of holiday food they prefer. Those on the West Coast are less traditional and formal compared to people living on the East Coast and Midwest, he adds.

Successful holiday merchandising starts with a big kickoff. It’s important to allow enough lead-time to make customers aware the deli is the place for holiday and entertaining items. “Things such as festive counter decorations and signage help get the message out,” Piller’s Brandow says, adding that retailers need to communicate for the Christmas holidays right after Thanksgiving.

Creating a diverse program that allows consumers to mix and match items can help set a department apart from its competitors. “Delis need to start marketing these programs in early November or sooner,” notes McCarthy. “Store signage is the best way to utilize this, and circular ads should include these programs.”

Stores can also distribute leaflets and flyers a couple of weeks before the holiday. By displaying multiple products tied to a seasonal theme, retailers can develop logical tie-ins that get consumers in the holiday shopping mode.

“For example, our cocktail bread is frequently displayed along with dips, cheeses,

hummus and deli meats,” says Tom McGlade, president and CEO of Chicago, IL-based Rubschlager Baking Corp. “This allows the consumer to consider multiple types of holiday appetizer combinations. Since Rubschlager is usually displayed in the in-store deli department, it makes it easy to effectively merchandise these items together.”

Many retailers have turned to social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, in addition to email blasts, to get customers

geared up for the holiday season. “This is different than what’s been done in the past with brochures, but social media can be easily directed to the appropriate people,” according to Brandow.

If, for example, the deli offers a turnkey program with holiday meals, it’s important to communicate this early on. “With these programs, customers can order in advance. It’s quick and convenient,” McCarthy says.

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road map to holiday items ahead of time, so they know where to find them. "Dedicated spaces help drive consumers to these spots," says Mary Caldwell, marketing director at FoodMatch, New York, NY. "Holiday dis-

plays cannot be located within the normal schematic, or these items will get lost."

Those shopping for the holidays are typically frazzled and hurried, so directing them to holiday displays utilizing clear, concise signage is key. It's also a good idea to provide a number of grab-and-go items for those who are especially rushed. "The holidays are a crazy time of year for everyone, so anything that can make life a little simpler will attract the consumer," notes Patty Echeverria, marketing manager at Castella Imports, Hauppauge, NY.

Unlike other departments, supermarket delis have the advantage of face-to-face contact. A motivated and knowledgeable staff can go a long way to creating loyal customers. "Our products are carriers for cheese and other toppings, so it is helpful if deli staff make serving suggestions to their customers," says Michael Thompson, president at Hingham, MA-based Venus Wafers.

Appropriate Products

Offering the appropriate products, along with unique items, can help set delis apart from their competitors. Innovative snacks, appetizers and hors d'oeuvres can create a standout, memorable display. "A combination

of fresh Mozzarella wrapped in prosciutto on a toothpick is a gourmet hors d'oeuvre for holiday parties," Echeverria says. "Stuffed cherry peppers or an olive and piece of Feta cheese are other options." Among Castella's offerings are fresh Mozzarella, marinated artichoke hearts, marinated olives, bruschetta, pesto, Feta cheese, stuffed grape leaves, antipasto salads, olive oils, pepperoncini, giardiniera and spices.

Any foods that are easy to serve, colorful, unique and/or exotic can be slated for holiday entertaining. "Colorful salads, deli meat platters, different varieties of olives and pâté are popular holiday options," says Laurie Cummins, president of Alexian Pâtés & Specialty Meats, Neptune, NJ. The company provides different varieties of all-natural meat and vegetable pâtés for both the service deli and self-serve appetizer departments, in addition to Eastern European-style smoked sausage and single-muscle smoked meats.

DeLallo recently introduced Bruschetta Cups in five varieties, including olive artichoke and mufaletta; toasted bruschetta crisps perfect for an array of toppings to make tasty antipasti; a number of seasonal olive medleys available only during the holidays; and an assortment of sweet-and-spicy

Re-invent holiday hors d'oeuvres

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Spotlighting Ham

Ready-to-serve or heat-and-serve hams are the centerpiece of many holiday tables. Retailers can consider increasing the promotion of artisan and other specialty hams by including them in promotional flyers and advertisements and by displaying point-of-sale materials. Delis should also be leveraging social media marketing as well as placing hams in a prominent location in the deli case.

According to Robin Sampson, director of operations at Oskaloosa, IA-based Vande Rose Farms, "Because the holidays are special times, consumers are looking for ways to make their family gatherings and holiday celebrations a more memorable experience. Artisan deli ham is perfect for company gatherings and special celebrations, not to mention an easy and delicious solution for time-crunched shoppers." Vande Rose offers a broad portfolio of all-natural, antibiotic-free Duroc pork products, including hand-crafted artisan smoked bacon and hams.

Specialty hams often have a great farm-to-table story to tell, and often those stories are best told by the companies that know their own products inside out. "Retailers shouldn't be afraid to reach out to suppliers for key messages, staff training tips and point-of-sale materials such as shelf talkers, brochures and flyers to help promote the products. Recipes and serving ideas — especially holiday — are always good ideas," Sampson continues. "Everyone loves an opportunity to taste the product, so be sure your team is actively offering customers opportunities to try a flavorful slice."

Vande Rose offers brown sugar-cured artisan hams — a recipe developed by chef and food author Bruce Aidells — made from all-natural, antibiotic-free Duroc pork. "Duroc hogs are a heritage breed



and produce meat well-known for its juiciness and flavor," Sampson explains.

To cure the ham, trained artisans locate the main artery of the ham, by hand, and infuse a unique cure of salt, brown sugar and curing salts from a sole needle, arterially curing the ham from the inside out, ensuring even distribution. After curing, the hams are boned and placed in individual flat screens to smoke over applewood, creating an old-fashioned brown sugar flavor.

"We have a point-of-sale card on the artisan ham we are happy to provide our customers, as well as fact sheets on the company, our products and the artisan process that are geared for employee training," Sampson adds.

It's important to effectively cross merchandise. "Departments tend to act as islands, but retailers want customers to shop the whole store," says Louis Eni, president and CEO of Dietz & Watson, Philadelphia, PA. "This time of year is

about entertaining with friends and family before the main meal gets underway."

The deli has become a destination for party planning, and the down economy offers retailers an opportunity to capitalize on consumers' need for value coupled with their desire for quality. "What better place to shop for parties than in the deli?" Eni asks. "In the past, a lot of parties would be catered, but that's no longer the case."

With families returning to more traditional foods for the holidays and entertaining, party trays have become more popular. "Over the past four to five years, we've added a lot of new items geared for party trays," Eni explains. "It's no longer just meat, but also gourmet deli cheeses such as flavored Cheddars and non-traditional items that have become more popular." Options such as buffalo wing-flavored Cheddar, toasted onion Cheddar and other unique cheeses, alongside American, Swiss and Provolone, can add variety and depth to deli trays. **DB**

peppers for olive bars. "Each of these items focuses in on the grab-and-go consumer who is looking for specialty or gourmet items that take little to no time to prepare, but visually, have the presence of something more dynamic, something that took more preparation," DeLallo's Pozzuto says.

Delis that go the extra mile by putting together prepackaged platters, such as antipasto with meats, cheeses and olives, can

provide added visibility to holiday displays. "The department can put a theme behind it," Caldwell says. FoodMatch assists retailers in creating product profiles of olives for themes or holiday cross-merchandising displays.

The more innovative a product or display, the better — especially during the holiday season. For example, Piller's Sausages puts together a shelf-stable snowman salami and provides information on creating salami

flower cups that can hold olives or melted Brie cheese, which garners additional customer attention. "We offer presliced smoked prosciutto that is sliced very thin and interleaved," Brandow adds. "Customers can take one slice and roll it into a cup for containing melon balls."

Expanding specialty offerings during the holidays provides customers with a greater selection and is another factor in differentia-

tion. "It makes sense for delis to carry 10 of our bulk pâté and mousses as well as traditional Parisian-style ham, which are popular for the holidays," says Collins Black of Les Trois Petite Cochons.

While departments can get more creative with unique appetizers and seasonal items for the holidays, when it comes to meals, it's best to stay traditional. According to Walker's Daskaleas, "We're noticing a back-to-basics trend for holiday meal items. We

recommend retailers stick with mashed potatoes and gravy, along with ambrosia and cranberry salads. Keep it simple and bundle as much as possible."

It's also important to capitalize on how items provide value when compared to the labor and time scratch preparation requires. "There is a very tight window for holiday marketing and promotions," Daskaleas adds. "Stores need to convey the message of convenience and value in supermarket holiday



meals, while also maintaining the traditions at the table."

Effective Merchandising

The deli should be considered a focal point for effective holiday marketing. "Creative cross-merchandising displays, such as salami with cheeses, show people how to provide hors d'oeuvres that look difficult but are simple to make," Piller's Brandow says.

Other ideas include cross-merchandising olives, cheese and bread or crackers, and bread with salads and bruschetta toppings. Pairing cheese with deli meats, pasta with pestos, peppers with sausages also can give holiday sales a boost.

One-stop shopping sections should be conveniently located and laid out buffet-style to catch customers' attention. "When cross-promoting, location is key. Bags or boxes need to be right by the display for convenient transport," Reser's McCarthy says. "Complementary items, such as bread, desserts and other tie-ins, should be nearby, even if these products are not part of the merchandising program."

Castella has created a sign for the olive bar that invites consumers to *Gather, Share and Savor* by grouping a select few olives and salads that complement a holiday hors d'oeuvre assortment. "Creating an invitation to an experience, rather than just suggested items to purchase, is important," Echeverria advises.

"We find olive and antipasti sales really see an increase when merchandised alongside specialty cheeses and meats, because they give the everyday consumer pairing and presentation ideas for items they may already buy," DeLallo's Pozzuto notes. "Many times, customers will have questions and need ideas. This is only one reason why we created our olive and antipasti bar merchandising program and our Olive & Antipasti Deli

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University." DeLallo's new PPS, Peel Place Sell is an olive and antipasti program geared for those with limited deli space.

One way to impress consumers with the department's offerings is to have someone dressed in full, white-glove butler attire passing hors d'oeuvres made from both upscale and traditional deli items. This unexpected presentation can inspire consumers to rethink their holiday menus.

Display shippers are another effective way to merchandise holiday offerings. Essentially, they can expand shelf space to accommodate the additional seasonal demand.

Product demos or over-the-counter sampling is essential for bringing new products, or products especially suited for entertaining, to the attention of shoppers. "The more proactive a store is in doing these activities, the more likely it will become a go-to source of ideas and solutions," relates Alexian's Cummins. "This is an excellent opportunity for the deli staff to be trained to make pairing suggestions to the shoppers as they prepare their order." Alexian provides a wide range of pâté holiday promotions, including sampling programs, price promotions and circular advertisements.

The holidays are a time for additional support materials, channeled signage and store-personnel training on the products geared for this time period. Additional information, including brochures or recipes customers can take with them, is especially important because of all the unique or unfamiliar products geared toward holiday entertaining.

Les Trois Petite Cochons offers literature on consumer applications and recipe cards. "It's important to make it as easy as possible. Customers shouldn't have to think about how they will utilize the products," Black concludes.

DB

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Soup Can Boost Sales

Soup offers consumers a delicious, nutritious, low-cost way to feed the family

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Soup has been on the menu ever since the discovery of leakproof containers some 9,000 years ago. In 1949, Louis P. De Gouy, chef at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel and founder of the now defunct *Gourmet Magazine*, sang the praises of soup in *The Soup Book*, writing, "Good soup is one of the prime ingredients of good living. For soup can do more to lift the spirits and stimulate the appetite than any other one dish." Soup continues to soothe consumers, especially in these tough economic times.

According to Mary Vaccaro, senior marketing manager for Sandridge Food Corporation, Medina, OH. "The entire fresh soup category — soups, stews and chilis — has undergone strong growth. We've enjoyed double-digit growth in both the bulk and retail fresh soup arenas across the board. Fresh soup represents a really good value for the money and offers a convenient meal solution that we believe is driving this positive trend. The economic recession played a key role in this growth by reminding consumers of the value of soup."

Soup sales are forecast to grow 12 percent between 2010 and 2015, according to the Mintel International Group. Its *Soup — U.S.* report, published in January 2011, states this moderate rate of growth assumes marketers will capitalize on trends such as consumers' desire for exciting new flavors.

Offering Bolder Flavors

There's a strong demand for soups with ethnic flavors, says Levon Kurkjian, vice president of marketing for Kettle Cuisine, Chelsea, MA. "We've seen an increased interest in Indian, Southeast Asian and Latin/South American cuisines. As a result, we've developed soups such as Indian lentil stew, spicy Asian beef soup and black bean soup."

Patrick Gabrish, director of foodservice sales for Pacific Natural Foods, Tualatin, OR, sees an expansion of flavor profiles. "In addition to classics such as creamy butternut squash soup and creamy roasted red pepper and tomato soup, some of our best-sellers



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include poblano pepper and corn soup and cashew carrot ginger soup.”

Retailers have noticed this trend and spiced up their offerings. For example, the Cincinnati, OH-based Kroger Co., with over 3,600-stores nationwide, offers flavors such as Thai-style coconut curry chicken soup, chicken tortilla soup with lime and cilantro, and artichoke Asiago bisque as part of its branded Private Selection Fresh Soups in the deli. The soups are sold in ready-to-eat, 10- to 11-ounce, single-serve bowls, 22- to 24-ounce family-style tubs, and bulk from hot soup stations.

In the future, says Sandridge's Vaccaro, “We see the need to develop more fresh soup flavors to cater to the Food Network generation who is very savvy and demands more unique and ethnic flavor offerings. This generation is fluent in the cuisines of the world, and fresh soup can be an ever-changing canvas to cater to these young foodies.”

Tradition Served with a Twist

In a highly competitive industry, retail deli operators can look to restaurants for inspiration on new soup varieties to add to their rotations, says Kevin Matier, vice president, sales and customer insights for North America foodservice at Campbell North America, based in Camden, NJ. “Specific to flavor trends, our research tells us consumers want

to explore soups beyond those typically available on grocery store shelves — products that are a twist on the familiar — rather than venturing into completely new territory. A great example where we've seen growth is tomato soup with a twist such as a tomato basil or bisque. In fact, the presence of tomato soups on menus has increased 75 percent in the past year.”

Tomato basil bisque, in addition to other traditional favorites such as chicken noodle and clam chowder, is one of the best-selling soup varieties at Bristol Farms, a 12-store chain based in Carson, CA. The merchandising twist on the chain's version is that it's homemade from fresh ingredients — advertised as vine-ripened tomatoes, onions, basil, cream and an all-natural vegetable stock.

Traditional, or comfort-food soups, still have a place at the table, however. Kettle Cuisine's Kurkjian says, “In spite of a growing number of consumers who are interested in healthier soups, indulgences such as our loaded potato soup are very popular and still climbing up the sales charts.”

Better-for-You Soups

Many consumers are looking for soups to satisfy needs such as vegetarian, gluten-free and low-fat. Martin's Food Markets, a Richmond, VA-based chain operated by Giant-Carlisle and owned by Royal Ahold, has cap-



italized on this trend by offering 10 icon-identified deli soups under its Ukrop's Kitchen brand. For example, broccoli and cheddar is signed VG for vegetarian, beef chili is GF for gluten-free, and chicken noodle is LF for low-fat.

Gluten-free soups have risen in popularity recently, notes Kurkjian. “Eighteen of our 60 soups are certified gluten-free. These are mainly sold refrigerated because there's a risk of contamination with gluten-containing ingredients such as croutons on the salad bar when soup is sold hot in a kettle nearby.”

Sodium ranks near the top of the list of what consumers know they should be eating less of, according to the *Soup – U.S.* report, and this has spurred soup manufacturer action in product development.

According to Vaccaro, “Sodium reduction is on the top of consumers' minds and hence in the forefront of new product development for us. So much so we introduced our first six reduced sodium soups at the National Restaurant Association and International-Deli-Dairy-Bakery shows this year. These soups are full flavor and in many cases offer a 50 percent sodium reduction. Our reduced sodium line has created tremendous excitement for us and for retailers.”

Broth- and Cream-Based Soups

While there are no trends, per se, regarding consumer demand for cream- versus broth-based soups, says Carl Worthington, vice president of national accounts for Classic Foods, Fort Worth, TX, “We do see some requests for healthier versions.”

“Years ago, chefs used lots of cream, while today many are substituting milk or even puréed vegetables,” explains Debra Kaminski, director of foodservice marketing for Pacific Natural Foods.

The bigger trend — and marketing opportunity — is when to sell cream- versus broth-



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based soups. According to Vaccaro, “Seasonality has always been a defining factor. During cooler months, a selection of comforting, cream-based soups could be offered and merchandised with such items as bread bowls to make a great one-dish meal. Holiday favorites such as our butternut squash bisque and pumpkin and roasted apple soup would be seasonally appropriate and perfect for that time of year. Deli operators can stir up more soup sales during warmer months with a lineup of lighter broth-based soups. Following the trend, this spring/summer we introduced a gazpacho soup that really speaks to freshness, flavor and health. Right now we’re only offering this in bulk but have plans on launching this at retail.”

Variety, Variety, Variety

The best way to sop up every drop of soup sales is to offer enough variety. Bristol Farms, for example, sells over 15 varieties of soups each month and boasts a collection of over 70 soups that rotate in and out through the year. Similarly, at Giant Eagle, a 222-store chain based in O’Hara Township, PA, everyday soups such as chicken noodle, Italian-style wedding and Timberline chili, are on the menu along with a rotation of eight seasonal soups that include Boston clam chowder, stuffed green pepper soup, and cheesy chicken tortilla soup.

According to Bob Sewall, executive vice president of sales and marketing for Blount Fine Foods, Fall River, MA, “People who eat

soup eat a lot of soup. Therefore, in order to have a successful soup program, you need to offer variety.”

Mainstay or core varieties of soups such as tomato basil, chicken tortilla and clam chowder are essential, advises Doug Johnson, vice president of sales and marketing for Harry’s Fresh Foods Portland, OR. “Then supplement these to address the needs of various consumer segments such as those looking for organic and vegetarian options in the kettle and pre-packaged.”

Hot vs. Cold

Many deli operators now sell both hot soup and cold or refrigerated soups. The reason, says Sewall, “is they represent two different eating occasions. Customers who buy hot soup will usually eat it immediately or that day, while those who buy cold soup tend to eat it up to a day or two later or take it for a brown-bag lunch the next day.”

“More retailers are offering fresh soups in both hot and cold formats because consumers demand it,” says Sandridge’s Vaccaro. “The shelf space is expanding, not just in the grab-and-go but in the prepared-foods sections of stores. Retailers are putting wells and kettles in to cater to consumers picking up their lunch for the day or grabbing dinner for the evening.”

Sales of refrigerated pre-packaged soups are on the rise, gaining 11.2 percent in dollar sales during the 52-weeks ending May 15, 2011, according to data provided by Sympho-

nyIRI Group, a Chicago, IL-based market research firm.

Consumer interest in this category has led Blount to launch its first national fresh-cup campaign for soup at retail. The 16-ounce, 5-sided, inlay printed cups feature six soups, including lemon chicken and orzo soup and organic tomato bisque under the Panera brand and three soups, including shrimp and roasted corn chowder, under the Legal Sea Foods brand. “Each soup package is a different color so they can be merchandised as a group and consumers can easily find their favorite,” Sewall explains.

Flavors to be launched in the fall include Maryland crab soup in the Legal line and quinoa chili and beef chili to the Panera line.

Meal Deals

Soup is most often eaten as solo meal, according to *Soup – U.S.* However, while family meals are cited less frequently, the report says these may represent a volume-building opportunity if marketers and retailers are able to position soup as a recipe ingredient or meal component.

Vaccaro recommends merchandising soup as a sauce and promoting it with fresh pasta. “Many fresh soups, such as our tomato basil bisque and lobster bisque, can serve as gourmet-ready sauces over ravioli and fresh pastas. The consumer will have a solution for a quick, restaurant-quality dinner at home, for a fraction of the price. Signs that read *Dinner in minutes, just heat and enjoy* would communicate this convenience and engage the shopper.”

Meal deals are an effective way to merchandise soup, notes Sewall. “Deli operators can bundle together, for example, a rotisserie chicken with chicken noodle soup or soup with a salad or a bread bowl for one price. Meal deals have become a cost-effective way to feed the family.”

Dierbergs Markets, a 23-store chain based in St. Louis, MO, offers a meal deal in the form of its Pick Two Combo Box Lunches. Customers can choose any two from an offering of soup, small entrée salad and half sandwich for \$9.99. The meal comes with chips and a dessert. The soups, which are packaged in 8-ounce heat-and-serve containers, include selections such as twice baked potato, vegetable steak and chili.

Beyond this, suggests Vaccaro, “There are numerous possibilities for merchandising fresh soup including a multitude of cross-merchandising opportunities. Soups can be bundled with logical accompaniments and placed throughout the store — near the register for impulse sales or in the produce section next to the bagged salads to encourage consumers to think of soup and salad.” **DB**

Regional Foods Generate Profit

Honing in on regional tastes can increase register ring

BY BOB JOHNSON

The deli has become a place to gather together regional favorite foods from throughout the country. There are, to be sure, still distinct regional tastes. New Englanders like their cheese sharp, and Westerners like theirs smooth. Consumers in different regions want potato salad with more or less vinegar, onions or mustard, and they even differ on whether to include the potato skin. People on the coasts think barbecue means grilling, while to Midwesterners and Southerners it refers to a long, slow cooking process.

While regional differences endure, the deli offers a culinary trip and an opportunity to experience someone else's favorite flavors.

"The deli case de-regionalizes tastes," says Louis Eni, CEO of Dietz & Watson, Inc., Philadelphia, PA. "We have, over the last few years, come out with products based on regional tastes such as Cajun turkey breast, Buffalo chicken breast and Southern fried chicken breast. The deli takes these regional flavors and nationalizes them. You can travel the country without leaving the deli."

Some regional favorites have already become successful in virtually every market in the country. "Sante Fe turkey breast, for example, has been a national favorite anywhere we've put it," Eni adds. "We have an array of seasoned or hot cheeses and they tend to sell in most markets. People from regions that like spicier foods will buy them in larger quantities than people from the Midwest, but they still sell pretty much everywhere."

The Meat of the Matter

Barbecue is one of the most highly regional foods offered in the deli; people from different areas of the country have very particular ideas about which meat should be cooked and how.

"Barbecue probably is the most notorious for regional tastes differences," explains Dan Zakri, manager of new product development at Sandridge Food Corporation, Medina, OH. "Carolina barbecue features more of a vinegar-based sauce. Memphis barbecue focuses on the potent flavors of the rub blend on the protein. St. Louis style or Midwest style is more of a heavy barbecue sauce that has a tomato based flavor. Memphis and Texas style rely on the slow-cooked smoked flavor. Texas doesn't even use barbecue sauce on their proteins and the flavor mostly comes from the seasoning rub and the smoke."

But we're witnessing efforts to take some of these traditional regional favorites national. "The flavors we do in Kansas City are already being accepted farther from the Midwest," notes Terry Hyer, part owner of Zarda Bar-B-Q and Sauce, Blue Springs, MO.

When people on the coasts say barbecue, they're talking a language that would make no sense in the South, Midwest or Texas. "On the West Coast and the East Coast, barbecue means grilled. In the Midwest, Texas and the South, it means a hardwood smoking process that takes six or seven hours in pits, or 18 to 20 hours for brisket.



You're using hickory wood to smoke the meat," Hyer adds.

But many of these distinctions are already being blurred as regional favorites from one area show up on menus in other areas. "Kansas City was a beef town. You would never have pulled pork — that didn't exist in Kansas City. I have two restaurants in Kansas City we do catering for, and now they want pulled pork. There are 130 to 140 barbecue restaurants in Kansas City and pulled pork is one of the faster growing items. It's a new concept in Kansas City the last five to seven years," Hyer continues. "If you went down to Tennessee 15 years ago, you couldn't find brisket. Today in Tennessee and you see brisket in all the restaurants."

He hopes this expansion can go all the way to the Pacific Ocean. "When you intro-

duce Kansas City barbecue into the West Coast or East Coast, it takes some education. We're looking at the West Coast to expand the gospel of barbecue," Hyer says.

"We live in a transient society and the Food Network and the other shows have made us more open," he continues. "The Food Network has changed the landscape. The differences are still there but the walls are coming down. As I look at the delis around the country, the regional favorites are still staples but you're beginning to see the food groups that defined regions are beginning to expand."

There are also regional favorites when it comes to the side of beans to go with the barbecue. "Baked beans follow the same regional differences. Parts of the country use ketchup in their beans whereas some use barbecue sauce. Some regions love a sweet baked bean with lots of molasses and others like it savory instead of sweet," according to Zakri.

"Texas is a pinto bean market, with a little more Mexican seasoning," says Hyer. "In Kansas City barbecue sauce is driving the flavor for beans. In the South people want a vinegar bite, and maybe a mustard bite. On the East Coast you have Boston baked beans."

A Salad by Any Other Name

The different preferences in meat dishes are paralleled by equally distinct preferences in salads. "There are regional differences in salad tastes and profiles. Differences can include the flavor, ingredients and texture of the salads," reports Steve Mueller vice president of sales and marketing at Garden Fresh Foods, Woodinville, WA.

Potato salad, in particular, differs depending on where you are in the country. "Some areas want mustard/mayo only, or there are differences in diced, sliced or shredded potatoes, or red skin or no skin," says Greg Klein, executive vice president for marketing at Sadler's Smokehouse Ltd., Henderson, TX.

The regional preferences in potato salad are largely decades old, if not much older. "For many years, the Southeast U.S. has preferred sweeter types of potato, macaroni and cole slaw flavors," explains David Lakey, vice president for marketing at Reser's Fine Foods, Beaverton, OR. "The Mid-Atlantic — Pennsylvania, Maryland and even Ohio — have traditionally purchased 'Amish' salads, which are sweeter than the national average. The Northeastern U.S., including

New York and Boston, often prefer simpler, whiter salads with fewer added ingredients such as eggs or mustard."

The Midwest and West have also developed particular preferences in salads, especially in potato salads. "As you move to the Midwest and West, you'll find much more complex recipes including eggs, mustard, pimento, carrots, etc. For example, our fastest growing traditional salad recipe is Deviled Egg Potato Salad, which is climbing double digits in both packaged and bulk service-deli applications. Finally, out West red skin potato seems to have more traction," Reser's Lakey continues.

Preferences in potato salad can even change when you go across town or down the street. "Virtually every American family has its own favorite potato salad recipe made with its own secret ingredient. Depending on where you are in the country, the taste profiles for potato salad can be very different. In the Midwest, consumers seem to prefer a potato salad made with a salad dressing. East Coast consumers prefer a real mayonnaise. Southerners love the taste of tangy yellow mustard. A sweeter taste profile is preferred in the Pennsylvania Dutch area," Sandridge's Zakri says.

The regional differences in potato salad can point to parallel taste differences in a number of related items. "Potato salad exemplifies regional taste differences" says Jeffrey Siegel, CEO of Farm Ridge Foods LLC, Commack, NY. "Some areas want it sweeter or tarter, more or less vinegar, more or less onions, mustard, creamier or dryer, sliced potatoes or diced potatoes. There are important regional differences in chili, mayonnaise/salad dressing, hot dogs, salami, pimento cheese spread, chicken/tuna/egg salad."

Cheddar Across America

People in the Northeast and the West have developed distinctly different tastes when it comes to cheese.

Most consumers in New England are familiar with the distinctively sharp flavor that is the trademark of Cabot Creamery Cheddar cheese. According to Amy Levine, director of Marketing at Cabot Creamery, headquartered in Montpelier, VT, "In the East there's more of a desire for a sharper Cheddar; the further west you go, you see milder Cheddar. We have a sharper extra sharp than most of our competitors. We make Jack and we make Muenster, but we're known for our Cheddar."

One of Cabot's flagship products is Seriously Sharp Cheddar, which is a step beyond extra sharp. The company describes it this way: "When Sharp goes awry, when Extra Sharp earns a pucker, Seriously Sharp is

born. It never tastes the same from one batch to the next. It's a cult thing. . . the cheese we used to sell to hunters and truckers. . . on their way out of town."

People in the West grew up with a taste for a distinctly creamy Cheddar. "We do other cheeses but we specialize in aged Cheddar," says Jay Allison, vice president for sales and marketing at Tillamook Cheese, Tillamook, OR. "If you grew up on the West Coast or in the West, you're used to a mild, creamy Cheddar that isn't too bitey. It's a Cheddar to eat, cook or do anything with. In the West you get that mellow creamy Cheddar."

These producers on opposite sides of the country are both gaining favor with consumers 3,000 miles away. "In the last decade there has been more and more crossover. Cabot sells cheese in Oregon, and we sell cheese in Vermont. Our retail customers have worked hard to offer the varieties to their consumers. They want to have the best product, no matter where in the country it comes from," Allison says.

Just as Tillamook has gone East, Cabot has made the journey to the West Coast. "We've expanded our distribution in the last six months to a year. We've added more West Coast distribution through delis in Safeway and Albertson's. Five or 10 years ago there was a more clear-cut geographical distinction. In general consumers today want to try a variety of cheeses, a variety of flavor profiles," Levine says.

The deli has been the leader in this move to try regional favorite cheeses from other areas. "The deli is generally open to carrying more variety," Levine adds.

The Power of the Familiar

While most Americans are increasingly open to culinary experimentation, they still have the favorites they grew up with. "Many preferences depend upon the types of foods

consumers were raised on when they were young. As first-generation immigrants come to all parts of the U.S. and households move between regions, we find that preferences also depend upon neighborhoods and demographics rather than simply large regions," Lakey explains.

For example, distinct regional differences in tastes for meats still show up in sales figures. According to Nielsen surveys, oven-roasted is the No. 1 selling turkey flavor in every area of the country, with regional differences showing themselves after that. Honey is the second leading flavor everywhere but the Western U.S., where smoked is No. 2. In the West, honey flavored is the fourth leading seller.

Major regional differences also occur in tastes for ham, where the East and the South choose baked as No. 1, followed by honey flavored. But in the West, Black Forest is the favorite, followed by baked. Honey is No. 1 in the Midwest, followed by baked.

Roast beef is No. 1 beef in all areas of the country, but corned beef is No. 2 in the Central and Southern US, while it accounts for less than 5 percent of deli beef sales in the West.

Meat and beef are the top two bologna choices everywhere but the Eastern U.S., where meat is No. 1, German No. 2 and beef drops all the way down to No. 4.

Even with a strong trend toward offering regional favorites from around the country, there is still much to be said for local favorites done right. "Many retailers believe they can grow salad sales by adding unusual flavors to the case. However, our experience is that broad-appeal flavors, priced and merchandised correctly, generate much more incremental sales. Most retailers are better off executing the basics well, rather than being overly concerned about emerging flavors," Lakey says.

DB



Flavored Cheeses finding Their Niche

High quality and bold flavors draw consumers

BY BOB JOHNSON

A wide and growing range of flavored cheeses is feeding the appetite for bold and exciting culinary adventures. “Americans are tired of eating boring cheeses. You can add flavor by adding spices,” says Max McCalman, dean of curriculum at Artisanal Cheese Center, New York, NY. McCalman has written three books on cheese, the most recent being *Mastering Cheese*.

He recalls a survey conducted two years ago by Oregon State University in Portland asking people who are interested in cheese about their preferences. “One of the categories that scored the highest was flavored cheese,” he says.

Some cheese producers noticed the change a few years ago when their more adventurous flavored cheeses began to find a warmer reception. According to Marieke Penterman, owner of Holland’s Family Cheese Company, Thorp, WI, “I think it started about five or six years ago — that people recognized better and local foods. The flavored cheeses kicked in about three or four years ago, I think. I base this on the fact that when we started in November 2006 and I showed all our flavored Gouda cheeses to several consultants, they weren’t very impressed and told me just to focus on plain with one or two flavors max. Our latest flavors have been in our inventory for about two years, and they are the pesto basil and honey clover.”

The Old and The New

The new world of flavored cheeses can trace its ancestry back centuries to Europe. “The Spanish have been using rosemary in many of their cheeses for centuries. They also use spicy peppers, and they use pimentón in a lot of their cuisine including cheeses. Some goat cheesemakers have cheeses with chocolate. One cheese in our caves is flavored with hops,” McCalman explains.

According to Tara Kirsch, marketing manager, Best Cheese Company, Mt. Kisco, NY, Europeans are embracing the high-quality



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flavored cheese trend. “Currently, in Holland, we see cheese flavors, mostly with herbs. Some popular flavors currently are cumin, chives, mustard, fenugreek and basil.” In addition, she says, “For unexpected flavors, I’ve heard — although not seen — banana, coconut and wasabi.” Best is currently importing Hollandse Honey Bzzz Chèvre, an aged goat cheese flavored with a touch of natural honey. “It gives the cheese a tang. It has floral notes rather than being a sweet cheese,” Kirch explains.

Americans are looking for bolder flavors, and cheesemakers are responding with a new generation of flavored products. “The desire to accommodate this educated and sophisticated American palate has pushed cheesemakers all over the world to introduce more and more daring flavors,” notes John Stephano, director of cheese training and education at Atalanta Corporation, Elizabeth, NJ.

Many of the new flavors combine cheese with compatible fruit flavors. “Big bold and contrasting cheese flavors are pushing their way into restaurants and onto consumers dinner tables this year. Mango, blueberry, fig and honey flavored goat cheeses, in addition to the consumer desire for spice and heat,

“THE DESIRE TO ACCOMMODATE THIS EDUCATED AND SOPHISTICATED AMERICAN PALATE HAS PUSHED CHEESEMAKERS ALL OVER THE WORLD TO INTRODUCE MORE AND MORE DARING FLAVORS.”

— JOHN STEPHANO
ATALANTA CORPORATION

are challenging many of our traditional flavor pairings of the past,” Stephano says.

Chefs trying bold new pairings inspire some of these exciting flavors. “Chefs are continuing to push these boundaries now pairing the sweetness of blueberry goat cheese and

black peppercorns in their dishes,” he continues. “Fig-flavored Chèvre and honey combined with jalapeño create a parade on your palate, craving all that is heat and sweet. Mango goat cheese-stuffed duck or chicken breast is a new twist on a classic favorite.”

Many producers began to respond to the craving for new cheese flavors around five years ago. “It seems as if there has been an explosion in the category. People are always looking for something new and one way to do that is to create new and interesting flavors. The sky’s the limit, as long as it tastes good — pretty much anything goes,” says Pat Ford, co-founder of Beehive Cheese Co., Uintah, UT. “We entered our Barely Buzzed espresso and lavender rubbed cheese back in 2006 and it seems there has been an explosion ever since.”

These new flavors from Beehive are not, technically speaking, “flavored” cheeses but are related to them. “Our cheeses are rubbed-rind cheeses. By creating a unique rind, the flavors naturally penetrate the cheese over time and become stronger and more complex as the cheese ages,” Ford says.

Some contemporary producers are taking their inspiration from familiar flavors that haven’t previously been associated with



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director of culinary development at Laura Chenel's Chèvre, Sonoma, CA. The company specializes in goat cheeses including flavored goat cheeses such as its recently introduced Blossom in flavors of basil olive oil, sun-dried tomato, and fig and Olive.

"High-quality fresh and fresh-tasting goat cheese was not available in the United States before Laura Chenel began to produce her cheese in the early 1980s. Goat cheese is familiar to most Americans now but flavorings can be a way to encourage new users," Buchanan adds.

Best's Kirsch notes the company's Coach Farms Green Peppercorn Goat Cheese is an established cheese that's been around for several years. It's an aged goat cheese made by adding peppercorns to curds. She believes that for many consumers it's a flavored cheese with a "pure aesthetic."

Some producers are finding demand for their flavored cheeses increasing at about the same pace as demand for their other cheeses. "We've always had flavored cheeses, and our tomato and basil and Mediterranean herb sell the best," says Luke Buholzer, vice president for sales at Klondike Cheese Company, Monroe, WI. "The flavored cheeses are keeping about the same percentage of our total cheese sales, so the volume is going up."

cheese. "We have a killer Dill Cheddar, a Steakhouse Onion Cheddar made to imitate the flavor of a blooming onion at a restaurant and our biggest award winner is our Jalapeño Peppadew Cheddar," says Mike Wimble, executive vice president for sales and marketing at Peppadew USA, Morganville, NJ. "We tested a Tequila Margarita Cheddar at the IDDBA [International Dairy Deli Bakery Show held this past June]."

Wimble attributes the growing interest in these familiar but bold cheese flavors to consumer fatigue with bland cheese. "The flavored category is growing because people were tired of the doldrums of the same old, same old. People in the U.S. like Cheddar, so we started making flavored Cheddars in 1994," he says.

The search for adventure comes at the same time many consumers are also searching for healthier foods. "The current trend in food in general is toward healthful ingredients and ingredients that are sustainably produced. We were very mindful in pairing our cheese with ingredients that are sourced from Sonoma County and California for that reason. Additionally, the Mediterranean flavors and ingredients that work well with our cheese are widely produced here in Sonoma County and are understood to be healthy and delicious," says Jacquelyn Buchanan,

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However, most producers believe the flavored cheese category is riding a wave caused by the growing desire for bold, adventurous flavors. "Flavored cheeses are trending up. Americans are well known for their curiosity when it comes to foods and flavors," says Emmanuelle Hofer-Louis, vice president for marketing at Anco Fine Foods, Fairfield, NJ.

One of the keys to merchandising this category, according to Hofer-Louis, is to offer flavored cheese at a range of price points. "In the U.S. more than anywhere else, you have a wide variety of flavored cheeses. You have all the price points from the mundane to the high-end artisan cheeses," she says.

The flavored cheese category opens new possibilities not just for flavors, but also for colors and aromas. "What the cheese looks like on the board is a great way to re-discover the art of conversation. Spices add not only flavor but also color and aroma — building character, leaving something to talk about. When entertaining, we all like to show off and a beautiful piece of cheese will have your guests leave as friends," says Kenia Delgado, product manager for Arla Foods, Inc., Hoboken, NJ.

Show Them the New World of Cheese

Even the minority of producers who believe flavored cheese will remain a very small category believe they can bring a level of excitement to the deli. "Flavored cheeses are kind of a small item. They complete the category but 95 percent of your sales and growth are in cheeses that are not flavored," says Michael Blum, sales and marketing manager at Beemster, Jersey City, NJ. "The one that's popular is mustard cheese because it's sort of mainstream. We have a red pepper cheese we just came out with, and wasabi cheese is about three years old. They're similar in style to a Gouda."

He finds a pretty strong divide among buyers on the importance of the flavored cheese category. "Among buyers, you have your purists who refuse to sell flavored cheese and your buyers who insist on them. They don't run the numbers — they're trying to satisfy every customer. If you run the numbers, you won't lean toward flavored cheeses."

But he believes the flavored products can be used effectively to draw greater attention to the more traditional cheeses. "With flavored cheese, the most effective strategy is using them as an in-and-out promotion.

Come in and do a big splash on the flavored cheeses, and use them as a merchandising tool for the other cheeses."

Flavored cheese demos can be an opportunity to create buzz at the cheese counter and may be necessary to merchandise some of the flavored products. "The big thing to do is make sure you're demonstrating the flavored products — people need to sample them," Peppadew's Wimble advises.

Demonstrations may not be needed for familiar flavors, but they are helpful for the more unusual flavored products. "Most of the flavors are fairly obvious and I don't think you need to demo them. But some of the more unusual flavors, such as Sage Derby or Port Wine Derby, might not be familiar and sampling might be necessary," Anco's Hofer-Louis says.

Keep the Traditional Display

Flavored cheeses should not be displayed as a separate category but should, instead, be included with other cheeses of their type. "We don't set the flavored cheeses as a category. We sort them by goat, sheep and cow's milk, by the country, or by the texture," relates Artisanal's McCalman.

According to Hofer-Louis, "It's good to

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keep the flavored cheeses within their cheese types — the Fetas with the Fetas, the Cheddars with the Cheddars, and the Jacks with the Jacks.”

Within the traditional cheese arrangement, however, some of the flavored varieties can add an entirely new range of colors to the palette. “For so long white, off white and pale yellow dominated the color spectrum of most cheeses in your local supermarket cases,” explains Atlanta’s Stephano. “Therefore, it has always been a challenge to display or merchandise these cheeses. However, with the ever-increasing demand for flavored and colorful cheeses, merchandisers now have so much more flexibility. Berry blues, spicy oranges and radiant reds are pushing the concept of cheesecake displays and catching the customer’s eye. It’s all about the color.”

Packaging can also intensify a colorful display. “Packaging is important for visual attraction and beautiful serving ideas. The purchase should feel comfortable in terms of its use and value,” according to Buchanan of Laura Chenel.

These bold colors grab the eye and can open up new display possibilities. “Packaging is the best way to create excitement and stand out among other brands,” Arla’s Delgado says. “For the retailer, an attractive display includes an array of color, size and shapes. Displaying a full wheel next to cut pieces will give the impression of deli-style cuts for those customers not willing to wait in line. Merchandising with a wooden box or handwritten chalk board will give a more

natural feel.”

An artisan flair can provide a decisive merchandising edge. “In this increasingly competitive market, the quality and unique-

ness of your cheese case selections are important, and the trend to grab your customer’s attention with specialty flavors and brilliant colors is a fact of the future,” Stephano adds.

Retailers can expect to see the continuing introduction of new flavored cheese products. “I think we’ll see more ingredients that will be nourishing for our body, with great quality, such our Burning Mélange — there’s stinging nettle in the cheese and the stinging nettle is known for cleaning the blood. But you have to eat a lots of it, of course,” Holland’s Penterman says. And, she adds, the stinging quality is removed before adding the nettles to the cheese.

Flavored cheese can help educate consumers about classical pairings of cheeses and herbs and seasonings. “There can be excitement and potential for growth in trends but what one is always seeking is the ‘classic’ pairing or direction that will be lasting,” Buchanan explains. “Flavorings also can educate users on serving suggestions. Blossom is a product that is already ‘dressed up’ for the consumer. We have for many years flavored our Chabis with herbs and black pepper — sprinkled on the exterior of the cheese by hand. These traditional flavor pairings for goat cheese are all ready for the consumer.”

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The Caves of Roquefort

The story behind a unique cheese can entice consumers to buy

BY LEE SMITH

Consumers may know the name Roquefort cheese, but how many of them know what distinguishes it from other Blues? Why it's the world's most famous Blue? Made from raw sheep's milk, this white cheese with green or blue veins is rich and very creamy. Its flavors start off mild and slightly acidic. When the layers of flavor start to emerge, the cheese takes on a pleasant sweetness moving to subtle hints of bacon and smoke. The finish is pleasantly salty without being overwhelming.

According to legend, a young shepherd was taking a break in the caves around the town of Roquefort to eat his lunch of bread and cheese when the most beautiful woman he had ever seen appeared before his eyes, beckoning to him. For the next month, he followed her through the caves, cavorting as

only a young man in love and lust can do. When he finally returned to the mouth of the cave, the cheese and bread he had brought with him were covered in blue-green mold. He was hesitant, but his hunger drove him to eat it — and Roquefort cheese was discovered.

The actual history of Roquefort begins approximately two million years ago during the Quaternary Era when a collapse of the Combalou plateau left a huge rift in the earth almost two kilometers long and 200 to 300 meters wide. This is the area in the Grands Causses limestone plateau of south-central France where the magic begins.

The town of Roquefort-sur-Soulzon, a community of 600 people dedicated to the affinage — or aging — of its namesake cheese, is situated along the fallen rubble.

The famous caves of Roquefort hide their treasure underneath the village. Walking along the town's winding two-lane street, you can see the majestic side of the plateau that didn't collapse and contemplate what lies beneath your feet.

Two million years ago the limestone plateau was already riddled with crevices created by flowing water. The collapse caused the formation of tunnels, caves and fleurines — faults in the rock that are natural air ducts. They generate a constant flow of air from inside out while maintaining a consistent level of humidity and temperature year-round.

The fleurines themselves have an ethereal glow that results from the naturally occurring molds and microflora. And, within the caves, *Penicillium roqueforti* — the magical



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blue mold — lives.

In 2009, under President George W. Bush, the United States ordered 300 percent tariffs on Roquefort in retaliation for the European Union's refusal to allow U.S. beef with hormones into Europe regardless of international legal rulings. The tariffs were finally dropped in May 2011, making it possible to competitively price Roquefort cheese once again.

Today, there are only seven producers. Roquefort Societe made by the Societe des Caves de Roquefort (a division of Lactalis) is the largest producer, representing about 61 percent of production. Papillon, another well-known brand, produces 10 percent of tonnage. Carles and Gabriel Coulet, which each own one cave, are also available in the United States. Other brands include Le Fromageries Occitanes, Vernieres and Le Vieux Berger.

Romancing the Cheese

The land surrounding the caves is both stark and beautiful. This is a hard land where droughts are frequent and the rough terrain supports very little of anything. The only crop to grow and prosper is the hearty rye grain. The only livestock suitable for this land of sparse vegetation, little water and rocky hills is sheep.

In 1924, milk quality control standards were applied for the first time to a flock of 175 sheep. After World War II, inter-breeding of Cameres and Lacaune sheep resulted in the stock we now recognize as Lacaune.

This contemporary breed, the result of generations of selective breeding, is uniquely suited to its harsh environment. Resilient and with small hooves suited for the rocky landscape, it produces rich, full-cream milk with a pure, clean taste. It feeds on natural pasture, which can be quite varied, giving the milk the complexity it needs to make a cheese of great depth and sophistication.

Today, Lacaune is the only breed allowed to produce milk for Roquefort. Approximately 4,500 people in the surrounding area work on about 2,100 farms tending 750,000 animals. The ewes' milk is collected throughout the counties of Abeyran, Tarn, Lozere, Gard, Herault and Audeas in an area known as the Rayon de Roquefort.

Magical Mold

While *P. roqueforti*, the mold that gives Roquefort its distinctive taste, is found in the soil of the caves, more modern and predictable methods of growing the magic must be used. It's no longer sufficient for lonesome shepherds to leave their cheese scattered on cave floors.

Traditionally, giant loaves of rye bread



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were baked in brick ovens at high heat until the outside of the bread was burned black and the inside raw. The loaves were then inoculated with *P. roqueforti* and allowed to rest for 60 days until the mold had literally

devoured the inside leaving nothing but a shell filled with moist blue-green flora. The mold was then removed and dried to produce a powder.

Today, only one company, Papillon, still

uses the traditional method. The process is closely watched and DNA testing insures each batch is genetically the same. As tradition dictates, old brick ovens bake bread, but for protection, Papillon always produces two

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years of mold — just in case there is a bad year or bad batch.

Most companies now produce the mold in laboratories where great consistency can be assured. The mold may be added to either the curd or the milk.

Contrary to popular opinion, Roquefort is not made in the caves. The cheese is made in dairies in the surrounding area. The caves are used only for affinage — aging. Brought to the caves inoculated with *P. roqueforti* and

white as snow, the cheeses are aged naked for 14 days.

After a fortnight, the cheeses are covered with tin foil that protects the outside but allows the cheese to breath. Roquefort has no rind and every morsel is edible. The cheese is aged for a minimum of three months and carefully watched and turned by the cellar workers. Almost exclusively women, they're highly trained and pass down the secrets of the cellars from generation to generation.

ROQUEFORT CAN BE SERVED AT THE BEGINNING OR END OF THE MEAL AND PAIRS WELL WITH SWEET OR RED WINE OR A SWEET COCKTAIL. ONE OF THE MORE CONTEMPORARY PAIRINGS IS ROQUEFORT AND CHOCOLATE ... THE QUINTESSENTIAL WAY TO ENJOY ROQUEFORT IS WITH A LOAF OF CRUSTY BREAD AND A GLASS OF WINE. SOMETIMES THE BEST SHOULD BE LEFT TO ITS OWN GLORY.

After aging, the tin foil is removed and each cheese is inspected to make sure the taste, texture and blue veining are correct. If the cheese passes all the tests, it becomes Roquefort. The cheeses are then wrapped in aluminum foil for shipping and distribution. All packing must be done in Roquefort to protect the integrity of the cheese.

Serving Tips

Very few people are fortunate enough to eat Roquefort straight from the cave, so here are some pointers that will help preserve the flavors and condition of the cheese.

Before eating, Roquefort should be left at room temperature for at least one hour — good advice for all cheese.

Roquefort should not be stored in an airtight container. It is still alive and breathing and it needs oxygen. The temperature should be as consistent as possible. Wild temperature fluctuations disturb its sensibility.

It should be cut it into serving size pieces, only taking out of the refrigerator what you need for each meal.

Roquefort can be served at the beginning or end of the meal and pairs well with sweet or red wine or a sweet cocktail. One of the more contemporary pairings is Roquefort and chocolate — even chocolate popping candy, a novelty making the rounds in Paris. The quintessential way to enjoy Roquefort is with a loaf of crusty bread and a glass of wine. Sometimes the best should be left to its own glory.

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There's Hope For The Brown Bag



By
**Jeffrey
Spear**
President

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With summer winding down and students of all ages getting ready for the new academic year, retailers are in high gear with back-to-school offers. While these typically include clothing, pencils, paper and notebooks, there's no reason to overlook the brown-bag lunch and create promotions within the deli department.

For moms and dads packing school lunches, nothing makes brown bagging easier than prepared foods, especially when so many choices are available. While fast-food operators have been cashing in for years, and savvy restaurateurs in all categories have been beefing up their take-out and curb-side offerings, deli counters have been expanding and improving their offers as well.

Take a look at Wegmans, Whole Foods or Fresh Market. They've built in both hot and cold self-service food bars as well as extensive selections of prepared entrées, side dishes, salads and snacks available from the service counter. But these stores are not innovating in isolation.

In the Southeast, the newest Winn Dixie deli departments include olive bars, cheese bars, pizza bars, salad bars — a bar for every occasion. In the same region, Publix enjoys the reputation for the best deli sandwiches around, not to mention delicious fried chicken ready to go. People line up at these service counters and shun QSR (quick service restaurant) options.

Assuming your store has been keeping up with these developments, take the time to present your deli department as a convenient alternative to brown bagging and back-to-school meal preparation — highlighting those foods most likely to win the hearts and stomachs of school-age consumers.

On a recent deli visit, I saw a prepared-food section offer that included crab cakes, coconut chicken fingers, sesame noodles, eggplant rollatini and chicken cordon bleu. More than likely, your service counter has something along these lines. You need to let your customers who are brown-bagging lunch — kids, parents, teachers, anyone — know that you can take boring out of mealtime.

Children who are exposed to exotic flavors and textures are not as squeamish as you might expect. According to Laurie Cummins, president of Alexian Pâtés and Specialty Meats, "Whenever we have tasting events, kids are thrilled to try whatever we have on hand. When we show our duck and cognac pâté, the creamy texture has them coming

back for more."

When it comes to cheese, there's more to life than the ubiquitous Cheddar, Jack and Swiss. Bob McCall, sales and marketing manager of Cypress Grove Chevre, proclaims, "We find kids love our Lamb Chopper sheep's milk cheese. While the illustration on the wheel is engaging and the name couldn't be more entertaining, they truly enjoy the distinctive flavor and texture this cheese has to offer."

Of course, price may make these sorts of specialty foods a bit out of reach for everyday use. The idea is that back-to-school doesn't have to be limited to any one culinary direction. Suggesting new and/or exotic choices will make back-to-school promotions that much more interesting, expanding the consumer's understanding of what you have to offer and, at the same time, enhancing the reputation of

your department and your store.

No matter how you promote back-to-school, remember to communicate your offerings as often as possible through your full arsenal of signage and display options. Whether you use overhead posters, framed signage, countertop stands or modification to price pins, let your customer know something special is happening in the deli department. You can also include inexpensive aprons, caps and buttons adorned with prompts such as "We Love Brown Bags" as part of the uniform for service staff — allowing them to get involved.

Don't forget recipes and preparation demos — especially if your store is equipped with a cooking island or digital TV monitors. Schedule frequent demos or run a variety of 30-second tips developed especially for back-to-school. While moms may be thinking tried-and-true meal solutions, you can advocate new ingredients, new dishes and new ways to prepare satisfying meals that fit in the lunch box.

If your store has a dedicated aisle or special displays for seasonal merchandise, think about tie-ins. Knowing that crayons and markers are popular items in back-to-school shelf sets, run a coloring contest. Ask kids to draw their favorite sandwich or create an image that describes how they feel about going back to school. Set up deli prizes that could include a free sandwich for every month of the school year, a lunch box or other such themed rewards.

The bottom line is that, if you want to take advantage of back-to-school promotions or any other seasonal activity, there's no shortage of opportunity in the deli department. A little bit of creative thinking goes a long way.

DB

You need to let your customers
who are brown-bagging lunch —
kids, parents, teachers, anyone —
know that you can take boring
out of mealtime.

Blast From The Past

I

Mrs. Gerry's Kitchen, Inc.

In 1973, Gerry Vogt's husband, a salesperson for the Schweigert Meat Company, told her the woman who had been supplying his company with salads was going out of business. He asked if Gerry would be interested in making salads and gave her one night to make a decision.

The next morning she agreed — on the condition she use her mother's family potato salad recipe.

On Dec. 4, 1973, in the small, renovated building on the south side of Albert Lea, MN, pictured top right, Mrs. Gerry's Kitchen began manufacturing salads: Original Potato Salad, Macaroni Salad and Creamy Coleslaw. The small facility measured only 1,100 square feet.

In four years, sales increased enough to move to a new 8,000-square-foot facility in an industrial park in Albert Lea. Today that facility, pictured bottom right, has grown to 85,000 square feet and Mrs. Gerry's now makes over 120 varieties of salads and sides (bulk and retail).

Vogt can vividly remember encounters with men who didn't believe a woman could succeed in business — from the salesman who refused to do business to the inspector who told her she belonged at home barefoot and pregnant (she showed him to the door). She has certainly proved her detractors wrong.



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