

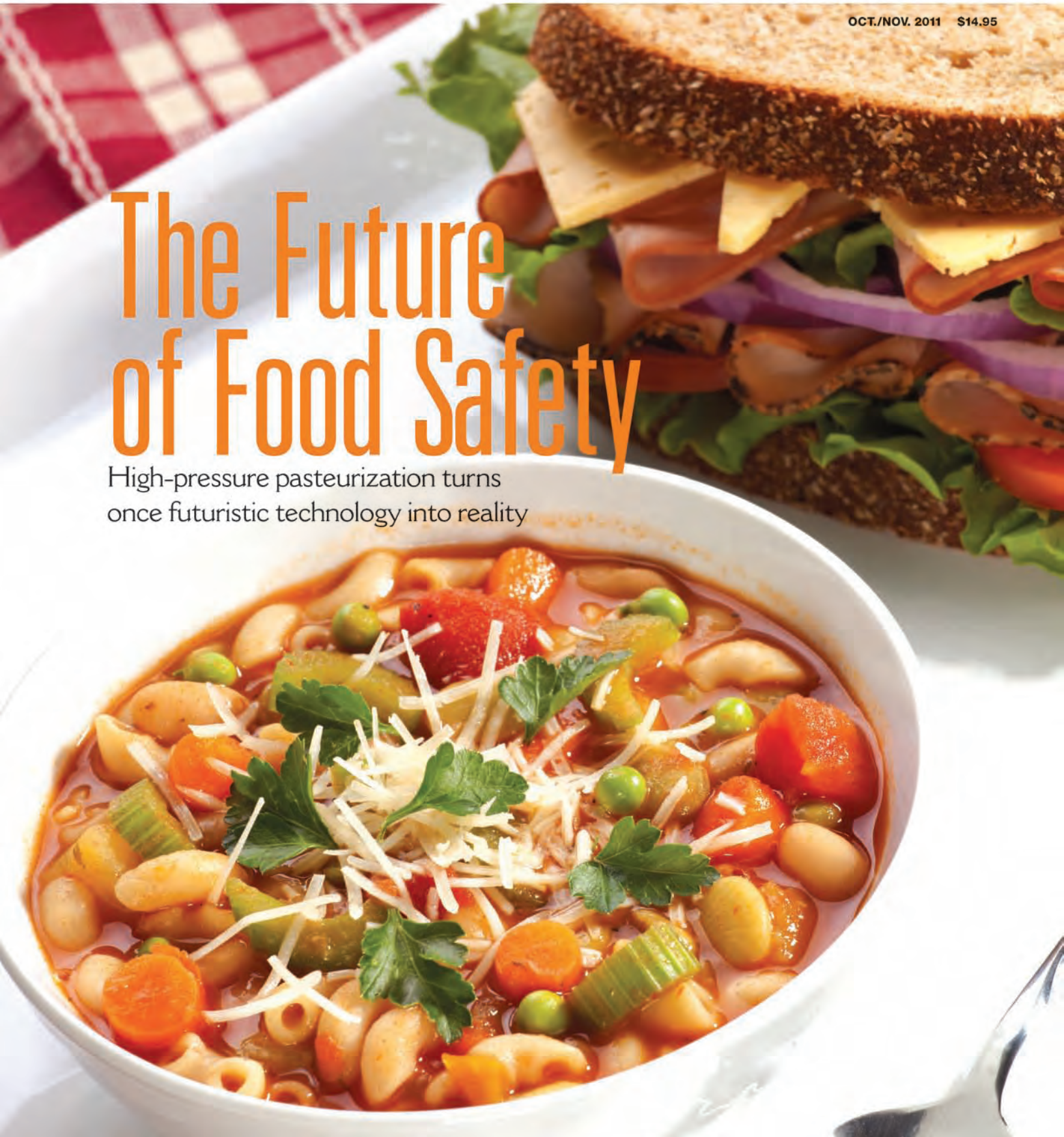
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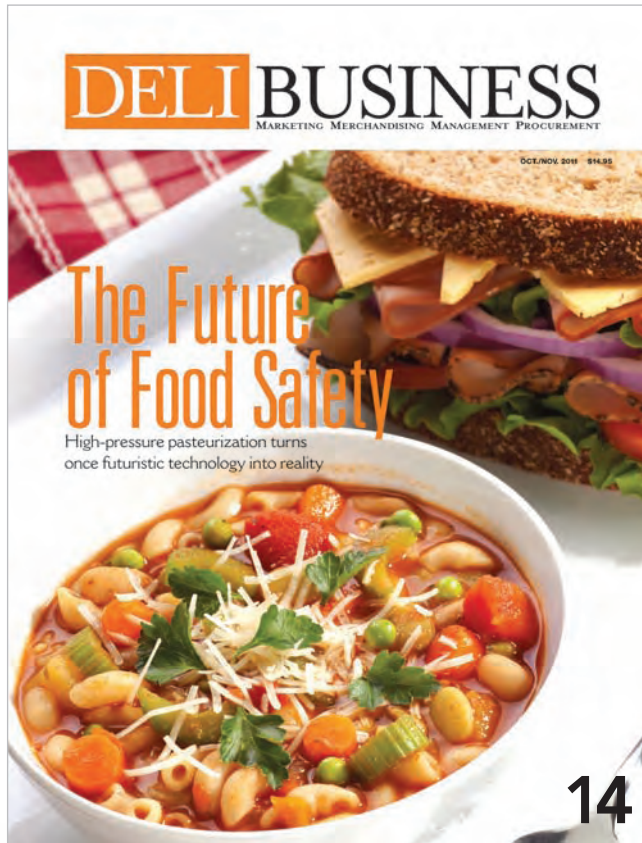


Vlaskaas
Sweet and creamy



Lite
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PIONEER ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF THE FRYING FRENZY



Pioneer Hi-Bred, Ankeny, IA, a DuPont business, has announced the winners of the inaugural Plenish High Oleic Soybean Oil Frying Frenzy competition at the 2011 Iowa State Fair. Local chefs entered the competition with their unique fried appetizers and desserts, cooking each entry in Plenish high oleic soybean oil.

First place winner in the appetizer and dessert category was Tag Grandgeorge of Le Jardin Catering who prepared a fried pork wonton and fried Fromage Blanc. Grandgeorge took home a \$1,000 prize for each entry and will have the opportunity to work with Pioneer on testing Plenish high oleic soybean oil in his operations.

The second place winner in appetizers was Tom McKern of Zombie Burger & Drink Lab who featured a buffalo pork belly with fried ranch dressing, garnished with celery fries tossed with Blue Cheese salts. Second place in desserts was Bette Dryer of Bette Dryer Catering who prepared a fresh peaches and cream fried flip. Each received a \$500 award. The third place prizes — \$250 each — were awarded to Randy Husted of Camp David for preparing a pepper-jam brisket slider and Tom McKern of Zombie Burger & Drink Lab for fried black cherry cream pie.

High oleic soybeans provide a soy-based trans fat solution for food companies and foodservice operators. Plenish high oleic soybeans contain the highest oleic content (more than 75 percent) of any soybean product under commercial development. This significantly increases the stability of the oil and provides greater flexibility in food applications. Plenish high oleic soybean oil has 0g trans fat and 20 percent less saturated fat than commodity soybean oil, making it a more attractive ingredient for consumer food products.

For the 2011 Iowa State Fair Frying Frenzy winning recipes and more details about the Plenish high oleic soybean oil, visit www.Plenish.com.

COMING NEXT ISSUE IN DEC./JAN. 2012

COVER STORY
Trends

FEATURE STORIES
Take-Out Options
Mediterranean Foods

MERCHANDISING REVIEWS
Pâtés
Italian
Crackers

PREPARED FOODS
Healthy Deli

PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES
Entrées
Breads

DELI MEAT
Prosciutto

CHEESES
French Cheeses
Blue Cheeses
Cheese Plates

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT:
2012 Annual
Specialty Cheese Guide

COMING IN FEB./MAR.

DELI BUSINESS will take an in-depth look at the latest consumer research and what it means for the deli department in today's economy.

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www.atlantafoods.com

DELI WATCH

Transitions



Bobby D. Ray has joined Haliburton International Foods, Inc., Ontario, CA, as vice president, retail sales. With a career in retail sales and marketing spanning over 30 years, he most recently was vice president of retail sales and marketing for Allens Inc. He has also worked for Pict-sweet, Birdseye Foods and Dean Foods and served as chairman of the private brands committee of the National Refrigerated and Frozen Foods Association, member of the board of directors of the American Frozen Food Institute and member of the private brands executive committee of the Food Marketing Institute.
www.haliburton.net



Warren Casey has joined Alto-Shaam, Menomonee Falls, WI, as vice president – sales. He has more than 20 years of foodservice operations and sales experience. Casey majored in business administration at Purdue University before starting his operations career. While managing restaurants, healthcare facilities and child nutrition programs, he learned first hand the needs and struggles of operators in single- and multi-unit environments. He has taken a consultative approach to finding solutions to customers' needs in resource allocation and planning, product and menu development, and work flow efficiencies.
www.alto-shaam.com

Announcements



APC ADDS PROCESSING LINE
American Pasteurization Company (APC), Milwaukee, WI, has launched its fourth processing line at its headquarters. The new line adds 350 liters of vessel capacity, nearly a 45 percent increase, to allow for greater production capacity. To accommodate the new processing line, it is leasing an additional 10,000 square feet. APC was the first company to offer high-pressure processing on a commercial tolling basis and currently serves food manufacturers nationwide. APC is committed to food safety through the utilization of HPP and to advancing such technologies to aid in the delivery of safe foods to consumers.
www.pressurefresh.com



GRUYERE RECIPE CONTEST
Emmi Roth USA, Monroe, WI, announces a Gruyere Recipe Contest for foodservice professionals. The winner gets a \$5,000 cash prize and 5-day/4-night trip for two to Lucerne, Switzerland. The contest runs through Dec. 16, 2011. Each entry must use one or more Emmi Roth USA Gruyere cheese (Kaltbach cave-aged Le Gruyère Switzerland AOC, Le Gruyère Switzerland AOC, Le Gruyère Reserve Switzerland AOC, Grand Cru Gruyere, Grand Cru Gruyere Reserve, Grand Cru Gruyere Surchoix and/or private-label Gruyere produced by Emmi Roth USA, including Block & Barrel Gruyere).
www.emmirothusa.com

New Products



NEW FOODSERVICE LINEUP
Day-Lee Foods, Santa Fe Springs, CA, has launched new foodservice offerings to the in-store deli. These include: Mandarin Orange Chicken: lightly battered, sliced chicken breast in a delicately sweet Mandarin orange sauce; Teriyaki Chicken: marinated and grilled white meat chicken in Day-Lee's original teriyaki sauce; Sweet and Sour Chicken: battered all-natural chicken breast, pineapple bits and vegetables in a sweet and sour sauce; Pork or Chicken Potstickers: seasoned pork or chicken in authentic Asian dumpling wraps with a dipping sauce; and Beef and Broccoli: top round beef strips and broccoli florets in a savory oyster sauce blend.
www.day-lee.com



ALL NATURAL CHARCUTERIE
Transatlantic Foods, Inc. New York, NY, has introduced a line of all-natural charcuterie. Pancetta: rubbed with assertive spices such as bay leaf and juniper berry, Sofi Silver Finalist 2011; Sweet Sopressata: traditional, studied with whole black peppercorns; Hot Sopressata: notes of Calabrian pepper come on slow and linger; Fennel salami: peppered with anise, dense and rosy; Toscano: pungent, garlicky, yet mellow, dotted with fat; Cacciatore: sweet, intense flavor, slender size crafted for hiking and travel; Chorizo: traditional, smoky, with cayenne-spiced finish; Abruzzi: sweet or hot, long and thin, fine texture, double-ground for deep pork flavor.
www.transatlanticfoods.com



AMERICAN-MADE GUANCIALE
S. Wallace Edwards & Sons' Surry Farms, Surrey, VA, introduces Jowciale, an American version of the Italian delicacy guanciale. Jowciale is a tongue-in-cheek name for what is known in the U.S. as hog jowls. To create Jowciale, the hog jowls are dry-cured, smoked for 24 to 36 hours and aged 2 to 3 weeks. Jowciale is produced from heritage-breed Six-Spotted Berkshire hogs that are 100-percent pasture-raised under Certified Humane conditions with no antibiotics and no added hormones. While Guanciale typically retails at \$26 per pound, the Surry Farms Jowciale retails at \$23.95 for a 1 1/2-pound package.
www.EdwardsVAham.com



TOP BAKE SIDE DISHES
Reser's Fine Foods, Beaverton, OR, is expanding its new line of refrigerated side dishes featuring a proprietary "Top Bake" cooking process that delivers home-baked taste, right from the microwave. The line will be available under the Reser's Baked Sensational Sides brand. Reser's proprietary baking process delivers a crispy and cheesy top layer that covers a rich and creamy base. Previously, only made-from-scratch casseroles delivered this kind of oven-baked taste. Each of the four flavors — Scalloped Potatoes, Twice Baked Potatoes, Hash Brown Casserole and Macaroni & Cheese — is packaged in a 14-ounce microwave/oven safe tray.
www.resers.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



PRETZEL CRISPS HOLIDAY INDULGENTS

The Snack Factory, Princeton, NJ, has reintroduced its Holiday Indulgents line with its White Chocolate & Peppermint and new Dark Chocolate & Peppermint Pretzel Crisps flavors. Pretzel Crisps are a perfect on-the-go treat for holiday travel and an ideal stocking stuffer or housewarming gift. The Dark Chocolate & Peppermint Pretzel Crisps are coated in premium dark chocolate and sprinkled with peppermint candy pieces, adding a burst of calming coolness. Only 120 calories and 5 grams of fat per serving, the low-fat, low-calorie snack comes in a 4-ounce bag with a suggested retail price of \$2.99.

www.pretzelcrisps.com



PACKAGED-OIL BOX SYSTEM

Frontline International, Inc., Cuyahoga Falls, OH, introduces the Box System for Standard Packaged Oil — an automated, convenient, safer, and more cost-effective way to re-fill fryers with fresh cooking oil. Place boxes or jugs upside-down in Frontline racks, connect with a Frontline fresh oil pump station, and fill fryers using the no-mess dispensing wand. Upside-down storage increases oil yields by 4 to 7 percent. The system is modular and flexible, offers tremendous ROI and is fully upgradable. A fresh oil system can be added at any time versus having to install both fresh and waste oil systems at the same time. 1-year warranty on all parts and labor.

www.frontlineii.com



HONEY COMB CHICKEN

Tyson Foods Inc., Springdale, AR, introduces Honey Comb Chicken Boneless Wings and Tenders, which bring news to a core category with a new flavor. Honey-flavored boneless wings and tenders take advantage of consumers' love for the sweet taste of honey. The honey flavoring is right in the breading. They save operators time and labor because they cook from frozen. Vacuum marinating ensures uniform flavor and moisture throughout the meat. Honey is a trendy ingredient that adds value: It was named one of the top 10 ingredients for 2011 and was top of the Food Channel's *Top Ten Things Seen at the 2010 NRA Show* list.

www.tysondeli.com



NEW FOODSERVICE SOUPS

Kettle Cuisine, Chelsea, MA, has introduced two on-trend varieties that appeal to evolving consumer demands. Steak & Ale Soup is a hearty, pub-inspired soup featuring Angus beef, diced potatoes, uncured bacon and sweet carrots in a tangy blend of handcrafted beef stock, sharp Cheddar cheese and amber ale. Curried Cauliflower Soup adds a global flare, staying true to the authentic flavors of Indian cuisine, while helping to satisfy the growing demand for vegetarian soup options. It contains sautéed cauliflower florets, tender potatoes, green peppers, sliced scallions and tomatoes in a handcrafted vegetable stock with fragrant Indian curry.

www.kettlecuisine.com/foodservice



PARTY TRAYS

Future Brands Ltd., Carrollton, TX, is now offering Santa Barbara Bay party trays available in 16- and 22-ounce sizes. These ready-to-serve duos combine two dips that are individually sealed to ensure freshness and product safety. Available in: Spinach Dip and Chunky Artichoke Dip; Roasted Garlic Ranch Dip and Garden Dill Dip; Caramelized Onion and Roasted Garlic Dip and Spinach Dip; and Roasted Garlic Ranch Dip and Spinach Dip. The party trays, which retail between \$6.99 and \$7.99, are available for the entire holiday season, with the 16-ounce trays debuting in October.

www.futurefoodbrands.com



HERBED & SEASONED DELI MEATS

Sara Lee, Downers Grove, IL, has introduced Sara Lee Deli Herbed & Seasoned deli meats, new, premium-quality varieties with unique flavors. Available sliced-to-order at the deli counter, these deli meats are hand-rubbed with savory herbs and spices, then oven-roasted for a flavorful, unique taste experience. Available in three, distinctive artisan flavors: Rosemary & Sage Turkey Breast, Basil Pesto Chicken Breast and Peppercorn Premium Roast Beef. These high-quality, whole-muscle meats are made with no fillers. The small piece and case size reduces shrink: 3.6-pound turkey and beef; 4-pound chicken and ham.

www.saralee.com



FIGOLI TAVALOZZE

Ritrovo Italian Regional Foods LLC, Seattle, WA, has introduced two flavors of artisanal snack crackers from a small, family bakery in the Veneto region. Tavalozze, literally translated as 'artist's palettes', are the perfect every time snack cracker. With a wholesome flavor owing to high quality basic ingredients and small-batch, artisanal baking techniques, Tavalozze also have a stylish, angular cut that inspires kitchen creativity with hors d'oeuvres, canapés, and antipasti. Available seasoned with truffle and salt — Tavalozze al Tartufo — and with Italian olive oil — Tavalozze al Olio di Oliva. Packages are 3.5 ounces each; 12 per case.

www.ritrovo.com



VISIBLY FRESH PACKAGING

Inline Plastics Corp., Shelton, CT, has introduced the Visibly Fresh line of upscale rigid, crystal-clear plastic containers. The line consists of eight containers in four popular footprints. The new line ranges from single-serve to dinner-size sizes. Large corner tabs enable easy opening; closing is accomplished by simply pressing down on the lid. The leak-resistant perimeter seal design provides increased product shelf life, keeping foods fresher longer and reducing shrink. It also ensures that the containers will not accidentally open while on display or in transit. The Visibly Fresh containers are manufactured from 100% recyclable PET material.

www.inlineplastics.com

by Jim Prevora, Editor-in-Chief

Will Delis Be Passed by Food Trucks?

If you want to win tomorrow's business, look at what is happening today.

Consider a website called *FindLAFoodTrucks.com* — its purpose is to consolidate in one place the Twitter feeds from a large number of Los Angeles area food trucks.

That such a website exists at all should give supermarket deli operators pause, because all over the country people are not only dining at food trucks but also checking Twitter feeds and websites to find out what sounds interesting today and where their favorite food truck is going to be. This really points out that there are loads of opportunities, and the typical supermarket deli is just letting them pass by.

It is true that lots of supermarkets have Twitter feeds, and every once in a while some deli-related Tweet comes across. Unfortunately, it is typically about how cheap the deli wants to give away its ham. There is no personality, no connection.

In contrast, you read the Tweets from the food trucks and you see overflowing enthusiasm and connection. The food truck proprietors mention where they are going to be, of course, but they also mention the food: "The short rib tacos are so good!!!" says BoolBBq. Babys Badass Burgers asks "...will U B joining the BURGER BABES 4 some NITE BITES? Come 4 the SEXIEST JUCIEST BURGER IN LA." BorderGrill announces, "Love Border Grill. The quinoa fritters are fabulous. Enjoy!" LouksToGo shouts out its feature: "LAMB BURGER lamb patty with melted kasseri cheese, honey-mustard tzatziki, spinach, sliced tomato and caramelized onions on a brioche bun!" IndiaJonesCT suggests folks come over and get "...great Indian veggie grub."

It is rare to see a discount price promoted, although once in a while they will do free samples: Followthevan tweeted: "Short line for FREE grilled cheese?! C'mon out..."

And there is much more. They recommend each other, talk about music, street fairs, charity benefits and a lot more. They feel comfortable asking their followers to come out and show their support.

There is an obvious issue here: Those retailers in urban areas are losing lunch business to a bunch of trucks, vehicles that not long ago were popularly called roach coaches. Yet thinking only of that would be missing the forest for the trees. The real issue is that the world is changing, and the supermarket delis are not changing fast enough.

The deli in a supermarket serves a lot of roles. One of the most important is that it is that rare place in a

supermarket where consumers and staff get to interact.

Although all supermarkets acknowledge the importance of micromarketing — recognizing that offering a uniform assortment against a highly diverse population is a recipe for disaster — most seem to stop micromarketing at the level of assortment.

The food truck phenomenon suggests a whole new level of connection with a community that supermarkets delis are neglecting.

The first is variation. You can't study a neighborhood, determine it is Italian or Jewish or rich or poor, come up with an assortment and think you are all set. What the food truck phenomenon is reminding us is that, to paraphrase Walt Whitman, we are all large, and we contain multitudes. In this day and age, the fact that the neighborhood is Italian doesn't mean shoppers don't sometimes want sushi. But the key is that it is not sufficient just to serve shrimp scampi one day; you have to Tweet, blog, e-mail and text the community so the 5 percent of your shoppers who want shrimp scampi all come that day. Then the next day, you have to repeat it all with a short rib grilled cheese sandwich and reach out to the 5 percent that want that.

The second issue is comfort and excitement. Food isn't something that exists in isolation. You have shoppers who like music and art, great beer and sports, dogs and so much more. If you establish that you are connected to all this stuff customers want in their lives, the food also becomes an integral part of their existence, and so does your store.

The third issue is staffing. We are way underestimating the importance of people skills in hiring deli personnel. Now to be No. 1, you need a guy or gal who knows when something is just awesome and can Tweet from the street fair where your store has a booth about the incredible day, and the shoppers, because it is real and the person has credibility, want to head out and be a part of it. Then your employee has to know how to make the party continue the next day at the store.

A lot of executives see things like the food trucks and grumble that they are not paying their fair share of taxes or don't have the rigorous food-safety standards the supermarket does. There is something to all this, but these trucks are tapping into youth, technology, flavor and friendship, while most delis are just slicing the ham. **DB**



James F. Prevora

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by Lee Smith, Publisher

It's All About The Food!

The world is a fast-changing animal that brings with it constant challenges. It challenges how we approach business decisions and how consumers choose the businesses and services they support.

Even in a recession, consumers have limitless choices. The pre-baby boomer generation was limited by geography; today, the world is literally at everyone's doorstep due to the internet, next-day delivery and often hundreds of secondary retailers and restaurants. The growth of restaurant options as well as the growth in the number of times an individual eats out has broadened the average Joe's palate as well as overall expectations for flavor, taste and price.

That's why this month's cover story is so important. High-pressure pasteurization (HPP) is a technical answer to modern challenges. HPP offers a solution for fresh, additive- and preservative-free foods with a shelf life able to meet long-distance transportation times and warehouse considerations.

It is true this technology comes with a cost, but the cost is not so prohibitive as to put products out of sync with a highly competitive market. More important, from a quality standpoint, it levels the playing field with restaurant-quality foodservice options.

Consumer trends affecting supermarket retailing are important because they come with unique challenges. The deli department has always been the retail anomaly; it is unique because it combines the market forces of retailing and foodservice. The competition has always been restaurants as opposed to other supermarkets or supermarket departments. The deli department is dependent on consumers who want fresh, fully cooked and delicious product. Traditionally, delis have faced a supermarket retail philosophy of striving to be the low-cost providers to a mass-market audience.

Contemporary trends include a desire for fresh foods with restaurant-quality flavors and textures as well as lots of variety. In order to provide wholesome, safe and low-cost alternatives, additives, preservatives and shelf-life enhancers are needed. Manufacturers are able to provide quality products but they must take into consideration shipping and the amount of shelf life required by distributors. Most fresh food requires a minimum of 30 days, and the ideal range is 45 to 60 days. Restaurants need only minutes to a few hours from ingredients to mouths.

With the share-of-stomach equally divided between restaurant/foodservice and retail, con-

sumers are no longer willing to sacrifice taste. They know the difference and are no longer willing to accept the off-tastes and higher levels of acidity most long shelf-life products intrinsically offer.

Of course, the elimination of preservatives, whether natural or artificial, directly contradicts consumers' desire for absolute safety. Consumers may demand rare hamburgers and undercooked eggs, but they are not willing to shoulder the resulting inherent risk of food poisoning.

Contending with in-house food preparation as well as dealing with hundreds of stores and thousands of employees puts retailers in impossible situations. Often retailers do not have the space, equipment and trained personnel required to handle raw-food ingredients safely, putting retail delis in a difficult competitive position that requires compromises.

Therefore, when there is a technology that offers at least some of the answers, it behooves every retailer to explore the options. It is also imperative retailers work with their suppliers with the understanding that there is cost that must be passed on to the consumer.

All too often, high gross profit and cheap prices are the supermarket mantras. Consumers didn't reduce their supermarket purchases for low-cost alternatives; they left for quality, variety and convenience. While retailers were competing with one another to offer the lowest price for canned soup and chicken breasts, consumers were leaving for sushi and lasagna.

For over 30 years, supermarkets have not been about food, but rather about being the most efficient distributor. Deli directors have known all along that it is about the food. HPP offers a consumer-focused solution that needs to be explored. **DB**





design
^

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The Future of Food Safety

High-pressure pasteurization turns once futuristic technology into reality

BY LISA WHITE



EDITOR'S NOTE: Foodborne pathogens, which can cause anything from an upset stomach to death, have always been problematic; anyone in the business of selling food is all too aware of the need to control them. In the past, manufacturers turned to additives, preservatives, pH adjusters and salt as ways to limit and/or eliminate pathogens in prepared foods. But these can alter taste and structure — and today's consumers want clean labels, not lists of chemicals they can't pronounce and can't define. So what if there were a way to eliminate pathogens, maintain structural integrity, protect taste and extend shelf life? And what if this new approach to food safety added only pennies to the cost per pound rather than dollars? In this time of economic uncertainty, high-pressure pasteurization — HPP — offers retailers a low-cost, highly effective option for protecting the health of consumers. The future of food safety is here.

Fresher, safer, deli beef



**“in our business, food safety
protects the brand.”**

Guy Giordano, President and CEO

SafePac Pasteurization, LLC and Vincent Giordano Corporation

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High-pressure pasteurization (HPP) makes it possible to kill the majority of harmful pathogens and double the shelf life of prepared foods.

HPP has been around for some time, but it wasn't until the mid-1990s that the technology became viable on a commercial level. In 2004, information about the process finally reached a significant audience, and today an increasing number of prepared-food companies and almost a half dozen commercial tolling operations are using HPP. A commercial tolling operation is a company that performs HPP on a per-pound basis for food manufacturers.

A cold water post-packaging technique, HPP preserves food naturally utilizing extremely high pressure rather than chemicals or heat treatment. In the HPP process, the product is packaged in a flexible container and loaded into a high-pressure chamber filled with cold water. The chamber is then pressurized as a pump transmits equal pressure throughout the package into the food for three to five minutes. The hydrostatic pressure disrupts pathogens' cellular walls.

Because the pressure is transmitted equally on all sides, food retains its shape even at extreme pressures. Bacteria are inactivated at levels of between 58,000 and 87,000 psi (pounds per square inch) and water temperatures of less than 45° F.

The process does not compromise quality; products retain nutrients, appearance, texture, taste and nutritional value. The only thing standing in the way of widespread use of HPP in the deli industry is cost. The equipment and installation investment will set a manufacturer back approximately \$4 million.

"We were the first refrigerated foods manufacturer in the United States to invest in this technology in April 2010," says Mark Sandridge, CEO of Sandridge Food Corp., Medina, OH. "We saw HPP as a way to deliver a better product with fewer preservatives and clean, simple labels."

Guy Giordano, CEO and president of Vincent Giordano Corp., Philadelphia, PA, also serves as president of Safe Pac Pasteurization, an HPP company that opened its doors in November 2006. "We're a toll processor that runs products from Vincent Giordano Corp. and other companies," he says.

Food manufacturers that can't afford the investment in HPP equipment are utilizing the services of commercial tolling companies such as Milwaukee, WI-based American Pasteurization Co. (APC), which provides these services to the food manufacturing industry.

Product is shipped to APC in hermetically sealed packaging that can withstand the



PHOTO COURTESY OF AMERICAN PASTEURIZATION CO.

HPP process. After going through the system, treated product can be labeled, packed in sleeves, boxes or other bulk packaging and sent back to the manufacturer, to its distributor or straight to the end user.

"Customers send us product daily, weekly, monthly or yearly, depending on volumes," says Ed Wabiszewski, APC's vice president of operations. "We have some manufacturers that only send 20,000 pounds a year, while others send 15 million pounds a year."

Because product remains in its final packaging during the HPP process, there is no risk for cross contamination. "Consequently, the vast majority of bacteria that survive other food-safety steps and cross contaminants are killed during this process," says Martin Mitchell, managing director at Plainview, NY-based Certified Laboratories, which provides food-safety testing for the food industry.

The Benefits

Even though Wheeling, IL-based Orval Kent doesn't currently utilize HPP, Bill Schwartz, the company's chief food safety officer and chairman of the Marietta, GA-based Refrigerated Food Association's (RFA) technology committee, thinks it makes a lot of sense. "Our committee visited Avure Technology's facilities in Kent, WA, three years ago [to learn more about HPP]," he says. "People are looking for a longer shelf life and a degree of confidence in salad items; this is one of the potential ways of dealing with it."

"No matter how good a job a company does to combat pathogens, there is always the risk of contamination," Mitchell says. "HPP provides the opportunity to significantly lower the risk factor, without impacting the product's appearance or flavor."

USDA and Health Canada have recognized HPP technology as a valid in-package

kill-step to combat the potential of contamination from harmful pathogens such as salmonella, E. Coli and *Listeria monocytogenes*.

HPP virtually eliminates all harmful bacteria and helps prevent foodborne illness — without the use of chemicals or heat, which can potentially diminish a product's integrity. "This process offers unbelievable shelf life extension that is three to four times longer, without the use of preservatives or extenders," Giordano explains. "It's very much a home run for organic and all natural products since they are virtually sterilized."

With the recent trend toward cleaner labels touting natural ingredients and fewer additives and preservatives, this process offers an alternative that lengthens, rather than shortens, shelf life. As a result, HPP offers an opportunity to substantially reduce shrink in the deli department. "Foods maintain freshness longer, since all the bacteria is destroyed, which can mean expanded distribution," Sandridge says.

In addition, HPP has the ability to infuse flavors into products, providing a full-bodied taste without the use of added sodium, dressings and other flavors. It has even led to an expansion of recipe development in the prepared-food arena.

"This process has broken down barriers in product development and given our chefs creative freedom," Sandridge adds. "Since HPP kills bacteria, we're able to utilize an extensive array of ingredients that previously were not an option due to bacteria and shelf life issues, such as asparagus, grapes, grape tomatoes and fresh herbs."

By offering expanded shelf life, cleaner labels and safer products, HPP is very much on trend. "People are looking for fresh product," APC's Wabiszewski says. "HPP is not a silver bullet, but it is a step in the right direction."

Continued on page 20.

Salsa Equals Deli Sales

America's favorite condiment is no longer just tomato.
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CONSTANT INNOVATION, COMBINED WITH CUTTING-EDGE TASTE TECHNOLOGY — this is what Sandridge Food Corporation provides for today's foodservice and retail industries. A leader in the North America refrigerated foods industry for more than 50 years, Sandridge specializes in refrigerated salads, sides, sauces and specialty dishes that couldn't get any fresher. In addition to these proven products, Sandridge is now offering a new line of reduced sodium fresh soups that brings flavor to the forefront, as well as Pacific Coast Cuisine Premium Seafood Salads and Dips that were designed with the consumer in mind.

REDUCED-SODIUM FRESH SOUPS

Sandridge delivers full-bodied flavor with less salt in its latest line of reduced sodium fresh refrigerated soups introduced in early September. The development of these better-for-you soups supports new USDA guidelines released in February 2011 that recommend sodium intake is reduced to 2,300 milligrams or less per day. Sandridge reduced sodium fresh soups contain less than 750 milligrams of sodium per serving, and several have additional favorable attributes such as preservative free, gluten free and high fiber.

"We wanted to address not only the USDA guidelines on sodium reduction, but also consumers' concerns for robust flavors without all the salt," says Mark D. Sandridge, chief executive officer. "Our chefs matched some of our signature soup taste profiles to develop a new line of reduced sodium refrigerated fresh soups."

Appropriately, new advertisements released by Sandridge ask customers to say, "Hello, TASTE ... Goodbye, Sodium." Sandridge reduced sodium fresh soups are available in the following flavors: Reduced Sodium Cream of Potato Soup with Bacon, Reduced Sodium Chili with Beans, Reduced Sodium Chicken & Dumpling Soup, Reduced Sodium Clam Chowder, Reduced Sodium Herb Tomato Bisque and Reduced Sodium Broccoli & Cheese Soup.

PACIFIC COAST CUISINE PREMIUM SEAFOOD SALADS AND DIPS

The Sandridge Culinary Team also developed new Pacific Coast Cuisine Premium Seafood Salads and Dips. The recipes are made with recognized and trusted ingredients and are small-batch mixed — a philosophy that has built Sandridge's reputation, and the finished product and ingredient statements reflect this.

Additionally, Pacific Coast Cuisine Premium Seafood Salads and Dips are designed to have seafood listed as the first ingredient on the back-of-package ingredient statement — an important detail when marketing Premium Seafood Salads and Dips.

These new products are versatile, offering the consumer many applications from entertaining to the center-of-the-plate. They are also high pressure processed to reduce the risk of damaging product recalls and provide ultimate brand protection, offering the retailer food safety and peace of mind.

Pacific Coast Cuisine Premium Seafood Salads and Dips are available in the following flavors: Coastal Seafood Salad, Crab and Dill Salad, Shrimp and Crab Salad, Crab Slaw, Cajun Crab Dip, Honey Smoked Salmon Dip, and Low Country Crab Dip.

SANDRIDGE FOOD CORPORATION - A LEADER IN THE INDUSTRY

It is clear Sandridge offers dependability, labor savings, ease of preparation and innovation for today's foodservice and retail industries. Along with their broad line of successful products, Sandridge is constantly pushing the envelope to develop new and better-for-you choices such as their reduced sodium fresh soups.

Moreover, Sandridge's new line of Pacific Coast Cuisine Premium Seafood Salads and Dips proves that their fresh, never frozen, products are created by culinary experts, designed to please the taste enthusiast. Pacific Coast Cuisine Premium Seafood Salads and Dips are preserved naturally with cold water using High Pressure Processing (HPP) technology, which was added to their plant in April 2010.

HPP is just one more layer of safety to Sandridge's already stringent safety measures. Sandridge is a USDA-inspected production facility and a certified Safe Quality Food (SQF) 2000 Level 2 Food Manufacturer.

In addition to their signature dishes, Sandridge has the flexibility and unique ability to customize fresh dishes and develop proprietary recipes for customers, via their research and development department — staffed with a very experienced team of accredited chefs and food scientists.



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Continued from page 16.

The Challenges

With all of the benefits come a number of challenges that have put HPP out of reach for some manufacturers. For example, this process is not suitable for all products. "The lower a product's water activity, the lesser the activation level for this process," explains Greg Zaja, vice president of sales and research and development at APC. "This doesn't mean HPP won't work with these items, but the

products would require a longer hold time and higher water pressure [to achieve the same results as other products]."

The aforementioned high cost of the HPP equipment and installation also can be an insurmountable barrier for companies that choose not to use a commercial toll processing company. Companies need to weigh these costs against the cost of a product recall. "A company will never be subject to a recall if HPP is done properly, so what's the value of that when even one recall can put a

company out of business?" Giordano of Vincent Giordano asks.

In addition to being pricey, HPP equipment currently has limited production; the vessels containing product need to be small to properly handle the water pressure needed to treat the food. "Consequently, the throughput is not great, since HPP is accomplished in a batch process," says Certified Laboratories' Mitchell. "We need to see a maturation of this technology, an increase in the equipment's efficiency and a price reduction so food can be put through this process with a cents-per-pound level that makes sense."

The cost of the equipment in relation to the volume of product has kept Orval Kent

**"YOU CAN'T PUT A
PRICE ON PROTECTING
YOUR BRANDS."**

— GUY GIORDANO
VINCENT GIORDANO CORP.

from implementing HPP. "To withstand the cost, we need a product volume that is appropriate," Schwartz explains. "Our product lines have many formulations and pack sizes, so it's difficult to justify the high cost of this equipment as well as the tolling costs. It has to make economic sense."

In addition, HPP must work intrinsically with good manufacturing practices for the full benefits to be realized. According to Wabiszewski. "Manufacturers must still take the proper food-safety steps they did before and then add HPP in the process."

The industry is moving to develop a designation for products that have undergone HPP. "Eventually, prepared-food manufacturers that are not utilizing HPP will be out of business," Giordano notes. "People will pay the extra 10¢ for an 8-ounce package or 20¢ for a pound of food that offers the same quality and increased food safety. You can't put a price on protecting your brands."

The use of this process is on the rise. Last year in its facility, APC ran 30 million pounds of product that ranged from hummus to wet salads and salsa to deli meat. "We have some customers that were limited in the distribution of their product due to the short shelf life," Wabiszewski says. "Using HPP, this same product now has a 120-day shelf life, allowing companies to go country-wide with their brands."

Many in the industry foresee HPP as the future of prepared foods. "This will be the case for the entire fresh foods industry," predicts Sandridge Food's Sandridge. **DB**

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Packaging For Hard Times

Economic difficulties put packaging front and center

BY BOB JOHNSON



PHOTOS COURTESY OF INNOWARE

PACKAGING COMPANIES ARE FACING DIFFICULT AND COMPLEX TIMES. CONSUMERS ARE ANXIOUS ABOUT THE SECURITY AND SAFETY OF THEIR FOOD, AND ALTHOUGH STILL CONCERNED ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT, MANY ARE UNWILLING TO SPEND VERY MUCH TO BACK UP THAT CONCERN.

PRODUCERS ARE WORKING OVERTIME TO DEVELOP PACKAGING THAT MEETS THESE DIVERSE NEEDS AT A PRICE COST-CONSCIOUS RETAILERS AND CONSUMERS CAN ACCEPT. THE INDUSTRY IS DEVELOPING EXTRAORDINARY TECHNOLOGIES THAT ENHANCE SEAL/RESEAL CAPABILITY AND AFFORDABLE PACKAGES THAT ARE EASY TO RECYCLE OR DON'T USE ANY PETROLEUM-BASED MATERIALS.

According to Roman Forowycz, corporate chief marketing officer at Clear Lam Packaging, Elk Grove Village, IL, "Continued pricing pressures make it more important than ever to develop cost savings initiatives for packaging through new material and design technologies." Clear Lam produces a wide range of flexible and rigid plastic packaging, including a line of plant-derived plastics called EarthClear.

In addition, demand for smaller packages holding a single serving is increasing. "Single-portion packaging is becoming more critical to retailers expanding their traditional deli product mix," Forowycz continues. "The challenge is to provide a visually appealing product at a price point that can compete with other QSR [quick serve restaurant] meal options. We're seeing continued movement toward smaller, single-serve and grab-and-go-style packaging. Companies are developing products that are easy to transport and consume."

Other producers are also seeing this trend toward single-serving packages. "Across all types of food products, single-serve or individual-type packaging is being developed. It started two or three years ago and continues to develop momentum. We don't have to eat



PHOTO COURTESY OF CLEAR LAM PACKAGING

the same things, but we can still eat together," notes Dave Fosse, director of marketing, Lindar Corporation, headquartered in Baxter, MN.

Lindar, which produces plastic packaging from different materials, including plant-based materials, for numerous industries including food, counts a single-serve cupcake package among its recent successes. "We've

had a single-serve cupcake package for three years that continues to grow phenomenally," Fosse says.

Although small package options have always been available, single-serve packaging is fueling the trend for individual snacks and quick meals that can be eaten on the go. According to Jeff Lucash, national sales manager at Placon, Madison, WI, "There's a

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trend toward small portions. Consumers are on the go and looking for quick meals including salads, sandwiches and sides. Single portion is very important and is a growing market." Placon makes thermoformed plastic packaging including its recently introduced completely recyclable Ecostar line that forms a clear multi-layer barrier to prevent oxygen from reaching the product.

However, not all consumers are interested in single-serve offerings. "Salads are staying with large portions, while entrées seem to be downsizing," says Jim Adams, director of sales at St. Charles, IL-based Form Plastics Company. "I'm finding a lot of interest in packaging that can contain a whole lunch. I'm also getting more and more requests for crepe holders. Crepes are making a come back." The company began developing custom plastic containers for food retailers more than 30 years ago.

Whatever the size of the package, convenience is a key selling feature. "The market is moving into new packaging that enhances the consumer experience. We're seeing activity in combination kits such as sandwiches and salads or soups and salads. We're also seeing a lot of activity in healthy dips such as premium hummus, salsa and veggie dips," Clear Lam's Forowycz says.

Food-Safety Considerations

The challenge of food safety is giving birth to technological innovations in tamper-proof and resealable packaging.

According to Cheryl Miller, marketing manager at Flair Flexible Packaging Corporation, Appleton, WI, "Flair has patented an alternative to rigid dome and tray containers for deli foods such as roasted chicken and meat offerings. Flair's alternative to rigid dome and tray containers for roasted chicken and meat offerings is the Permazip packaging technology. Permazip boasts a tamper-resistant permanent zipper on a flexible film pouch that ensures food safety while reducing

waste and shipping expense. The Permazip closure eliminates concerns about steam pressure causing deli pouches to open and other tampering concerns. If a permanent seal is desired, the simple easy-to-close pouches eliminate the need for specialized sealing equipment in the deli. Upon sealing, food is kept air-tight and safe from contamination throughout its point of purchase."

Not only does this packaging technology improve food safety at the point of purchase,

but it also makes it possible for consumers to reduce waste after they take the product home. "A secondary reclosable seal can be added below the Permazip for retail customers' use. Studies have shown that consumers may serve or eat directly from the deli pouch, so this reclosable seal adds a lot of functionality in the home setting," Miller adds.

This technology can be used with a wide range of deli products and in a wide range of

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Green Packaging – As in Both Environment and Bottom Line

The demand for environmentally friendly packaging is not slowing down, but it is taking a new turn. In today's down-turned and downsized world, the challenge is finding packaging alternatives that are easy on both the environment and the pocketbook.

"Green is still a big buzzword out there, but people are not willing to pay for it," says Dave Byrne, sales manager at Bardes Plastics Inc., Milwaukee, WI. "All of our containers are PET that has already been recycled once."

Retailers should expect package suppliers to help design a program that

saves resources by reducing waste. "Flair is actively involved with designing packaging for customers that reduces waste and saves on shipping costs, both of which show a respect for the environment," says Cheryl Miller, marketing manager at Flair Flexible Packaging Corporation, Appleton, WI.

Most companies offer post-consumer PET made entirely from recycled material. "The market is moving to more PET-based food packaging due to its ability to have 100 percent recycled content," explains Jeff Lucash, national sales manager at Placon, Madison, WI. "Our customers are also

asking for recyclable packaging options. Currently only bottles are able to be curbside recycled but with the work different organizations are doing, hopefully in the future, packaging will be able to be recycled again. Our goal is to create a completely closed loop system keeping packaging out of landfill."

Many producers offer a variety of plant-based packaging options. According to Dave Fosse, director of marketing at Lindar Corporation, Baxter, MN, "We use INGE0, which is a non petroleum-based package. We also have a post-consumer PET. We removed polystyrene food pack-

package sizes. "A technology like Permazip can be applied to any size pouch, from single servings to entire roasted chickens or meats," Miller says.

Peel-and-reseal options offer both food safety and food freshness advantages. "Peel-

and-reseal technology that will allow processors and retailers to eliminate a rigid lid on their package and replace it with a lidding film that will peel open and then reseal is developing. This new technology works well for a central processor or commissary opera-

tion. The film provides tamper evidence, helps to extend freshness and reduces the weight of the packaging. The consumer is capable of reclosing the package for multiple servings," Clear Lam's Forowycz explains.

Tomorrow's packaging will keep food safe and reduce waste. "More tamper-resistant packaging is coming. We're seeing more requests and opportunities for tamper resistance as well as packaging made from post-consumer recycled materials. With Placon's introduction of EcoStar FG100 PET material, we were recently able to increase our post-consumer content from 35 percent to near 100 percent," Lucash notes.

One hard-times twist to the food-security theme is packaging that is secure and saves money at every step of the operation. "We're trying to find a way to make containers that stay closed but take up as little space as possible. This will reduce shipping costs, warehouse space and store space," Lindar's Fosse says.

The Package As Promoter

The package still serves as a primary promoter of the product by drawing the consumers' eye.

"We're doing well with seasonal specialty packaging — such as football-shaped packaging or Christmas tree ornaments. It's stepping away from traditional packaging. It's pretty much a year-round business. In the summer we do daisy containers, sunflower containers, all sorts of novelty containers," says Dave Byrne, sales manager at Milwaukee, WI-based Bardes Plastics Inc., which has been designing and producing custom plastic containers for six decades.



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aging three years ago.” INGE0 refers to packaging made from plant material, usually corn stalks.

Progress is being made in the effort to develop a wider range of packaging that is entirely free of petroleum. “Companies want to get away from petroleum-based products or Styrofoam,” says Robert Richman, chairman of Be Green Packaging, Santa Barbara, CA. “We have award-winning packages made from all plant fiber including bamboo and bulrush. By figuring out which plant fibers are the strongest, we can come up with a formula that is durable.”

Be Green’s petroleum-free and highly biodegradable packaging made its first major inroads with retailers committed to environmentally friendly packaging.

“Three hundred plus Whole Foods stores have our sushi trays, salad containers and other fiber packages. If you go into a Whole Foods, you’ll see the packaging at the salad bar, at the sushi bar and at the meat department,” Richman says.

This plant-based packaging may have gotten its foothold with Whole Foods, but it’s quickly going mainstream in a big way. “Our business has been doubling year after year. We’re not just in Whole Foods; we’re also in 7-11. We’re in discussions with some major fast-food companies. All these major companies are looking for more sustainable options that are cost effective or cost neutral,” adds Richman.

The cost difference for this highly sustainable option has narrowed substan-

tially because of the rising cost of all petroleum products. “If you’re comparing it to PET, we’re price neutral. If you’re comparing it to Styrofoam, we’re more expensive,” Richman continues. “In the beginning we were more expensive than PET but with the higher cost of oil, we’re cost neutral. It’s still more expensive than Styrofoam, but Styrofoam is sitting in a landfill and leaching chemicals for a thousand years, while we break down in two to four weeks.”

Ecological packaging looks to be the way of the future rather than a short-term trend. “The packaging market is heading toward Euro styling combined with eco-friendly materials,” notes Jim Adams, director of sales, Form Plastics Company, St. Charles, IL. **DB**

To promote effectively, packaging must stand out from the crowd. “We continue to develop products that look different and stand out,” Fosse says.

Nothing makes packaging stand out like bold colors well used. “Flair’s vibrant 10-color

custom reverse rotogravure graphics complement any combination of functional films and sealing alternatives,” Miller adds.

Another way packaging draws attention is to make it possible to see the product. “We make custom products. For example, we

make PET with an anti-fog solution,” says Robert Richman, chairman of Be Green Packaging, Santa Barbara, CA. Be Green specializes in an award-winning range of plant-based, tree-free packaging in a growing line of products. **DB**



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Italian Imports Coming On Strong

Italian cheeses offer something to everyone

BY KAREN SILVERSTON

Italy's cheesemaking goes back thousands of years but there are still opportunities for new taste discoveries. "The awareness of Italian cheeses and dishes varies among consumers in the U.S.," says Antoine Troegeler, marketing manager with Lactalis Deli, Inc., distributor of the Galbani brand in the United States.

Some consumers have a strong connection to Italian culture through family, friends or travel. Others are less familiar with Italian culture in general. "If you can explain the special history behind the cheese to consumers, then it will mean something to them and they will want to share it with their family and friends," says Margaret Cicogna, Italian cheese specialist and consultant to Elizabeth, NJ-based Atalanta Corporation.

"Italians are very proud. They still make many cheeses the way they were made [for centuries]. They care a great deal about their history and tradition, and have kept to this.

The most important thing to them is for it to be genuine, the way it always was," says Cicogna. The system of name protection (PDO) backed up with a certification seal from a government body designates the origin and authenticity of traditional foods.

Three imported Italian cheeses are about to become better understood, thanks to *Legends from Europe*, a recently launched three-year program. Funded in part by the E.U. and Italy, the program is a collaborative effort to raise awareness and drive sales by reaching out directly to consumers. The three cheeses are Grana Padano, Parmigiano Reggiano and Montasio. Two non-cheese items — prosciutto di Parma and prosciutto di San Daniele — make up the promotion.

"They're being promoted in the best way possible — getting consumers to taste the products," says Ruth Lowenberg, senior vice president of Lewis & Neale, New York, NY. Support for the tastings includes demo kits

supplying everything from hats to tablecloths — and training workshops for deli staff and chefs. Information about the program can be found at LegendsFromEurope.com.

Many people don't realize the prominence of Grana Padano. In Italy, it's the best-known cheese. The production area spans five regions — Piedmont, Lombardy and Veneto, and parts of Trentino and Emilia Romagna — where it sustains the farmers, their farms and their cows.

Best known in the U.S. is Parmigiano Reggiano, nearly all of which is made in Emilia Romagna, plus production in part of Mantova, a province in Lombardy.

Anna Gallo, director of marketing for Savello USA, Wilkes-Barre, PA, is one of the importers participating in the *Legends from Europe* program. Gallo is organizing more than 200 demos. "At least one person in the store is being trained to know and talk about the products and conduct the tasting,



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so the expertise will remain in the store after the promotion,” she says.

Consumers may be unaware that both Parmigiano Reggiano and Grana Padano are lactose-free, easy-to-digest, high-quality nutrient sources, and risk-free for pregnant women, young children and the elderly.

For those on the go, Il Villaggio Parmigiano Reggiano Bites provide nearly one-fourth the daily recommended calcium intake in individually wrapped, 80-calorie, 20-gram/0.7 ounce portions of 16-month Parmigiano Reggiano PDO.

Asiago PDO is produced in Veneto and in Trentino Alto Adige, where it originated. Asiago and Speck Alto Adige teamed up in the *Genuine Taste* program, running through 2011, aided in part by the E.U. and Italy. Information can be found on the website genuinetaste.org. Among the recipes that could be featured in the deli is a mouthwatering breakfast sandwich.

To PDO producers, imitation isn't flattery — it's illegal. And if a PDO cheese is altered in a way not specified by its Consorzio, it cannot carry the certification seal. “This is not just a piece of cheese. This is centuries of devotion and people pouring their heart and soul into one work. If the deli manager is trained and enthusiastic about it, he will convey that it is special,” explains Atalanta's Cicogna.

Training is a must to enable retail staff to differentiate between name-protected PDO product and other products — especially when Italian-style cheeses are merchandised together with cheeses from Italy — and to distinguish the characteristics of cheeses marketed at more than one stage of maturity.

Another staff training essential is learning how to identify cheeses that resemble one another. “At one time there were few dairies. Cheeses were made in communal latterie turnarie — revolving dairies. Anyone who had some cows and wanted to make cheese would take his turn in the dairy. He took his finished cheese home and called it nostrano — our cheese. There still are cheeses called Nostrano. In addition, each town would have its cheese. The cheesemakers would all use the same forms, so all the cheeses were the same size and shape. Things changed after the First World War, when farmers grouped together in cooperatives. But if you visit Trentino, Veneto or Friuli, or Piedmont and Lombardy where cheesemaking has also been the backbone of the rural mountain lifestyle, you'll find many cheeses are the same shape,” says Cicogna.

Friuli, Trentino and Veneto

Montasio, named for the highest peak of the Western Julian Alps, originated in Friuli

Venezia Giulia, the region known for exquisite prosciutto di San Daniele and wines. Produced in Friuli and in northeastern Veneto, Montasio is always made from milk of cows in the same zone.



Not all Montasio — a firm, raw-milk cheese — is the same. Age produces many variations. Young Montasio — called Fresca and aged two to four months — is scrumptious combined with potatoes and olive oil in the traditional Friuli dish, Frico with Potatoes. At six months, Montasio is referred to as Mezzano and has a wonderful depth of taste on its own — and is well priced. Montasio at 10 months or older is fully matured and called Stagionato. At 18 months, it is extra matured and called Stravecchio; it tastes like butter-scotch. Aged Montasio wheels can be displayed out of refrigeration.

For something out of the ordinary, consider Vezzena or “the emperor's cheese” — an aromatic raw-milk summer pasture cheese made in Trentino that was the favorite of Emperor Franz Josef. Vezzena resembles aged Asiago PDO and is not considered an imitation.

In Veneto, Monte Veronese PDO is made in the province of Verona, a fertile area with a temperate climate year-round — the weather phenomenon of the Monti Lessini range. “Available fresh, medium and aged, the nicest is the fresh. It's similar in texture to fresh Toma Piemontese PDO, and it's delightful,” says Cicogna.

Also from Veneto, the new, fresh goat's milk Robiola di Capra Cuor di Tartufo is individually packaged in easy-to-handle modified atmosphere bowls that keep it fresh and moist, and allow a longer shelf life without altering its character. Latteria Perenzin in San Pietro di Feletto sources truffles from Acquafredda in Marches and fresh goat's milk from an organic cooperative in Belluno.

Beautiful cheeses soaked in magnificent wines or wine marcs trace back to older times when farmers used ashes or grape pomace when they lacked the oil needed to rub their cheeses. But master cheese agers — *stagionatori* or *affinatori* — have transformed inventions born of necessity into artful maturation techniques.

Arriving for the holidays, Ciuco al Vino Rosso comes from the Formaggi di Cantina line created by Veneto's Antonio Carpenedo, master cheese ager for La Casearia Carpenedo Affinatori in Treviso. According to Charles Duque, project manager, Anco Fine Cheese, Fairfield, NJ, “The wheels are placed in small tanks suitable for food and covered with grape pomace.” The Raboso Piave grapes and the milk come from Veneto and the resulting wine and cheese are made there. Ciuco, which means drunk in a Venetian dialect, is full-flavored and a little spicy, with fruity sensations reminiscent of wild blackberries and sour cherries; it pairs well with red wine.

To make an impression, try La Casearia Carpenedo Basajo, a creamy Blue Cheese made from raw sheep's milk, then aged in Passito — a sweet white wine from Sicily's Pantelleria Island. Basajo pairs well with sweet wine.

Piedmont and Lombardy

From Piedmont, surrounded on three sides by the Alps and famous for its vine-covered hills, come Raschera PDO and Toma Piemontese PDO. Especially savory and full of character, both also come with affordable price tags.

A more exclusive Raschera, made in the mountains, is available from Piedmont's Ocelli Agrinatura in Farigliano, which is also known for Testun al Barolo.

“Every valley in Piedmont has its own Toma and they eat the cheese in their own manner,” says Cicogna. Toma Piemontese is aged a minimum of 60 days. The fine, delicate paste can be cut through. It's not soft or spreadable, but not hard and grainy.

A tomino is small, fresh and rindless. Tomini in oil are traditional, spreadable Piedmont delicacies. Packaging ranges from practical 150-gram containers for self-service cheese cases to picturesque large glass jars. Conrado Tomini in Oil marinate in sunflower oil with herbs, peppers, or truffles. They're eaten with salad or spread on toast.

Todd Druhot, cheese specialist for Atlanta Foods International, Atlanta, GA, is working with Carlo Fiori, master cheese ager for Luigi Guffanti 1876 in Arona with a focus on high-end mixed-milk cheeses aged by Guffanti.

“We're adding to the Alta Langa cheeses



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we've been offering. We're getting more and more requests for the mixed milk cheeses made in Piedmont," says Druhot.

Two-milk cheeses such as Robiola Bosina and tiny Langherino and three-milk cheeses such as La Tur and Rocchetta are uniquely appealing. Bosina and Langherino arrive wrapped and require no special handling, but La Tur and Rocchetta should be put in a cup or clamshell to protect them from being smashed; they're best merchandised behind the glass.

"The U.S. market has expanded for these. The milk supply is good, and on fresh cheeses, you don't have to wait for 18 months as with a Parmigiano Reggiano to be able to export the cheese, so they can react more quickly to the increase of demand. These cheeses are loved and it helps the whole area because people want to try other cheeses from the region," explains Atlanta's Druhot.

"Everyone desires something new now and then. I'd like to see more seasonal selections in the retail chain. Retailers can ask the importers or distributors what they're doing well with — what they feel could sell in your selection. Their recommendation can help you limit the selection to focus in on a few items, so they are successful for you," continues Druhot.

In rugged alpine Lombardy just east of Piedmont, in the province of Sondrio, Valtellina Casera PDO is made year-round. The cheese is from whole milk of Brown Alpine cows that feed on fresh pasture in summer and on strictly controlled natural feed in winter. "A very good value, this delicious cheese is best at about four months," says Atlanta's Cicogna.

Taleggio PDO, made in Lombardy, Piedmont and Veneto, is one of Italy's most important and historic cheeses. Many Taleggio PDO producers also offer regional non-PDO cheeses and signature cheeses.

"We have Taleggio PDO, and we have Quader de Cavra, a soft washed-rind cheese, made from full-cream goat's milk, the same size as a Taleggio. It cannot be called Taleggio because the PDO specifies cow's milk, but it, too, is a phenomenal cheese," says Savello USA's Gallo.

Capriziola is a blue-veined 16-pound wheel made from full-cream 100 percent goat's milk. "This is an aged raw-milk cheese from Carozzi Formaggi in Pasturo — the same producer who also makes our Gorgonzola PDO," says Gallo. "It starts out mild but becomes increasingly flavorful and has a nice lingering aftertaste. The texture's not as creamy as Gorgonzola Dolce and not as firm as Piccante. You could use the same pairing concept as with Gorgonzola — honey and

pear. A chef recently paired it with apple and decorated it with cinnamon bark and honey."

Mascarpone layered with Gorgonzola is luxurious without being too expensive. "American supermarkets can handle it because they don't have to cut it — it's available precut in trays. That extra dollar for air transport ensures freshness for a longer time," says Cicogna.

From Valtaleggio, an alpine valley in Lombardy, comes Roccolo, named for the little round huts used by local quail hunters. Made in round forms, it is aromatic like Taleggio and tart and slightly crumbly like Salva — the block-shaped cheese made to save milk left over after making Taleggio. Softer near the rind, Roccolo is more chalky white in the center.

Peninsula and Islands

Although we can't enjoy Mozzarella di Bufala Campana PDO within 10 hours of its being made as Italians do, U.S. demand is so high that it's driving air shipments. It must be eaten fresh, while still springy. If poked, it should spring back to its original shape.

Awareness of Pecorino is growing. "We're getting requests for different ages and for Pecorinos from different places. We also have chefs who used to buy generic request-fulvi or Locatelli," says Druhot.

More than 100 Pecorinos at DiPalo's Fine Foods, New York, NY, reflect the amazing range. "The many variations of terrain within Italy's regions not only lend themselves to differences in olive varieties and grape varieties — each also gives different characteristics to milk and how it translates into cheese. We need to explain to the consumer that there is tremendous diversity in Pecorino," says Italian cheese expert Lou DiPalo.

Il Forteto Cooperative in Mugello makes Oro Antico, a lauded aged Pecorino Toscano PDO rubbed with olive oil. "What the sheep are eating in Tuscany is richer because they graze from the Apennines to the sea, so Toscano is more delicate than the earthiness in Pecorino Sardo PDO or the stronger flavor of Pecorino Siciliano PDO," says Cicogna. For Boschetto al Tartufo, Il Forteto blends cow's milk with sheep's milk and pieces of real truffle.

Another lovely Pecorino is wrapped in walnut leaves. Sicily is known for young pecorino with pistachios, olives, even saffron — which was thought to increase women's fertility. All are very different from Toscano.

Pecorino di Fossa, from Emilia Romagna and Marches, is seasonal. *Fossa*, or pit, refers to the aging regimen. Pits are sanitized by fire and lined with rushes and grasses. Cheese in burlap bags, hermetically sealed, is buried in the pits in August and unearthed in Novem-



PHOTO COURTESY OF CONSORTIUM FOR THE PROTECTION OF GRANA PADANO

ber. "It goes back to when farmers were hiding cheese from the French and Vatican armies. As the fat drains off — the cheeses, of course, are not being turned — they acquire strange shapes," relates Cicogna.

Savello di Roma has a recipe that dates back 2,000 years. It's dependent on milk from the indigenous Comisana and Sopravissana breeds of sheep still raised in Lazio, grazing rich pasture that varies seasonally. These are the same breeds Roman soldiers brought with them on their campaigns. The milk makes this cheese unique. "It's very versatile. It has a nice aroma, a pleasant taste and is slightly sharp. You can serve it simply with a cracker or in a more sophisticated pairing with Moscato wine jelly or a glass of Chianti," says Gallo.

Sheep's milk cheese is Sardinia's quintessential product. For multimillennia, generations on this island have tended Sarda sheep. For 50 years, Ferruccio Podda S.p.A. in Sestu has produced the compact 8-pound wheel named Podda Classico, a *misto* — a mixture of cow's and sheep's milk. "When you taste it, you're reminded of the grainy texture of a Parmigiano Reggiano, and the flavor will be sweet. You can grate it or serve it with a balsamic wine jelly," adds Gallo.

Sardinia's signature pecorino is lightly smoked Fiore Sardo PDO, made from raw sheep's milk — delicious served with jams, mostarda or honey.

Italy — the nation — is celebrating her 150th birthday, but when it comes to cheese, it's all about the 20 regions. We may not be in Italy, but with the help of an educated retail staff, we can eat and drink as if we were.

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The American Cheese Society Winners

Judges pick the “best” cheeses in North America

BY PATTI ORTON

Crossing an international border for the first time this past August, the 2011 American Cheese Society (ACS) Conference descended on Montreal with 1,676 cheeses — a record number. “This was the largest-ever competition for ACS and we were thrilled to have such robust participation with our Canadian neighbors at our first international conference,” says Christine Hyatt, ACS president and owner of Scottsdale, AZ-based Cheese Chick. “It is great to forge even deeper bonds on both sides of the border. We can all unite and stand behind great cheese!”

This year four cheeses claimed a Best in Show award, with a tie for first runner up.

Rogue River Blue won Best in Show for the second time. Crafted at Rogue Creamery, Central Point, OR, this seasonal cheese begins with sustainably certified raw milk from Brown Swiss and Holstein cows. It's captured during the autumnal equinox specifically for this product, explains Francis Plowman, marketing director. The cheese is wrapped in Syrah grape leaves hand plucked in nearby Medford. The leaves are first infused with Clear Creek pear brandy distilled from local pears. The judges valued the honor to terroir and the expansive spectrum of flavor. “Its well-aged flavor tastes of brandy, fruit and burnt cream. It include hints of sweet pine, wild ripened berries, hazelnuts and morels,” says Plowman.

Due to its seasonality, Rogue River Blue, which also won Best in Show in 2009, is in limited supply. This year, the creamery made about 4,000 wheels, which are not expected to last through the 2011 holiday season, Plowman reports.

“I will always remember the first time I tasted this cheese — and almost every time since — and thought it was magnificent,” recalls Max McCalman, an ACS Best in Show judge, dean of curriculum/maître fromager of the Artisanal Cheese Center in New York City and author of three cheese books including *Mastering Cheese, Lessons for Connoisseurship from a Maître Fromager*. “It



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has consistently remained one of my favorites. The cheese is beautifully balanced in its flavor profile. It's a 'big-flavored' cheese but the salt is in check and the blue note does not overwhelm the other flavors."

Rogue's cheesemaker Cary Bryant "has taken everything he knows about microbiology and applied it to cheesemaking," says Neville McNaughton, a cheesemaking consultant and founder of CheezSorce, St. Louis, MO. "He understands what makes great cheese."

McNaughton's client, Mariposa Dairy in Ontario, tied for first runner up with its Lindsay Bandaged Goat Cheddar. "We were totally floored with the award," says Bruce Vandenberg, co-owner of Mariposa with his wife Sharon. "We haven't been making this cheese for years and years," he clarifies, debunking the notion that a lifetime of product development is a prerequisite for masterful cheesemaking.

Named after Vandenberg's hometown, Lindsay Bandaged Goat Cheddar "was judged as a great cheese, not as a goat cheese. This is significant. The potential in goat cheeses has never been harnessed," states McNaughton, who emphasizes the cheese edged out its bandaged cow-milk



PHOTO COURTESY OF CARR VALLEY CHEESE COMPANY

counterparts.

Due to its fullness, butteriness and roundness, "It's a red wine cheese," McNaughton adds. "It also makes the best macaroni and cheese on Earth."

Twenty percent of the goat milk comes from the Vandenberg's herd, the balance from local dairies. Prior to the win, Mariposa made one weekly batch in a small vat. Post Montreal, Vandenberg has doubled it in

anticipation of demand. Even so, availability is expected to remain scarce.

Carr Valley Cave Aged Marisa tied for first runner up Best in Show. According to Sid Cook owner, cheesemaker and self-proclaimed floor sweeper at Carr Valley Cheese Company, LaValle, WI, "It's an American Original." With milk from the Sheep Dairy Cooperative, Cook builds the cheese like an oil painting. "[The wheels] are dipped in apple cider vinegar, water and rubbed with salted butter. Native molds are grown on the surface. Some of the native flora include *camemberti*, *roqueforti* and *brevi*. It also gets some inoculation from the wood." Cook uses maple boards and ages the Marisa for 12 months. "It's a very clean environment with 91 to 92 percent humidity and 53° year-round."

Cook describes Marisa, which is named after his daughter, as having "a bright, fresh flavor with sheep notes and a citric, floral flavor on the front of the tongue. It has a fruity, earthy and umami finish which comes from cave aging."

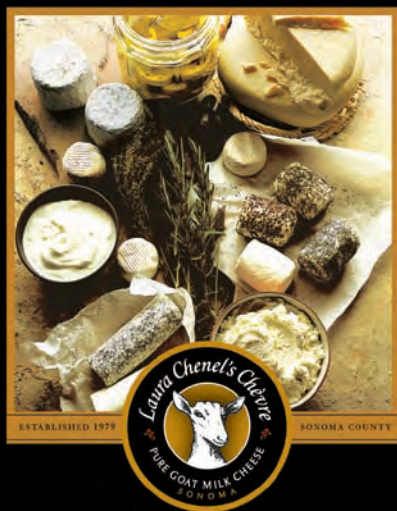
"This cheese keeps racking in the medals, deservedly so," Artisanal's McCalman explains. "The texture is spot-on, the 'sheepy' flavor is present but clean."

Carr Valley is well stocked with Cave Aged Marisa, although Cook cautions holiday orders should be placed early.

Second runner up was Quebec's Fromagerie du Presbytère with its farmstead Louis d'Or. The fourth generation farm is owned by cheesemaker Jean Morin and his brother Dominick.

According to ACS rules, farmstead cheeses must be created using milk from the creamery's farm. Louis d'Or milk comes from a specific herd comprised of 75 percent Holstein and 25 percent Jersey cows. The milk is certified organic and used raw. "The cows eat dry hay only and this is very impor-

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tant,” says Marie-Chantal Houde, cheesemaker at Fromagerie du Presbytère. “Silage could result in gas or cracks in the paste and this is very bad for any cheesemaker.”

“Louis d’Or is a French inspired recipe, a combination of Gruyère and Comté,” she continues. “It is a 40-kilo wheel washed with brine and red bacteria. The bacterium gives the rind its orange color. It must be aged a minimum of nine months, up to 24 months.” The winning cheese was a 24-month.

Certainly aging takes a toll on availability, which Houde describes as “very low.” Louis d’Or “is only available in Quebec and Canada in general.” However, the creamery ramped up production earlier this year.

According to Artisanal’s McCalman, “This was the first time that I tasted this cheese. I place it alongside the best of similar styles of Europe. It reminds me of an Abondance. Now, if we can just get it here in the U.S.!”

Reflecting on the top four, Cheese Chick’s Hyatt states, “Without a doubt, these cheeses rise to the top, showcasing the skill and art of their maker and the quality of their raw ingredients. One thing that was particularly interesting was that the Canadian cheeses that placed also won top awards in the Canadian Cheese Society awards earlier in the year. Both the Rogue and Carr Valley selections have won acclaim in many other contests. I think they do exemplify the best cheeses our cheesemakers are producing today.”

Trends

“Each of the winners represents at least one significant cheese trend,” notes Marilyn Wilkinson, director of national product communications for the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board, Madison, WI. “Research confirms that a preference for bold flavors is growing. Here in Wisconsin, we track specialty cheese production, and Blue cheese is one of the fastest growing in this category. When you combine this stronger flavor preference with the handmade qualities that artisanal cheeses represent, you can see that the ACS category and winners in it fit this trend perfectly.”

“The farmstead category represents a couple trends that we see in food and specifically cheese. One of these is the trend that’s sometimes called ‘Small is big.’ Consumers are shunning mega-company, mass-produced or industrially produced foods for those that are made with small-batch, sustainable techniques. Farmstead cheeses certainly fall into this category,” Wilkinson adds. “Along with this, the farmstead movement often includes the desire of consumers to buy locally and ‘know’ the food producer.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF FROMAGERIE DU PRESBYTERE

Tips for Retailers

Sampling will get more consumers to try these cheeses and cross-merchandising will give them ideas on pairing and usage.

“Sample it. It will sell,” is Carr Valley’s Cook’s straightforward advice. Cross-merchandising it will also spur sales. He says big red wines, such as an old vine Zinfandel, pair well with Cave Aged Marisa. “Beer goes well, too — the darker, heavier beers.” Cook cooks with his American original too, “Just last night I had kind of a Philly sandwich, with shaved steak and grilled onions and peppers. I melted Marisa over it. It was to die for.”

According to Houde, Louis d’Or is “really good but not many people know about it. It’s quite new.” She invites people to taste it with coffee. “With the cheese in your mouth, sip a little espresso rather than wine,” she explains. “The warmth of the coffee will bring out the aromatics and the flavors will explode!” As to usage ideas, she says, “I like it with wild mushrooms. It is also good for fondue, fresh at room temperature and with pasta.”

The prices of top-quality artisan cheeses can elicit sticker shock for consumers new to the category. “It’s crucial to educate the consumer they are worth it,” Wilkinson



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARIPOSA DAIRY

advises. “Because artisanal cheeses are comparatively expensive, they will tend not to be an ingredient so it’s important to suggest how to enjoy the cheese with accompaniments. [They provide] a great opportunity for cross-merchandising with fresh and dried fruits, jams, chutneys, nuts, specialty breads and crackers, beer, wine, bottled cocktails.”

For Mariposa’s Vandenberg, it’s all about the tale. “Find the story. Know the story. Promote the story.” He encourages retailers to contact their distributors for the details that distinguish the cheeses. “We have more customers who are looking for a really high-end deli, who want a piece of cheese to take home for a conversation piece. They want a cheese where they can invite a couple over and tell the story.”

DB

Any Way You Slice It ...

... pizza is big business for delis

BY ALAN RICHMAN

If every penny spent on pizza each year in the United States were donated to the government, it wouldn't wipe out the national debt, but it would make a dent — \$37 billion is a big hunk of cash. It's nice to know delis are ideally suited to pick up a large slice of this pie.

According to Alan Hoover, general manager of Jane's Dough Foods, a division of Columbus, OH-based Donatos Pizza, "We see the pizza market as an exciting place to be. Demand is growing for healthier alternatives — like our Jane's Dough Harvest Wheat line — gluten free, flatbread, breakfast pizzas, dessert pizzas, and more eclectic toppings.

"The beauty of deli section offerings is that they provide ultimate convenience to the consumer," he adds.

At the deli, Hoover explains, consumers have optimum control. They can avail themselves of ready-to-eat pies or slices, or opt for take-and-bake meal options for use at a later time. Sometimes they will do both.

"Competition has picked up in today's market," says Alan Hamer, vice president of sales and marketing for Stefano Foods of Charlotte, NC. "Aggressive advertising by both the home delivery and frozen foods industries has put volume and price pressure on deli pizza." This, he suggests, is what gives the double whammy of "an in-store hot and a take-and-bake program" such importance.

"We've noted that the select group of retailers that pursues both approaches has done well despite these forces," he continues. "Stefano's has the capability to supply in-store production components such as frozen dough and a par-baked product with 'fresh-baked' character for a consistent program regardless of merchandising format."

How to Increase Sales

Consistency is a much-applauded attribute. Liz Hertz, marketing director for Nevada, IA-based Burke Corporation, says there are three things a deli retailer must do to increase sales of pizza, and the first is to



"ensure a consistent, quality product, starting with high-quality ingredients and good training." The other two: make sure that regular deli customers know pizza is available; and promote pizza with free sampling and other promotional activities.

Peter Bozzo, vice president of sales, and Marylyn Batthish, national sales and marketing manager, at Molinaro's Fine Italian Foods Ltd., Mississauga, ON, Canada, urge delis to "offer value in quality and consistency." To separate themselves from the "herd," meaning pizzerias and the frozen category, the two executives say a deli must provide "a good product supported by unique promotions that capture the impulse buyer."

This last suggestion is especially important. As Chris Valsamos, vice president of Hauppauge, NY-based Castella, points out, "Pizza doesn't sell itself. Consumers need a reason to eat your pizza. Add a new twist or combination, making it trendy. Castella's gourmet vegetables, gathered from all around the globe, can revitalize the traditional pizza by making the ordinary extraordinary."

He recommends delis advertise pizza more heavily. "The best time to increase marketing efforts is during slower periods because there is more competition," says Valsamos. It's important to connect with customers, he adds. "Today's consumers demand to know more and more about the

products they buy. If you engage them with product knowledge and customer interaction, then they will come back to you and be your loyal customer forever."

New Boston, MI-based Champion Foods' national marketing manager Peter Smith calls on retailers to "dedicate shelf space to a take-and-bake program and to merchandise it heavily." Take-and-bake pizza is not usually a planned purchase, he explains, so consumers need to be reminded to look for the product in the case. Champion, which supplies the market with both branded and private label take-and-bake choices, offers promotional point-of-sale materials to help make pizza more visible and encourage additional sales.

Jane's Hoover stresses an "exciting, well-lit, and well-organized display section — utilizing professional signage, product sampling, and promotions to draw shoppers to the area. Make it a destination! Have at least four different pizza choices for consumers to consider." His company sells both Donatos brand and private-label take-and-bake pizzas, as well as a variety of dough products in other shapes and sizes.

"Add a special rotational item to spice up the variety from time to time," Hoover

advises. "Do special events — especially during Super Bowl, Lent, March Madness, football season, Halloween, and right before Thanksgiving. Tie in with videos, soft drinks, prepackaged salads and breadsticks. Remember: Friday and Saturday are usually the big selling days during the week, so take full advantage of those days."

Delorio Foods of Utica, NY, "prides itself on manufacturing the highest quality pre-made pizza dough on the market," says John Tackabury, marketing coordinator. "We provide the pizza industry with both frozen raw dough and par-baked shells." His best advice for increasing sales is to keep menus new and up-to-date. "Offering a specialty pizza a couple days a week will increase the interest and keep your program exciting. Another option is offering a combination package such as pizza and breadsticks, or a free drink with a purchase of two slices."

Flavors in Favor

Two or three decades ago, pizza was just pizza — dough, cheese, sauce, and maybe sausage or pepperoni. Then came Sicilian. And deep dish. And more. Nowadays, you need a scorecard to keep up with all the ingredients, toppings, styles, shapes and sizes.

At Connie's Pizza, a Chicago area chain, there are separate menus for the dining room, parties and events, catering, and carryout and delivery. Available toppings include a dozen veggies (artichokes, bell peppers, black olives, broccoli, giardiniera — a spicy Italian pickled vegetable mixture— green olives, jalapeño peppers, mushrooms, onions, sliced tomatoes, spinach and zucchini), 11 meats (bacon, capicola, chicken, ground beef, ground turkey, ham, Italian beef, meatballs, pepperoni, salami and sausage), and "other good stuff" (anchovies, BBQ sauce, Cheddar cheese, crushed garlic, pineapple, and Provolone cheese). Pity the customer who orders one with everything — he'll need a forklift to carry it home.

Connie's offers artisan crust, thin crust, Connie's middleweight crust, deep-dish crust, stuffed pizza (filled with Mozzarella cheese and covered in sauce), and the original "26th Street Style" (with no sauce on top).

Schaumburg, IL-based Nation Pizza, which supplies products to Connie's and other clients, describes itself as a "one-stop shop" for all things pizza. The company offers "everything from pre-made frozen pizzas to individual ingredients like crusts, dough balls, and fresh-tasting sauces,



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With so many variations out there, it's hard to identify just one as being dominant. Smith says a traditional Midwest crust is the most popular style among Champion Foods customers. But Hoover of Jane's Dough Foods says thin crust is the most preferred.

Local and regional tastes sometimes make a difference. According to Burke's Hertz, "Typically the Northeast is very loyal to traditional pizza combinations, while Chicago loves its deep-dish style pizza. In the Midwest, customers seem to be more likely to order meat toppings; and the West Coast is at the forefront of new and trendy pizzas." Burke manufactures fully cooked ethnic and specialty meats for restaurants and foodservice, featuring hand-pinched style Italian sausage, beef and pork toppings, meatballs, pepperoni,

bacon, Canadian-style bacon, chicken and beef strips, shredded meats, Mexican-style meats, and natural and organic toppings for custom and private-label product lines.

Just for the Health of It

The health trend shows up in the pizza category. Hertz sees strong interest in gluten-free offerings. "The biggest challenge is the production method," she advises. "Cross-contamination from gluten-containing components must be prevented at both the manufacturer's plant and the pizza shop. Consumers seem to have a greater interest in 'good-for-you' products, which plays out in many ways — more use of local foods, more vegetable options, leaner meats and poultry, whole grains and reduced sodium."

Delorio's Tackabury states, "We've noticed the demand for wheat and specialty diets, such as gluten free, increase over the past few years. I suspect these will continue to grow in the years to come."

Rocked, Not Wrecked, by Recession

With so much going for it, it might be assumed the deli pizza sector is recession-proof. Well, not exactly. Sources acknowledge industry sales dipped at the depths of economic upheaval. But they also assert that the industry is now back on track and experi-

encing growth.

Champion's Smith even suggests tough times are helping the category because people are eating more meals at home. "A good take-and-bake program is an ideal way to capitalize on this trend," he says.

Bozzo and Batthish say Molinaro's — a company whose core items are fully topped pizzas and pizza crusts, calzones, pizza kits and specialty breads such as focaccia and flatbreads — sees today's marketplace as "very price-competitive," with private label impacting branded products. Nonetheless, they conclude, deli pizza will make its comeback at the expense of pizzerias. In their judgment, the deli allows consumers to "realize significant savings without having to compromise on quality."

"Who doesn't love pizza?" asks Castella's Valsamos. Noting pizza is "very much part of the American way of life," he reports sales have been increasing since the beginning of 2010.

"All in all, the pizza sector has done considerably well, considering the present state of our economy," says Tackabury. "Material costs have increased due to weather and world economic events, but our sales have continued to grow steadily. People may not be buying a new car, but they continue to buy their favorite Friday night meal." **DB**

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Fried Chicken: Consider the Possibilities

Maturity doesn't have to mean the end of growth

BY BOB JOHNSON

The fried chicken category is very mature, but there continues to be steady growth for this comfort-food favorite even if more health-conscious consumers are anxious about any sort of fried food.

"According to Perishables Group data, the category is growing, but modestly. Year-over-year volume growth is around 4 percent or so. When you look across the total retailer landscape, most of the industry growth is occurring at five or six retailers who have a focus against the category — the rest of the industry is flat to down," says Eric LeBlanc, director of sales development for deli and convenience stores at Tyson Foods, Inc., Springdale, AR. Tyson has grown into one of the largest producers of chicken, meat and pork products and meals since it was founded 76 years ago.

This is modest growth for the category as a whole, but delis willing to put the resources into a quality fried chicken program may have possibilities for growth far greater than 4 percent.

Although growth is steady but modest for the fried chicken category as a whole, it is downright meteoric for higher-end product. "Demand for fresh fried chicken is increasing 20 to 25 percent annually," says Gerry Hays, president of Charley Biggs Food Company, Noblesville, IN. "There is a demand for quality product at the deli. If you're doing a frozen chicken program and you switch to fresh, you will see tremendous growth." Charley Biggs started seven years ago with a specialty in helping retailers develop chicken programs built on fresh chicken.

This growth in demand for higher quality fresh fried chicken is part of a general trend of consumers looking to the deli to provide restaurant-quality food at a more affordable price. "People are coming to the deli instead of middle market restaurants because the price point at the deli is better than at middle market restaurants. This started picking up momentum in 2008, and it's continuing to grow," Hays says. "There is a massive trend of grocery store chains moving back into the



PHOTO COURTESY OF TYSON FOODS, INC.

All Oils Are Not Created Equal

The oil is the area of a fried chicken program that can make the most important difference to health-conscious consumers. And the single easiest way to make the oil healthier is to use oil that is as low as possible in saturated fats.

"Oils that are naturally stable typically are elevated in either saturates or monounsaturates. Both types of oil classes are excellent frying mediums," says Roger Daniels, director of research and development at Bunge Oils, St. Louis, MO. "In the deep-fat frying category, frying oils serve principally as heat transfer mediums. The water, which is inherent in the chicken, is driven from the chicken during frying allowing for the development of the characteristic fried-chicken look and appearance. From a healthier options perspective, oils that are high in monounsaturates, such as high-oleic canola oil, are a better option than one that is higher in saturated fats." Bunge is a century-old integrated firm involved in the full range of cooking oils from the soy and canola fields to the finished product.

Common vegetable oils vary in their saturated fat levels. "There are many different deep-frying oils that can be used," explains Angela Pateman, marketing coordinator at Richardson Oilseed Limited, Winnipeg, MB, Canada. Generally oil is healthier than shortening, and even within the oil category the saturated fat levels are very different. Canola oil being the lowest at 7 percent saturated fat, soybean oil at 15 percent saturated fat and palm oil at 51 percent saturated fat. Richardson Oilseed Limited products are all canola based." Richardson, the largest privately

owned agribusiness firm in Canada, is involved in the grain business as well as vegetable oil and coatings.

According to Forrest Senter, national sales manager for Whole Harvest Foods, headquartered in Warsaw, NC, "There are two methods of extracting oil from soybeans, solvent (chemical) and mechanical pressing, which is similar to olive oil processing. But mechanical extraction doesn't get the same oil yield as chemical extraction. The big oil processors want to get all the oil, so they use the chemical process that allows them maximum efficiency. But then they have to remove the chemical residue from the oil. The difference in yield is offset by the quality of the crude, in that there are less impurities to be removed with chemicals." Whole Harvest produces trans fat-free all natural vegetable cooking oils using a process that does not involve the use of hexane, a solvent.

"We use a mechanical press to get the oil out. We're inefficient because we get only 94 percent of the oil out, while they [manufacturers using chemical extraction] get 99.5 percent. But our oil is more stable. The case price for our oil is 20 percent more, but you get better daily value," Senter says.

The better value with pressed oil that retains its natural vitamin E depends on following a rigorous program that allows an operator to use the oil far longer. "You have to filter the oil at least daily. Some operators have an alarm that goes off every few times they use it and then they push a button to filter the oil. They have to skim it regularly — there should be a

skimmer next to the fryer — otherwise black particles sink to the bottom and stick to the food. They have to monitor the level and the temperature of the oil because if they set the temperature constantly at 350°, it might really be 330° and it might really be 380°," he continues.

If an operator can adhere to this rigorous program, Senter figures a deli, where the fryer is used fewer hours than in a fast-food restaurant, can keep the same oil for as long as three weeks. "Some operators figure this is all too much trouble and just change the oil every third or fourth day," he adds.

If they can stick to the program, however, the more expensive oil can be a good investment. According to Senter, "What makes our oil last that long is the natural vitamin E left in the oil. The vitamin E is what stops the oil from becoming rancid. The gist of high-end oils is the value they provide — they last longer and lower operator costs per day. The value depends on whether the people making decisions have good practices in place and people to manage a quality oil."

Letting consumers know oil still has its natural vitamin E and omega-3s and was pressed without the use of hexane can be advantageous. "We're trying to drive home the hexane-free message," Senter says. "There's more demand for what we do because we're using an organic and natural process and that's a growing market. When you go into a restaurant today, you can see that the chicken is free range, but five years ago nobody cared about that. We're part of that healthy food movement." **DB**

fried chicken category. A lot of consumers are trading back into the deli at the grocery store."

A fried chicken program can flourish — if it's well done. "Fried chicken is a great comfort food, but it's messy to prepare on your own at home. We've pinned our business future on this category. If you're doing fresh fried chicken already and you're not increasing 15 percent a year or more, you need to take a look at your program," Charley Biggs' Hays says. "A fried chicken program takes more than having a box of breading and a box of poultry. There's a lot of moving parts. If you're not seeing a 15 to 20 percent increase, have some experts come in and take a look at your fried chicken program."

Tyson's LeBlanc believes a good fried chicken program has three basic elements. "The three attributes that drive purchase intent on fried chicken are crunchy breading, moist and tender meat, and spiciness — read pepper — in the breading. The most important thing is to deliver on these attributes. From a flavor perspective, we see home-style breaded, double breaded, buttermilk, spicy, Southern and honey," he says.

Some retailers are finding they can increase sales if they break the mold and offer fried chicken products in a wider range of sizes. "The standard selling configuration for fried chicken is the 8-piece sale, but the highest CDI retailers — those with the highest category development index — are much

more diversified: high CDI retailers sell 1-piece, 2-piece and 4-piece meal options. The data suggest these smaller meal options are truly incremental to the 8-piece business. Offering these other meal options opens up other demographics, such as 1- or 2-person meals and meal occasions, including lunch, for example," LeBlanc says.

Another key element is offering a convenient fried chicken meal. "Proper signage along with grab-and-go convenience for the consumer are must-haves for meal deal programs. If the consumer has to spend the time to figure out what salad or potatoes to put with chicken, it's not quick and convenient enough and isn't going to work," says Jeff Stuczynski, eastern area business manager



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Healthy Options

Because fried food of all kinds is coming under scrutiny by health-conscious consumers, finding ways to make fried chicken, always a favorite, a healthier alternative will enhance sales opportunities.

"We're looking at a gluten-free fried chicken program; we sense consumers are looking for that. The other component of this is that the gluten-free product has a 30 percent lower fat absorption into the chicken," says Charley Biggs' Hays.

Some retailers are finding that cooking fried chicken in healthier oils or in some cases, finding healthier ways to cook the chicken pays off. "Grilled is one option. We're also seeing that most stores have transitioned to trans fat-free oils," Stuczynski says. "One of the newest trends we're seeing is grilled chicken, which is really baked chicken with smoky, hickory-type seasoning for a grilled-like flavor. We've seen many stores with success offering grilled chicken, resulting in some cases in a 15 to 20 percent

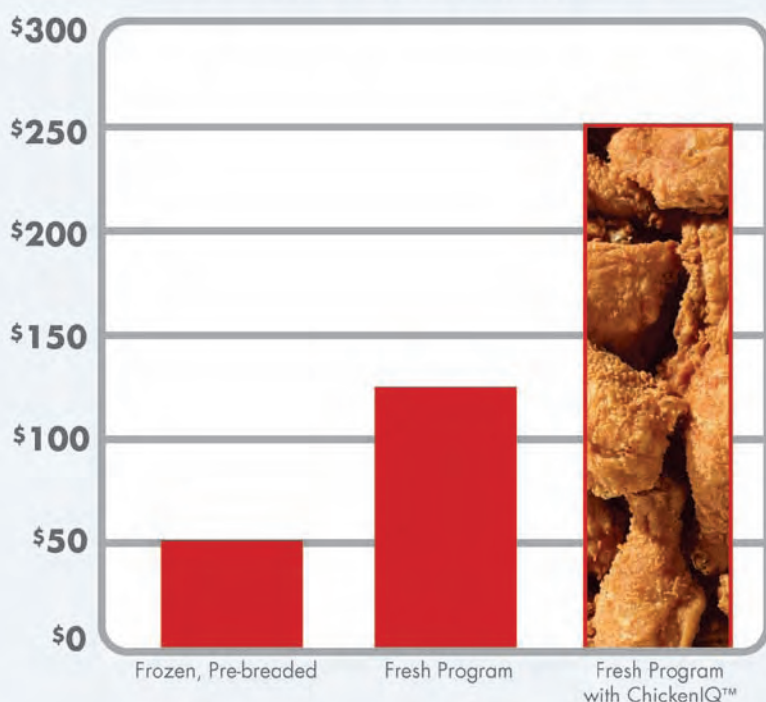


increase in sales in the deli chicken category. This offering provides consumers with a healthier alternative to fried chicken."

Another way to get a foot in the door with health-conscious consumers is to use

seasoning to pack a flavor punch with a minimum of salt. "Flavored wings are still popular; flavors with a sweet and sassy base, as well as fresh chicken tenders, are still very popular," Stuczynski says. **DB**

Average Daily Sales of Fried Chicken in Deli



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Raising the Food Bar

Creating a destination for consumers seeking quick and convenient meal alternatives

BY LISA WHITE

Imagine this scenario: After a long day at work followed by the inevitable round of “quick” errands, mom or dad still has to feed the family, at least some of whom have after-dinner obligations. A tough economy means thinking twice before heading to a local restaurant — and even if that weren’t the case, everybody wants something different for supper. This is when the deli food bar has an opportunity to be all things to all people.

In recent years, food bars have transitioned from offering mainly salads to offering a kaleidoscope of hot and cold entrées, ethnic items and more. “Today’s food bar has evolved from the salad bar concept, adding soup, olive bars and hot foods over the years,” says Ann Dressler, manager service deli/food service division at Mezzetta Fine Foods, Corona, CA. “These food bars are replacing the traditional home meal replacement sections that retailers have tried for years to expand.”

In the past, food bars focused more on convenience than on quality. “Today, with the demand for more gourmet, restaurant-quality items, food bars have definitely stepped up by offering a vast selection of diverse foods with a lot more focus on presentation,” notes Giuliana Pozzuto, marketing manager at George DeLallo Co., Jeannette, PA.

A Food Bar Profile

Salad bars were introduced in the 1960s at steakhouse restaurants. “Back then, people enjoyed all-you-can-eat salad buffets with different fixings,” says Mary Caldwell, marketing director at New York, NY-based FoodMatch. “This became a competitive field for these restaurants.”

In the 1970s, salad bars spurred the growth of buffet restaurants. “It was at this point that supermarkets saw an opportunity that restaurants had already identified, and



PHOTO COURTESY OF FOODMATCH

the salad bar became more of a fixture in this segment," Caldwell adds. "The biggest benefits of food bars are the freshness and availability as well as the ability to control the amount of food being purchased. That's why the bars' changing and varied selections are used to get shoppers into the store more frequently."

Although the cold bar was popular and successful, supermarkets saw an opportunity to mature this segment. "What has propelled the success of food bars is the sophistication and customization of the equipment," she continues. "Stores are able to implement a number of programs such as cold and hot bars, as well as combined bars." This has enabled supermarkets to create a bigger diversity of offerings that transcend the typical salad, soup and olives.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GEORGE DELALLO COMPANY

Food bar offerings have become more regional in recent years. For example, wing bars have gained popularity in some parts of the country. "Stores are paying attention to the foods shoppers like and what are they looking for, and then responding to these requests," FoodMatch's Caldwell relates. "That's how delis are creating customer loyalty."

Chicken continues to be a strong food-bar staple. "In the past, chicken has been the largest seller and it still is, but this has expanded greatly to include better cuts of freshly cooked meats, pasta dishes, side dishes olives and salads in food bars," says Mezzetta's Dressler.

Supermarkets are seeing a growing opportunity with olive bars. As a result,

many are increasing these mixes to include items from specific countries. "Origin is becoming important to shoppers in things such as olives, mixes and marinades," Caldwell explains. "Semi-prepped ingredients, such as pitted Kalamatas, also are great for olive bars."

Today's deli department consumers are in search of the restaurant experience. Olives and antipasti are important because they're the opening act, giving consumers a full-meal

experience like that at their favorite eatery. According to DeLallo's Pozzuto, "The olive bar provides a way for us to package our product for convenience, but also give retailers an ever-growing focus on pairings to gain those high-end restaurant consumers. [We target] those who want to bring the fresh flavors and presentations of fine dining to their home."

Along with higher-end imports, olive bars also are focusing on less expensive varieties

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to appeal to budget-conscious consumers. "We've seen olive bars expand, as there is greater customer demand," explains Dean Spilka, president of Norpaco, Middletown, CT. "Although olive bars consist of less expensive items alongside pricey items, higher-quality products are the strongest sellers. We're also seeing more olive salads in food bars, rather than just individual olives."

Getting It Right

How can delis attract more customers to food bars? It's important to offer a good selection of foods that speak to the store's demographics. It's also important to keep some general concepts in mind. Consumers don't want to take the time to figure out what a product is or how much it costs. Convenience is key. Containers need to be easily accessible.

"Above all, deli operators must keep the bars appetizing with full and fresh product," Mezzetta's Dressler relates. "No one wants to buy the last piece of chicken or lasagna in the pan." It's crucial to walk the food bar and identify areas that need improvement.

According to DeLallo's Pozzuto, "While it can be seen as the biggest challenge for many retailers, the most successful food bars are set up with attentive deli staff who can anticipate the needs and demands of their deli."

"Keeping these sections attractive requires constant care and attention by store personnel," Dressler adds. "Also, it's important to continue offering new and interesting

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sections to keep the customer coming back for more."

Maintaining a fresh mix of product will draw shoppers. "Ways to accomplish this are to commit to a core number of products, follow a schematic and planogram, be consistent with stores, include core pans, rotate pans often, select one or two specials that are from an in-store recipe or innovation and test new products," Pozzuto says.

Cross-merchandising will help sell more product and provide customers with usage and pairing ideas. "The major question is

what else can be done with these products to increase traffic," notes FoodMatch's Caldwell. "Deli operators need to figure out ways shoppers can utilize food bar products within the department before they can properly merchandise them together."

The food bar location is important. Many contend the best real estate is alongside grab-and-go deli items. "When customers are in a hurry, this is where they go," relates Pozzuto.

Merchandising and signage are integral to success. "Delis are loaded with specialty cheeses, spreads and cured meats — perfect complements for the savory delicacies found at an olive bar," Pozzuto continues. "With so many different varieties of foods, in particular olives and antipasti, it's crucial to keep up with labels and signs, and, of course, to keep items looking their best."

The sight and smells of the food bar will entice the consumer. Proper merchandising can draw in impulse shoppers, increase sales and expand a store's customer base. "When it comes to new sales, deli departments want customers to try different things so they continue to make these purchases," Pozzuto adds. "This is why active signage, staff knowledge and attentiveness are all so important." DeLallo provides educational materials on the different food items and their attributes for deli staff and consumers.

"Food bars offer great ready-to-eat meals for that night, but can also be used as part of a recipe in home preparations," Pozzuto says. "This appeal gives your bar a great value, reaching every customer, not just those looking for grab-and-go items."

DeLallo's newest olive and antipasti program, PPS (Peel-Place-Sell), works within a retailer's space limitations. This customizable program offers size options for racks, amounts and product. "Not everyone has floor space for a bar, and we get that," she explains. "Another program we offer is geared toward the efficiency and convenience of olive and antipasti sales. An incentive for both the retailer and the consumer, this prepackaged tray program offers a coupon toward the purchase of top-selling, prepackaged olive and antipasti items."

With consumers continuing to look for convenient, fresh and varied meal options, the evolution of food bars is expected to proceed. "I foresee olive bars being used more often as a place to acquire ingredients for meals," says Norpaco's Spilka.

"With the continued shift in the economy, people are turning more toward food bars," Pozzuto notes. "What will be interesting is seeing how food bars play into health, weight management and portion control."

DB

Salami: Rebirth for A Classic Favorite

New twists turn an old favorite into a trendsetter

BY BOB JOHNSON

Salami is experiencing a resurgence of sorts. Some producers are introducing American consumers to traditional Old-World varieties, others are coming up with healthier versions of classic favorites, and still others are offering packages of sliced or cubed salami accompanied by sliced or cubed cheese to fill the demand for convenience. Add in an appropriate dash of homage to historic traditions, and it isn't a stretch to speak of a salami renaissance.

"There's a rebirth for salami," says Lorenza Pasetti, president of Volpi Foods, St. Louis, MO. "It's a great thing. You can see it in finer dining establishments. There are several chefs who have gotten into it — and once you start, you become attached to it." Volpi has been making salami, pepperoni and other Italian specialty meat products since Pasetti's great uncle, John Volpi, set up shop in St. Louis in 1902.

Some producers are adding a touch of excitement to this very mature category by introducing classical salamis from around the world. "Salami used to be just for Italians or Italian Americans. We're realizing now that there are more kinds of salami than just Italian," Pasetti notes. Volpi introduced its Un Mondo brand to feature international flavor profiles. The line, which started with Spanish, French and Italian salamis, expanded this year to include Chinese, Hungarian and German varieties.

Other producers look to bring renewed excitement to the category by offering centuries-old Italian regional favorites to an American audience. "We're trying to introduce old flavors that have been known for centuries in Europe to U.S. consumers," says Simone Bocchini, vice president for sales at Fratelli Beretta USA, South Hackensack, NJ. "We're introducing a mix of traditional flavors — Rustico from the North, Fennel from Tuscany and Picante from the South."

Fratelli Beretta has steadily grown over the last two centuries to become one of the major meat processors in Italy, and the firm's



leadership believes the American palate has matured enough to spark a desire for authentic Italian salamis. "Target a new kind of consumer," Bocchini suggests. "The consumer is smarter and more knowledgeable [than in the past]. We are hoping consumers are looking for something more traditional."

Salami-making traditions are akin in many ways to the traditions for making fine wine. According to Dave Brandow, director of sales and marketing at Piller's Sausages, a 54-year-old family-owned business making a full range of European meat products in Waterloo, ON, Canada, "There are many different styles of salami just as there are many different types and vintages of wines. Like wine, salami takes time to produce a unique taste, texture and body. Some salamis immediately impact your taste buds while others slowly enhance your palate with complexities of the fusion of select spices. Once again, as with wine using specific grapes to produce a specific type of wine, hogs are raised on specific diets to produce a meat that provides a more aromatic flavor and delicate texture."

Deli operators that are willing to go the bold, adventurous extra mile in their merchandising have opportunities to build business. "Retailers could improve this category with active demonstrations — put it in people's mouths," advises Pierre Zreik, owner of Eatalia Imports, Clifton, NJ. "Cross-merchandising and sampling of this product will increase the sales and create more awareness. For example, sample the salami out on a piece of Italian bread or a cracker with a piece of Brie cheese and small piece of cornichon. It gives the consumer an idea of using the product and adds a couple of other rings."

The key is generating excitement. "Create excitement around the product. Be more proactive with sampling and suggestive selling," Volpi's Pasetti recommends.

Retailers should be looking for new products in the salami category. "There's a lot of interest in innovation in the category. Even with an old, old category you can find interesting things to merchandise," says Mark Scholze, sales and marketing manager at Sparrer Sausage Company, Chicago, IL. Sparrer has developed a wide range of sausage and salami products since the company was started 75 years ago by a sausage peddler from Chicago and a retired wurst-maker from Germany.

Healthier Salami

A major new trend is the wide range of products that are healthier or more natural salamis. One way to promote health is to simplify the ingredients list. "There is a trend toward going all-natural, toward going with simple ingredients," Pasetti says.

"Eatalia Imports will be introducing soon an all-natural salami chub line — sopressata, dry sausage and other specialties," says Zreik. Eatalia is the exclusive importer of Rovagnati charcuterie products.

Many producers have focused on supplying salami products that suit the demand for healthier foods. "The biggest thing that's happening now is that consumers are attempting to eat better. We're getting more demand for all natural. That's relatively new, but a few people are doing it. When you put something out there that's different than the category has been for a long time, the consumers get excited," Scholze says.

Sparrer is seeing requests for its relatively new all-natural line of salami and sausage products take off. "The demand for our all-natural line showed up late last year, maybe the fourth quarter. It takes more than a year

for a label to really show up. Based on the demand for natural and organic products in general, this is not a fad — it's a way of life and a way of eating," Scholze adds.

One way to offer healthier salami is to start with healthier meats, such as chicken or turkey rather than pork or beef. "We have a new line of Hispanic-style salami sausages geared toward healthier living," says Edgar Soto, vice president for sales and marketing at Cibao Meat Products, Bronx, NY. Cibao is a family operation that has continued branching out since introducing its flagship Campesino brand salami 42 years ago.

The firm most recently introduced a new Don Filo line featuring 100 percent turkey and 100 percent chicken salamis. "The demand for healthier products is not an overnight thing. It's been going on for four, five or six years. A lot of it is second- or



third-generation Hispanics,” Soto notes.

The healthier meats serve the purpose of making salami healthier and more affordable. “We have not chosen to downsize the product. We’ve made the products with different meat mixtures to lower the price. Chicken and turkey are less expensive than beef and pork,” Cibao’s Soto explains. “Because of the economic situation, consumers are looking for something that is both good and cheap. One big salami can be used for a number of different meals. You can use it at breakfast, in a salad and as part of dinner.”

However, many producers and retailers are offering more digestible price points by offering smaller packages. “There’s a trend to make package sizes smaller, in part to soften the blow of the higher cost of the raw materials,” says Michael Grazier, president of Busseto Foods, Fresno, CA. Busseto Foods is named after the village in the area of Northern Italy that gave birth to many of the firm’s recipes.

Many consumers have to weigh going healthy versus cost. “There are plenty of salamis out there. All-natural, no nitrate or nitrite is taking off at this time, but it is a bit more expensive than the traditional one that uses a small amount of nitrate and nitrite,” Eatalia’s Zreik says.

The Convenient Package

Salamis are commonly produced in different sizes and shapes, depending on their end use. “Some salamis are small in diameter for snacking times while others are larger diameter for sandwiches or as flavor enhancers for entrées,” says Piller’s Brandow.

The predominant current trends are toward smaller packages and pre-sliced products. “The trend toward pre-sliced products has been around quite awhile and continues to grow,” Grazier says.

With pre-sliced salami the customer doesn’t have to wait at the service counter, and says Fratelli Beretta’s Bocchini, “Convenience is more important. Pre-sliced salami has become more important. Rather than waiting at the counter for the salami to be sliced, customers want to just pick it up.”

The key is convenience. According to Sparrer’s Scholze, “Previously people thought nothing of buying a pound of salami and some cheese, then slicing it themselves and putting it on some crackers. Now people want to open the package and eat. That means bites, pre-sliced or pre-sliced with cheese.”

A new twist to the convenience theme is combining salami with other ingredients. “There’s a trend toward value-adding with cheeses or other ingredients that go with salami. It’s either packaged with the salami or

merchandised with it at the deli,” according to Grazier.

Many consumers see salami as a convenient snack with a protein punch. “The other trend is that people are looking for meat snacks, whether salami bites, beef bites or turkey bites. People are saying, ‘I’m not going to have a Twinkie or a Snicker’s; I’m going to have some protein.’ Meat snacks are a growing category,” Scholze adds.

Fratelli Beretta is coming out with a line

of salami trays intended to provide consumers maximum convenience for social gatherings. “We’re already working on convenient salami party trays that will have pre-sliced cheese and meat at the same time. One tray will have four different salamis sliced, another will have a regular and spicy sliced with both Asiago and Provolone all sliced, and a third will have spicy and regular salami nuggets with cubed cheese instead of sliced,” Bocchini adds.

DB



Does Deli Service Matter?



By
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Many consumers consider retail service to be a nostalgic memory they speak of wistfully. Often technology is used to enable the shopping experience with transactions free of errors and devoid of human contact. Yet, not all retail environments are created equal and the service deli seems to be one of the last places where customer service is required, expected and appreciated.

Younger millennial consumers and baby boom consumers have some significant differences in regard to human interaction and the importance of a positive experience with a deli employee. Younger consumers are far more accepting of technology-enabled transactions that save time, and they often consider a well-stocked self-service area a manifestation of great service. Consumers over 45 years of age continue to enjoy sampling before making a purchase decision and they rely on the advice of the deli employees whom they expect to have a good working knowledge of the products offered.

In recent conversations with consumers we found the vast majority were satisfied with the service they receive from deli employees. Eighty-five percent of consumers believe deli employees are knowledgeable about the products offered in the service deli. Customers say they can tell when an employee knows what he or she is doing, and appreciate it.

Consumers of all ages consider food they purchase from the service deli to be fresher, and they like the ability to have their order customized exactly the way they like in the exact quantity they need. Eighty-eight percent of consumers prefer to have service when they shop and only resort to other alternatives when they are pressed for time.

Sampling is considered a very positive part of the deli service experience. The deli is literally the only department in the store where customers consistently have an opportunity to try something immediately before they purchase it. Customers say they appreciate the deli samples for their children even more than the free cookie they are sometimes offered in the bakery because a slice of turkey or cheese is inherently more healthful and it makes the shopping experience more of a treat than a chore.

Sometimes a smile is all it takes to make a customer feel special. Numerous comments from customers of all ages addressed the difference a smile and a friendly greeting make to turn the deli experience into more than just a simple transaction. Customers revel in being recognized by an employee who remembers preferences.

When customers were asked about the advice they might have for a store manager who wanted to make the deli a more attractive option, we received hundreds of comments. Following are a few of the key areas where consumers offered advice to assure that your deli delivers world class service.

Sparkle and Shine: Sparkling clean glass, fresh food dis-

plays and well-groomed employees ready to serve make a first impression that lasts. Polished, neat and clean were mentioned over and over as cues to customers that the deli is worth the wait. Clear, concise and easy-to-read signs are considered part of the service experience, and these tell customers the deli is well organized.

Sampling: Sliced-to-order samples by employees who recognize their customers are the ideal. Customers like the fresh, sliced-to-order experience with samples just as much as they like it for their order. Cubes of cheese that have been sitting out with toothpicks and no product label tell customers the service won't be much better and make them wonder whether the product will be fresh.

Mindfulness: Nothing is more irritating to customers than employees who don't seem to be paying attention to customers waiting. Even though a clean, fully stocked

case is appealing, little is more irritating than employees cleaning, stocking or chatting with each other when customers are waiting. An employee who acknowledges customers and lets them know they will be served shortly helps make it worth the wait. Customers universally dislike getting the last few slices of a loaf and want employees to be mindful of this common preference.

Get Fresh: The service deli gets universally high marks for freshness. Just as universal are complaints about products that are pre-sliced -- precut product is perceived as dry and less fresh. Consumers will often opt for the self-service deli where they can quickly grab a package of a product that is close to what they want if they think the service deli is going to serve them precut product.

Even though employees do slice to order when requested, customers sometimes sensed that employees gave them the feeling they were being unnecessarily picky to ask for this expected service when they were told, "We just cut it this morning."

Healthfulness: Although the deli gets high marks for freshness, healthfulness of salad offerings is sometimes noted as a challenge. Salads heavily laden with mayonnaise are perceived to "scream fattening." Nothing frustrates health-conscious customers more than when they ask for nutrition information or a detailed list of ingredients and employees cannot fulfill the request. One of the primary reasons customers noted for not shopping more often in the deli was the lack of healthy offerings.

The Right Selection: A selection of products tailored to the desires of your customers is key. In some areas customers asked for more organic products and in others they wanted a wider selection of luxurious imported cheeses. No matter what they wanted, all agree deli managers who listened to their requests and responded were the ones who gained their loyalty.

Although technology is the great enabler, it is clear personal service in the deli still matters.

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Blast From The Past

Crave Brothers Farmstead Cheese



Charles, George, Thomas and Mark Crave are second-generation dairy farmers who purchased their own dairy farm in Waterloo, WI, in 1980. They began making cheese in 2002 under the Crave Brothers Farmstead Classics label.

In this picture taken on the farm in 2000, George Crave, manager of the cheese production facility, is helping his 8-year-old son Brian get his calf ready for the Dodge County Fair held each year in August. Brian graduated from high school this past June and is now working on the farm as a full-time employee.

And yes, Brian did win a blue ribbon at that fair.



Blast From The Past is a regular feature of DELI BUSINESS. We welcome submissions of your old photos, labels or advertisements along with a brief description of the photo. Please send material to: Editor, DELI BUSINESS, P.O. Box 810217, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0217 or e-mail DeliBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com. For more information contact us at (561)994-1118

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