

ALSO INSIDE

Holiday Sales
Pâtés
Handheld Deli Foods
Soups
Pre-Sliced Deli Meat
World Cheese Update
Grana Padano
American Cheese



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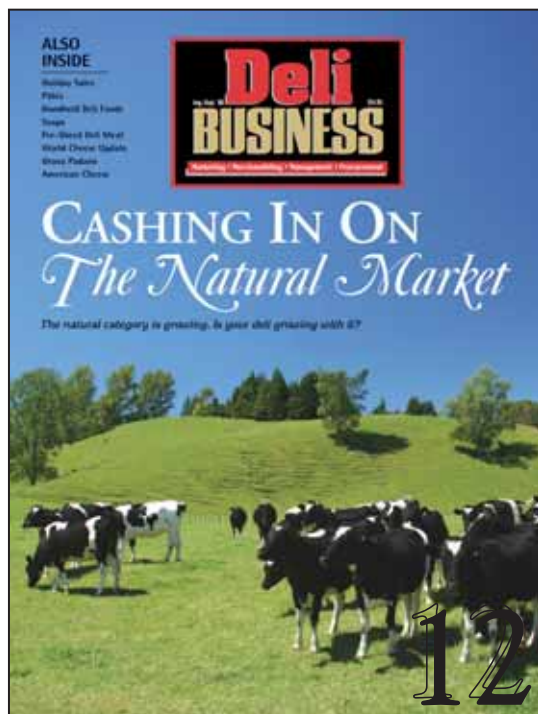
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Deli BUSINESS QUIZ



NICOLE SEALANDER

Buyer
C & S Wholesale Grocers, Inc.
Hatfield, MA

Nicole has been a buyer with C&S at its Hatfield location for three years. The company, which is headquartered in Keene, NH, is the second largest grocery wholesaler in the country.

She buys primarily rotisserie chickens, imported cheeses, specialty items and whole-meal replacement items. Her accounts include Waldbaums, Pathmark and A&P. Prior to joining C&S, she interned at the Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, MA.

Nicole has been reading DELI BUSINESS for about 1½ years. When an issue comes into the office, she and her colleagues take turns reading it. "I like finding out about new products and lines," she says. "And I like seeing what the vendors I buy from are offering. 'I think DELI BUSINESS is very informative. You can pick up the magazine and find information you may not get anywhere else.'"

As winner of the DELI BUSINESS Quiz, Nicole will receive a personal DVD/CD player.

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Quiz Questions

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- 2) What is the web address for Coleman Deli Meats? _____
- 3) What is the E-mail address for Heinz Deli Division? _____
- 4) In what city is Karl Ehmer located? _____
- 5) What is the fax number for Rubschlager? _____
- 6) What is the street address for Marcel et Henri? _____

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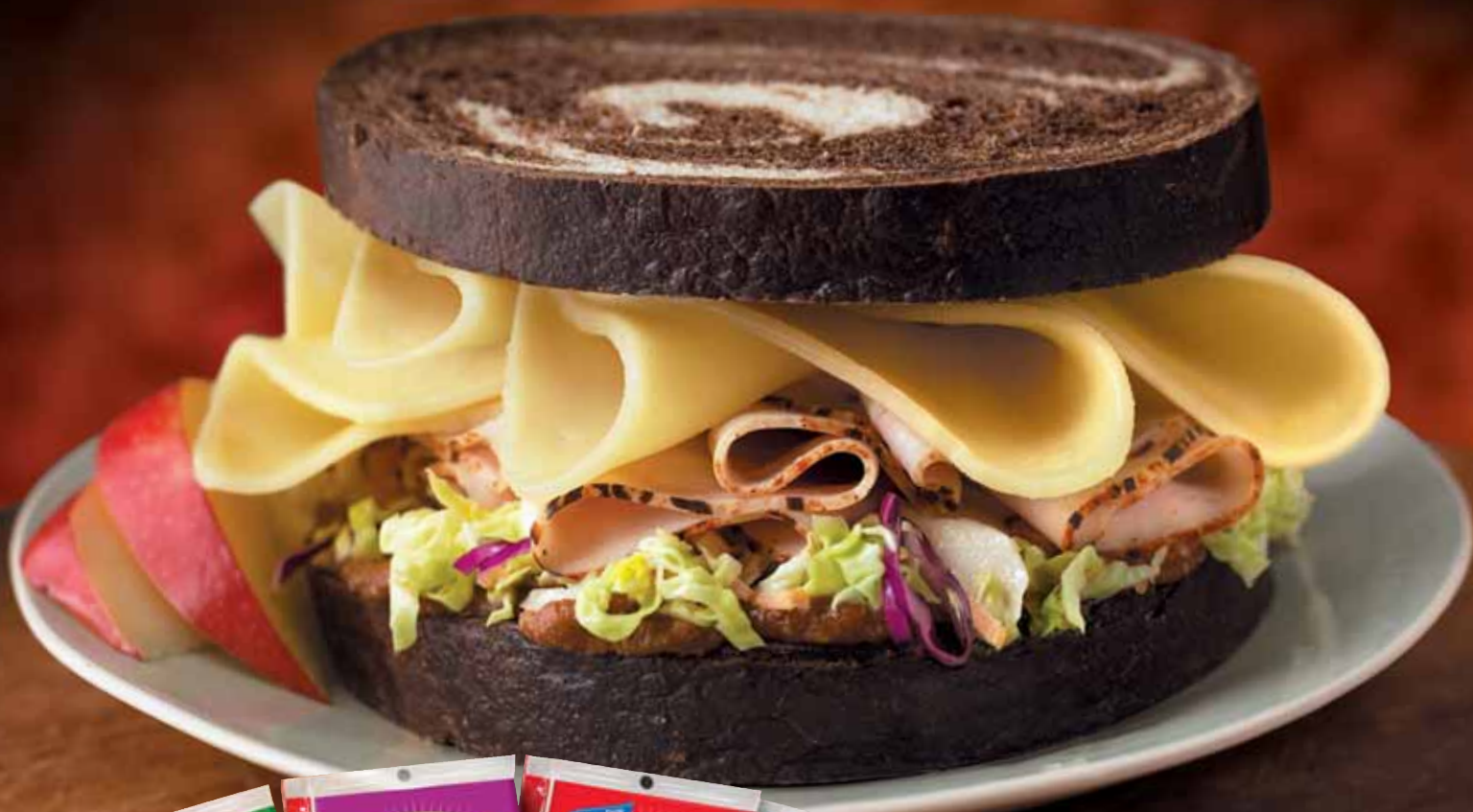
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Putting Tesco To The Test



By
Jim Prevora

*Editor-in-Chief of
DELI BUSINESS*

Up until now, the proliferation of food channels has only served to reinforce the importance of the deli in the supermarket schema. If supercenters — at least in the iteration that Wal-Mart has rolled across the country — were going to focus on price and attracting the consumer who lives paycheck to paycheck, it naturally led supermarkets to adjust. The supermarkets deemphasized easily price-comparable groceries and reduced space allocation for bargain lines of groceries.

Equally, if warehouse clubs were going to attract an infrequent shopper — perhaps because their relative paucity of locations and perhaps because minimum package sizes made it a concept unsuitable for quick fill-ins — logic led to an emphasis on perishables in supermarkets to attract the business that was left after a monthly stock up to Sam's, Costco, BJ's or another club.

And the proliferation of other food venues, such as drug stores, caused an increase of food offerings in conventional discount stores. Even on-line offerings by companies like NetGrocer.com were all focused on non-perishables and thus left this area free and clear for supermarkets.

These competitive dynamics, combined with consumer trends of less cooking and a need for more convenience, really led to the notion that the next generation supermarket was going to carry groceries almost as a convenience for those needing a fill-in between trips to a supercenter or warehouse club. The next generation supermarket would also be for those wanting certain specialty brands and products not available at supercenters and warehouse clubs.

Now, however, the British are coming — once again.

They have been here before, mostly to disastrous effects, as with Marks & Spencer, which achieved nothing with its acquisition of Kings in New Jersey, and Sainsbury's, which flopped with its acquisition of Shaw's in New England.

This time it may be different. Tesco is a more formidable company. It competes head to head with Wal-Mart's British division, ASDA, and wins. In addition, the company has studied the U.S. market for many years, and through its Dunhumby subsidiary, Tesco is widely recognized as an expert on consumer behavior.

The real key to Tesco's success, though, will be one thing: The success of an idea. Unlike Marks & Spencer or Sainsbury, Tesco arrives not through an acquisition but through the opening of new stores with a new concept.

Committed to spending almost \$500 million a year to launch its new venture, called Tesco Fresh & Easy, it is understood that Tesco has already signed papers for 200 new locations in Southern California, Arizona and Nevada.

Though loosely based on the Tesco Express concept popular in the U.K. and other countries, these stores are mostly 10,000 to 15,000 square feet, which is much larger than the U.K. concept.

The stores will lean heavy toward private label and heavy toward perishables and, especially, heavy toward prepared foods. The stores have been compared to Trader Joe's but with more fresh and prepared foods.

The stakes are hard to overstate, not just for Tesco, but for the future viability of the supermarket business model. It seems as if Tesco is imagining a consumer purchase pattern that might go like this: Once a week or within ten days, consumers shop at a supercenter doing the bulk of their food shopping.

Every three to six weeks, depending on location, the consumers stock up at a big warehouse club on many high volume consumption items.

Fill-ins for milk and whatnot are at convenience stores. But to pick up lunch or dinner, consumers will run to the new small-size Tesco Fresh & Easy.

The prepared food offering is Tesco's main focus. It is so extensive and different from what is offered in the U.S. that the Tesco people took no risks on any U.S. producer of prepared foods. Instead they are setting up a campus on 88 acres in Riverside, CA, and have persuaded its British suppliers of prepared foods to set up U.S. production facilities as part of the campus.

It is uncertain if the concept will succeed. Tesco Express stores prototypically sell prepared foods to a London shopper stepping out of the Tube, picking up some prepared foods, then walking to her flat.

That is an entirely different model than what is being talked about in America's car-loving west.

It is questionable whether a bunch of smaller stores will be perceived as so convenient that consumers will want to stop, park, get out of the car, etc., before buying dinner.

And lower-than-expected sales can easily start a death spiral in this type of concept, with Tesco faced with the dilemma: Keep a full range of fresh foods and go broke due to shrink or start to limit the assortment but limit appeal.

And, of course, that's what the issue is for the supermarket in general. If supermarkets respond to supercenters and warehouse clubs by ceding the market to them and emphasizing perishables, what do supermarkets do if someone comes up with a superior format for merchandising perishables. But if supermarkets respond by deemphasizing these products, what can be the focus of a food format that neither sells dry goods or perishables very well?

There has been an interesting exchange on this subject on our new Internet product, www.PerishablePundit.com. You can check it out on line and subscribe for a free daily e-mail version.

The stakes are hard to overstate,
not just for Tesco, but for
the future viability of the
supermarket business model.

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Let Us Not Forget



By
Lee Smith
Publisher of
DELI BUSINESS

The growth in natural foods has taken many retailers and manufacturers by storm. There is organic and now there is "natural". The landscape is changing as more consumers get concerned about what is in their food and rebel against what is seen as industrialized food production that values low cost of goods and high profits above integrity.

With Wal-Mart entering the picture and super-market chains adding organic sections and/or natural food stores, the move to large scale organic farming is inevitable. As organic moves toward industrialized production, a blessing for many people who want to eat healthier foods but can't afford the ultra-high price of many organic foods, purists are reacting in horror.

The hard-core organic consumers, who equate organic with the spirit of food production that includes the preservation of regional and local farms, humane treatment of animals, fair trade and preservation of traditional food production methods, are pushing additional standards and new certifications, such as certification for the humane treatment of animals, and I applaud and support those efforts.

But is industrialized organic bad? Hardly. After all, if organic farming is good for the environment, good for the health of Americans, then more lands turned into organic production is better. With more money being poured into research for integrated pest management systems instead of insecticides, better farming techniques and an emphasis on raising animals more humanely, organic farming will get easier and more affordable.

And, with a great demand, more lands will be turned into organic pastures for the purpose of growing feed and grain. There even may be more variety in proteins as animals more indigenous to the natural landscape return to favor, such as bison, duck or rabbit. As farmers begin to develop crops suitable to the local environment instead of altering the natural landscape to farm commodities, we are sure to see the expansion of regional food production and regional, local crops.

All of this is good news for retailers, who need value-added products that are clearly differentiated from commodities and can draw high retails and great margins, offsetting the high labor of many stores that are offering more service and service departments.

What should never be forgotten, however, is this is a luxury of an affluent society. While it is popular to portray industrialized food manufacturers as devils, it is worth noting that people are living longer and in far better shape than ever before. In large part, this is due to the abundance of food — good quality and good tasting food — that is uniquely affordable.

The United States still has the lowest food cost as a percentage of income anywhere in the world with the most variety. It is very easy to forget that for a substantial part of the world and, yes, a large part of the population of this country, good quality food is still a struggle to afford. Even people who are struggling will go out to eat, because eating out is part of our social structure, but that doesn't mean they are not looking for ways to keep food costs under control, often translated to as low as possible.

Prepared foods often are at odds with keeping home food costs low, but in today's society, where there are long commutes to work and two-income couples, any time saved is more of a necessity than a luxury. It is the large-scale food manufacturers and corporate farms that have blessed us with the abundance of affordable food available today.

As for all the food scares, the majority of people believe that foods sold in our stores are safe, healthy and government regulations protect them using the best science of the day. It is inevitable that as time goes by new science will disclaim old science, but for the most part what is sold in stores today is safe, wholesome and nutritious. That means some products are better than others and in an affluent culture, people have the option of deciding what they want to buy.

Least we think every consumer is concerned, we must remember that there are large numbers of consumers who think, "It's good enough for the kids and they like it." Many adults still want to buy what tastes good to them — period. For them, if it is available, it's just fine and all the health nuts are just that — nuts.

The bottom line is: Who are we to determine what is good enough? Consumers need choices and in an affluent society, consumers will demand better choices. Retailers need to make decisions about what consumer base they will cater to, but we also need to remember the consumers who can't afford or just don't want to go the route of organic, natural or even top quality. They just want decent food that is "good enough."

The "good enough" market is not going to disappear, and mainstream retailers looking for higher margin products should never forget that consumers are going to buy what they want and often don't really care how great it is. Good taste is often not the same as good-for-you. We like artificial colors, lots of salt and sugar and long shelf life. Make a dynamite macaroni and cheese, and many customers will make a run for mac & cheese in a box.

Forgetting the importance of commodity deli meats, processed sliced cheeses, wet salads, spreads and inexpensive prepared foods is not always good marketing, and often it is not in the best interest of the consumer. As for me, I still love fried bologna sandwiches with American cheese on white bread.

The natural food trend is a
luxury of an affluent society.



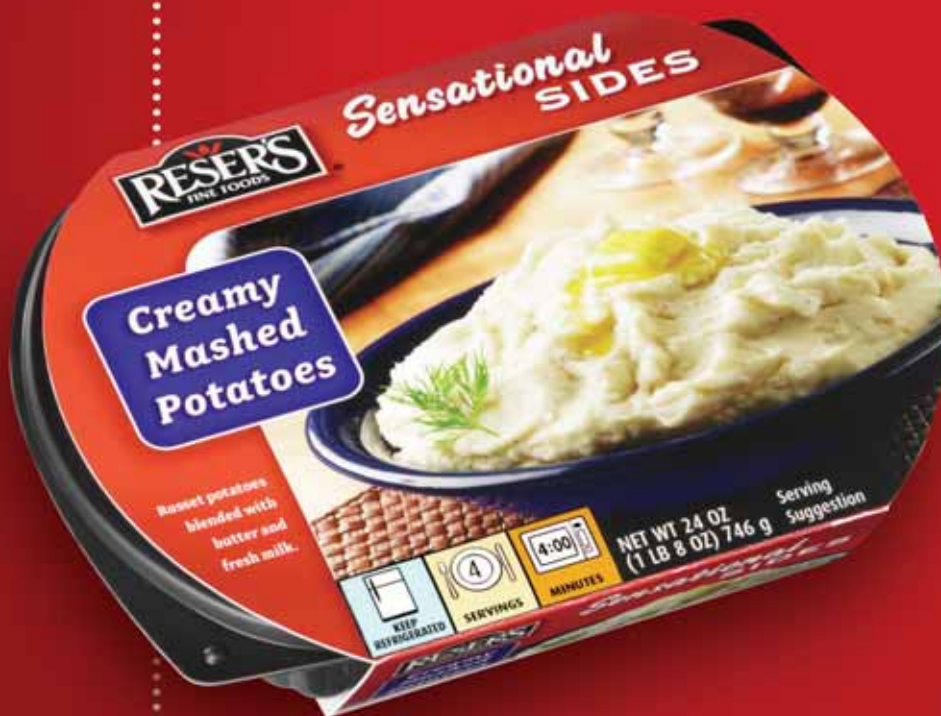
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FRESH INNOVATIONS.

DELI WATCH

Transitions



Joe Hoff became president of St. Louis, MO-based Swiss-American on July 1 of this year, according to an announcement from Swiss-American CEO Jerry Weil. Hoff will be responsible for all aspects of sales, marketing and operations. Swiss-American has been a leading importer and distributor of cheese and deli items for over 60 years.



Michael Weber has been appointed vice president of engineering, Novazone, Livermore, CA. He will lead research and development efforts. He has more than 20 years of engineering, technical and management experience at Novazone, a leading provider of innovative ozone-based solutions to improve the freshness and safety of food and water products.

Announcements



Award Winning Cheddar

New Zealand's award winning all natural Mainland Cheddar Cheese, imported by Fonterra Brands Americas, based in Ft. Lauderdale, FL, is making its way into retail markets. Varieties include Mild, Sharp, Superior and Aged Vintage. Mainland was honored with the prestigious "Cuisine Champions of Cheese Awards" in its native New Zealand as the best tasting cheddar.

Reader Service No. 401



First World Award

Sugar Brook Farms, Verona, WI, wins with CheddaBlu, a spreadable cheddar-blue cheese product at the 26th Biennial World Championship Cheese Competition in Madison, WI. Competing with nearly 1,800 entries, it took Best of the Class for spreadable cheeses with a near perfect score of 98 points out of a possible 100.

Reader Service No. 402

New Products



Tropical Chicken

Perdue, Salisbury, MD, introduces new Coconut Tenders, which will bring in wave after wave of repeat business. All-white breast meat is dipped into a light, tasty batter for a uniquely satisfying tropical flavor. Coconut is popular with Hispanic consumers, and it is a favored ingredient in Asian cuisine.

Reader Service No. 403



rBST-Free Fresh Cheese

Denmark, WI-based Belgioioso Cheese now offers a classic variety called Crescenza-Stracchino, which originated in the Lombardy and Romagna regions of Italy. Formed into petite 3.5-pound wheels, it is made to order. Also available in random-weight cuts for retail, this fresh cheese has a limited shelf life and is rBST-free and vegetarian friendly.

Reader Service No. 404



Deli Pizza

Champion Foods of New Boston, MI, introduces Take2Bake Pizza and breadsticks, offering the deli a unique patented pizza concept — a 10-inch square pizza crust that includes two slices of pizza and eight breadsticks. Butter garlic sauce and Parmesan cheese are included to top the breadsticks after baking. Additional varieties include Pizza & Cinnamon Stix and Cheezy Stix.

Reader Service No. 405



Gourmet Salad Kits

Fresh new salad kits with a 30-day shelf life are now available from Einstein Bros. of Golden, CO. Varieties include Taos Chicken Chipotle, Club Chef and Autumn Chicken Caesar. The consumer simply adds the salad greens to enjoy a delicious gourmet salad in minutes.

Reader Service No. 406



All-Natural Dips

A new line of all-natural Parmesan cheese-based dips was introduced at the IDDBA Show in June by Santa Barbara Bay, Dallas, TX. The 10-ounce dips will be located in deli departments and varieties include Original, Zesty Red Pepper and Sun-Dried Tomato & Basil.

Reader Service No. 407



Certified Humane

Grass Point Farms, a brand of Organic Farm Marketing of Thorp, WI, introduces the first nationally distributed, certified-humane line of pasture-raised dairy products, including milk, butter and an assortment of cheeses ranging from Monterey Jack to Mozzarella to Blue. This certification details specific steps that must be taken to guarantee humane treatment of all cows.

Reader Service No. 408



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**

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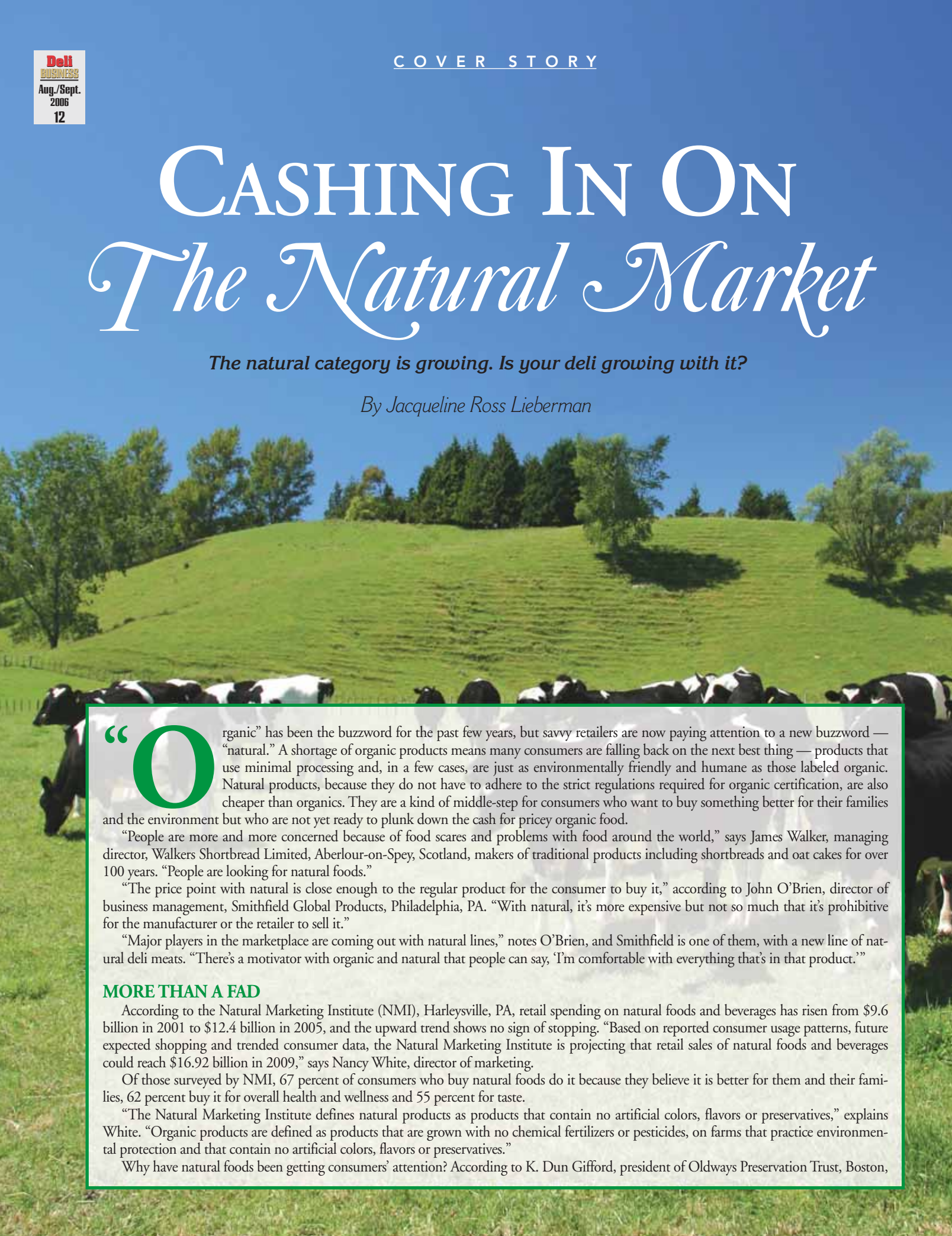
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CASHING IN ON *The Natural Market*

The natural category is growing. Is your deli growing with it?

By Jacqueline Ross Lieberman



“Organic” has been the buzzword for the past few years, but savvy retailers are now paying attention to a new buzzword — “natural.” A shortage of organic products means many consumers are falling back on the next best thing — products that use minimal processing and, in a few cases, are just as environmentally friendly and humane as those labeled organic. Natural products, because they do not have to adhere to the strict regulations required for organic certification, are also cheaper than organics. They are a kind of middle-step for consumers who want to buy something better for their families and the environment but who are not yet ready to plunk down the cash for pricey organic food.

“People are more and more concerned because of food scares and problems with food around the world,” says James Walker, managing director, Walkers Shortbread Limited, Aberlour-on-Spey, Scotland, makers of traditional products including shortbreads and oat cakes for over 100 years. “People are looking for natural foods.”

“The price point with natural is close enough to the regular product for the consumer to buy it,” according to John O’Brien, director of business management, Smithfield Global Products, Philadelphia, PA. “With natural, it’s more expensive but not so much that it’s prohibitive for the manufacturer or the retailer to sell it.”

“Major players in the marketplace are coming out with natural lines,” notes O’Brien, and Smithfield is one of them, with a new line of natural deli meats. “There’s a motivator with organic and natural that people can say, ‘I’m comfortable with everything that’s in that product.’”

MORE THAN A FAD

According to the Natural Marketing Institute (NMI), Harleysville, PA, retail spending on natural foods and beverages has risen from \$9.6 billion in 2001 to \$12.4 billion in 2005, and the upward trend shows no sign of stopping. “Based on reported consumer usage patterns, future expected shopping and trended consumer data, the Natural Marketing Institute is projecting that retail sales of natural foods and beverages could reach \$16.92 billion in 2009,” says Nancy White, director of marketing.

Of those surveyed by NMI, 67 percent of consumers who buy natural foods do it because they believe it is better for them and their families, 62 percent buy it for overall health and wellness and 55 percent for taste.

“The Natural Marketing Institute defines natural products as products that contain no artificial colors, flavors or preservatives,” explains White. “Organic products are defined as products that are grown with no chemical fertilizers or pesticides, on farms that practice environmental protection and that contain no artificial colors, flavors or preservatives.”

Why have natural foods been getting consumers’ attention? According to K. Dun Gifford, president of Oldways Preservation Trust, Boston,

MA, a nonprofit organization that encourages consumers to make healthful eating choices and choose sustainable and traditional foods, "I think it's education — all those books, television programs and articles that warn about the dangers of pesticides and herbicides."

Smithfield's O'Brien believes the spread of information on the Internet has a huge influence. "Look at how people get information today, and it's absolutely amazing," he says.

Ed Jenkins, president, Coleman All Natural Deli, Gainesville, GA, believes natural food chains, such as Whole Foods Market Inc., based in Austin, TX, and Wild Oats Markets Inc., based in Boulder, CO, also have had a major influence on consumers.

"As those chains grew rapidly, those customers enjoyed all-natural products. Now major retailers are focusing on offering their consumers lines of all-natural and organic products," says Jenkins, whose company's new line of pre-sliced natural deli meats will become available in September to complement its natural bulk deli meat.

While natural foods have sold well throughout the supermarket for years, deli products are just starting to catch up. "It's been a vegetarian trend. Meat is kind of the last thing to the table," explains Stephen McDonnell, founder and CEO, Bridgewater, NJ-based Applegate Farms, a pioneer in natural meats. "We do a full line of bulk deli products," he says, as well as "pre-sliced turkey, chicken, beef and pork, all of which are antibiotic-free and some of which are organic."

Roy Moore, founder and CEO, Maverick Ranch Natural Meats, Denver, CO, proclaims, "I think the time is now for natural in the deli." The company will soon add hickory-smoked organic buffalo to its more traditional natural deli offerings. "The demand for organic and natural is at a high."

Moore says consumers have been buying natural products in the meat section of the supermarket and are now seeking it in the deli. "It's grown to the point where it's probably 1 to 2 percent of meat sold. In some stores, it's more than that."

"It's certainly not a fad," says McDonnell. "It's a long-term trend. Will it be more than 10 percent of the shelf? That's not clear. It's slightly over-hyped, and I would encourage retailers to not overreact." Still, he says, the market for natural foods continues to grow.

"You can't say this is a trend anymore. It's really a whole new category now," notes Theresa Marquez, chief marketing executive, Organic Valley and Organic Prairie, La Farge, WI, makers of organic dairy products, including organic cheeses for the deli.

JUST THE FOOD, PLEASE

"People are very, very interested in and

ADD VALUE WITH NATURAL PLASTIC PACKAGING

Customers are looking for more than just natural foods in the deli. Thanks to corn-based biodegradable plastics, even the containers the food is packed in can appeal to the environmentally conscious consumer.

NatureWorks LLC, Minnetonka, MN, began making plastic pellets from corn in 2003. "We start with sugar from the corn, which turns to dextrose, which feeds our fermentation plant," explains Ann Tucker, director of public affairs. "From that fermentation, we make lactic acid. It's a very naturally occurring substance. From there, we go through a series of steps that make it into plastic pellets. We ship these around the world to be turned into plastic containers, such as clear plastic deli containers.

"We've seen the growth in organics in the last couple of years, and retailers want to package their natural products in natural packaging," she continues. "If you have a product with a natural-product value position, think of the lift you get from natural packaging."

"A lot of this is driven by consumers who are interested in being more 'green,'" explains Mary Rosenthal, global communications leader for NatureWorks. "In the last year and a half, there's been a growing awareness of the nature of oil. People ask, 'Do you want to use a diminishing resource to hold your sandwich for an hour and a half?'"

The idea seems to be catching on. "In 2005, we saw a triple-digit volume growth, and we're seeing this sustained in 2006," says Rosenthal.

Wilkinson Industries in Fort Calhoun, NE, uses NatureWorks PLA plastic to make its line of natural plastic packaging. The company, perhaps best known as the creators of the first TV dinner tray and the first tamper-evident seal, believes plant-based packaging is the next big thing.

"We feel that we're very innovative," says Judeane Tusa, marketing communications manager. "We're always looking for new things, and we think this helps retailers sell. I think that NatureWorks' plastic brings attention to the product. I'm really proud that our company is one of the first in the world to come up with containers like this."

DB

conscious of not eating chemicals and preservatives," says Simon Johnson of Duchy Originals, an East Twickenham, England, company founded in 1992 by Prince Charles, a strong believer in sustainable, organic farming. "I'm amazed when I see people reading the labels."

"More people are interested in eliminating additives from their diets," agrees Joan Rubschlager, secretary and treasurer of Rubschlager Baking Corporation, Chicago, IL. "For that reason, we created the Natural Preferences line of breads and snack chips in which there are no preservatives. These products contain no calcium propionate, a mold-inhibitor. These breads have a shorter shelf life than the regular line. Many nutritionists feel calcium propionate is a good addition, rather than a problem, but it is an 'artificial' ingredient."

"With a natural product, the lifespan is less," says Smithfield's O'Brien, because natural products do not contain artificial preservatives. However, even without preservatives, natural meats can have a long shelf life.

"We post-pasteurize everything, and that effectively kills anything that would be harmful," explains Coleman's Jenkins. "You get a

longer shelf-life with preservatives, but when you post-pasteurize, you add 15 to 20 days to the shelf life. So our products have over 50 days' shelf-life."

Because nitrites, used to give meat an appetizing pink color, cannot be used in products labeled natural, many companies are finding acceptable natural alternatives. "A lot of people are using celery juice or beet juice to get that color," says O'Brien.

Many consumers are seeking out food grown without chemical pesticides, hormones or antibiotics. All organic foods are grown this way as are many non-organic natural foods.

"Many of the pesticides in our foods are carcinogens," says Moore. Maverick Ranch never uses pesticides. "Most of the health issues today can be traced back to environmental contamination. The main one is cancer.

"There are groups that say there's no harm in pesticides," but he will not be convinced. "Every day we eat a low dosage of chemicals.

"Farm workers have 13 times as many birth defects as non-farm workers," Moore notes. "I think eventually, within 50 years, many countries will ban these chemicals."



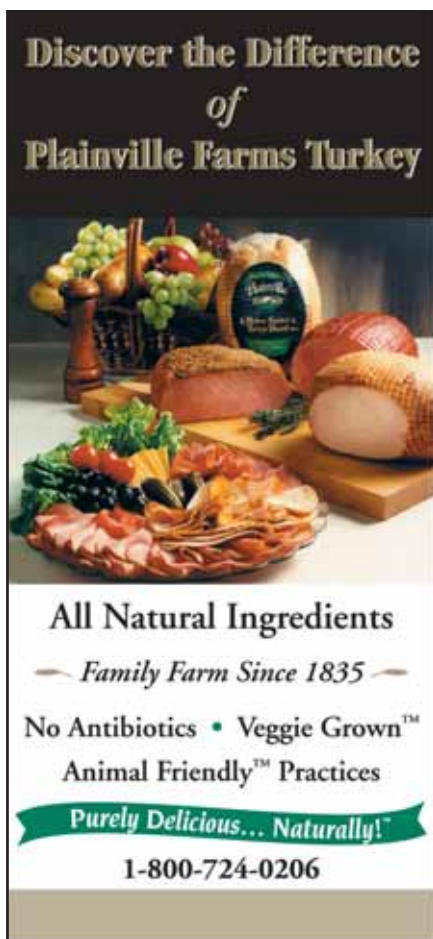
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Like-minded consumers seek out pesticide-free food because they, too, worry about the chemicals that they ingest and that are potentially harmful to the environment. "The knowledge increases with education and level of income," says Moore.

"I think consumers nowadays are more educated about food and concerned with providing products that are nutritional and wholesome, not only for themselves but also for their families," says Barbara Quijano, vice president of sales and marketing, Plainville Farms, Plainville, NY. The family-owned farm produces over 600,000 natural turkeys a year.

"Health is always a huge concern," says Marquez of Organic Valley. "Environment is another concern, and the two are linked."

Dairy cows at Organic Valley and Organic Prairie are raised without the added hormones some farms use to increase milk production. "The consumer doesn't want milk from cows pumped up with a hormone," she adds.

Of those consumers looking for hormone-free food, young mothers are some of the pickiest. "So many women are pregnant or have young kids and worry about what they put in their bodies," Marquez notes.

Rick North, project director of the campaign for safe food for Physicians for Social Responsibility, Oregon Chapter, Portland, OR, cites two reasons educated consumers are concerned about hormones in their dairy products. First is an increase in udder infections. "That means farmers are going to use more antibiotics. The second is cancer. It significantly increases another growth hormone called IGF1. Excess levels of IGF1 have been linked very strongly to cancer in humans. From milk, it comes into us.

"We don't say there's absolute proof that it causes cancer, but why take an unnecessary risk?" asks North.

Antibiotic use in conventionally raised animals also sends more consumers to the natural category. "Antibiotics are a big issue for a couple of reasons," says Applegate's McDonnell. "One is, in our opinion, it allows growers to produce animals in an unsustainable way. It allows them to give animals cheaper feed, which is bad for the immune system, and it allows them to crowd the animals in ways they shouldn't be crowded. They're on drugs, from the minute they're born until the minute they die. It's done to cheapen the product.

"The increased levels of resistance to antibiotics in animals and people is another issue," says McDonnell. "Antibiotics become increasingly ineffective."

While many people choose natural food because they believe it is more healthful, concern about the environment is a growing reason consumers choose natural — especially organic — food.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

"None of us has figured out what the successor to organic will be," says K. Dun Gifford, president of Boston, MA-based Oldways Preservation Trust.

"I think you can predict that if you have a good story — a good message — you can appeal to Americans to change the way they eat," he says. "Organics are a big deal. People pooh-poohed it at first. In this country, we really don't have any deep-rooted traditions, except that we change."

So what is his best guess? "It's trending towards localism — eating more local foods. What happens with these kinds of trends is they start small and they build, and the big companies start going, 'Hey, we've got to get in on this!'"

Eating locally grown and produced foods is an idea that has been strongly embraced in Europe. But will it catch on here?

"This is a slippery slope," Gifford says. "What's local? Fifty miles away? Are people going to say, 'Okay, I'm all for eating local, except for oranges,'" he laughs. "And, hey, where are we supposed to get our coffee? And our chocolate? And the spices we used to flavor our locally made ham?"

Stickers on rotisserie chicken packages may one day proclaim that the chicken came from the farm next door, but it certainly will not stop Gifford from enjoying it with a piece of imported Italian cheese. **DB**

"If you go back 10 or 20 years, there was no concern about the environment in respect to the food supply," says Oldways' Gifford. "There's an upward trend with that."

"Agriculture is now the No. 1 pollutant in the world," says Marquez. "Natural does not address that. It means no additives in the processing. It does not mean organic agriculture."

That does not mean a product must be certified organic to be environmentally friendly. It does mean environmentally conscious consumers are reading more labels and doing their homework to find out exactly how their food was grown.

HUMANE TREATMENT

Many feel the food they are eating comes from happier animals if no pesticides, hor-



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mones or antibiotics are used. After all, crowded feedlots only work if the animals are given drugs to protect them from diseases that can result from such conditions.

So instead of being packed in and fed a diet of corn and animal by-products, these animals eat more as they would eat in nature and mill around more freely.

"I think people think if an animal is better treated, it's better for you, which is generally correct," says Smithfield's O'Brien. He believes conventionally raised animals are treated humanely for this very reason. But many consumers want to go beyond that.

"There are some expectations consumers have that they're buying these products from a sunny farm, with hills and valleys. A family farm. It's an idyllic perception," he says.

Some products are certified humane. "There are certifying agencies that you can use to audit your farms," says Applegate's McDonnell. "We do have that label on some. We're trying to get it done on all of them."

PAYING MORE FOR FEWER CUT CORNERS

Raising animals without the use of pesticides, hormones or antibiotics takes longer and costs more than raising them conventionally. In the case of organics, the costs jump

even higher, partly because of the current shortage in organic foods, especially milk.

Organic cheese, for example, costs far more than non-organic. "It takes 10 pounds of milk to make one pound of cheese," explains Organic Valley's Marquez. "That's a lot of expensive milk to make an expensive cheese." Even so, "The overall organic category is growing faster than it's ever grown."

The supply of organic milk may catch up with demand by spring, with perhaps better prices and certainly more availability. "Probably by April, you'll see a lot more organic milk and organic cheese. We're increasing our own supply by about 40 percent," she says.

Animals raised without antibiotics are more expensive than conventionally raised. "A lot of antibiotics act like steroids," explains McDonnell. "It accelerates their growth rate." And the faster they grow, the cheaper they are.

According to Maverick's Moore, "We have the lowest food costs in the world, and a lot of people don't want to raise that. But what's the health cost?"

That's a question a lot of educated consumers are asking themselves.

Marquez believes many Americans buy organic food simply because they can. "People are choosing to buy organic because their food bills are so cheap they realize they can

spend a little bit more for food they think is better for them."

DOES NATURAL TASTE BETTER?

"The bottom line is, the products that sell the best are the most flavorful," says Smithfield's O'Brien. "The flavor of a natural product isn't necessarily better."

Marquez agrees. "Are there great organic cheeses? Yes. Are they consistently better tasting than conventional cheeses? No."

But while "natural" does not always mean "delicious," natural meats do have an advantage over meat that has been processed with additives.

"If you want to reduce the cost of a product, you have to put in additives to hold water," explains Coleman's Jenkins. "Water's cheaper than meat, obviously."

But all that added water also dilutes the flavor and gives meat a more rubbery texture. "When we did focus groups, the comments were that our natural meat tastes like it's right off the bone, like a Thanksgiving turkey or a Christmas ham," says Jenkins.

Quijano of Plainville Farms agrees. "It's a texture. There's more of a taste of day-after-Thanksgiving turkey. Once you taste the difference, it's tough to go back." **DB**



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Rev Up Your Holiday Sales

*More customers turn to prepared foods during the holidays.
Is your deli department ready?*

By Jacqueline Ross Lieberman

The holiday season brings to mind family gatherings featuring old-fashioned comfort food and indulgence. It may also bring to mind hectic days of shopping and endless parties to attend and prepare for.

"Everyone is time-starved during the holidays," says Lori Simco, vice president of marketing for deli, Tyson Foods, Fayetteville, AR. That means customers are looking not only for entertaining solutions but also for more quick meals for their families.

"You can barely fit anything into your schedule this time of year," agrees Dan Emery, vice president of marketing, Pilgrim's Pride, Pittsburg, Texas.

"The holiday season is a time of frenetic activity and when we all feel the pull of hearth and home," says Simco. "The contradiction this presents drives the fastest growing meal occasion today — food prepared away from home, but consumed at home."

"The thing you've got to remember about the holidays," says Emery, "is it's not just Thanksgiving turkeys. It's a time for family gatherings. So items like Buffalo wings and chicken strips do very well up through the Super Bowl. So do some rotisserie chickens and rotisserie turkey parts."

Jeffrey Siegel, president, Chloe Foods, Brooklyn, NY, believes people cook less and rely on prepared foods more. As the busy holidays approach, cooking a full meal can be overwhelming, leading many customers to buy most, if not all, of their holiday and party meals and their everyday meals, as well.

"The side dishes become more popular in the winter months. Especially the warm ones," notes John McCarthy, Jr., senior retail marketing manager, Reser's Fine Foods, Beaverton, OR. "Starting in September, you see sales of side dishes grow."

Tradition Sells

Food is a common element in all traditions across the globe, and at holiday time, consumers will be looking for foods that are traditional and authentic.

"Traditional products are big sellers at the holidays, not just for family dinners, but also as gifts. Price becomes a non-issue at the

holidays for sought-after foods — carrying on family traditions is more important," says William Osanitsch, sales and marketing director, Ridgewood, NY-based Karl Emher, Inc., a European-style meat manufacturer of high-end smoked and Black Forest hams, liverwurst, luncheon meats, corned beef and a traditional salami called cervelat. "When a holiday ham is a long-standing holiday tradition, the consumer is going to go for the best quality."

Siegel warns of straying too far from the norm. "Our retailers are always looking for ways to be new and different, to set themselves apart. We've tried all kinds of crazy things, and they don't make it to the next year. We tried chunky mashed sweet potatoes and red-skinned potato croquettes. We made a cauliflower purée. It sold a little, but there was no call for it the next year." Chloe will offer a few new items, such as grilled root vegetables, and plans to incorporate nuts into many of its dishes.

Reser's new items also skew toward the old-fashioned. "New items are green bean casserole, cornbread stuffing, a new pre-packed home-style stuffing, spiced apples and a new line of side dishes under our Holiday Favorites side-dish line," says McCarthy.

"Retailers can help the consumer by offering a complete meal rather than just side dishes and when the center-of-the-plate protein is of exceptional quality, consumers will be more willing to pay the higher price great quality deserves. The deli department really stands out when it offers convenience, ease of preparation, without sacrificing quality," notes Osanitsch.

Many distributors work with retailers to



PHOTO COURTESY OF TYSON FOODS

create proprietary prepared dishes. Vicki Aloia, deli specialist, Bashas' Markets, Mesa, AZ, says Bashas' uses a special recipe produced by its local distributor for "the best fresh cranberry sauce with orange you have ever tasted."

As long as it is cost effective, Reser's can help retailers come up with any number of dishes, says McCarthy. "We're not limited in what we can do. We're interested in growth."

Fire Up The Rotisserie

Many consumers rely on the deli for everyday main dishes during this hectic time. "The bustle of the season restricts the time and energy we have for cooking, but we still want that meal in the home," says Simco.

When it comes to quick meals, she says, "Rotisserie chicken has always filled that spot." Tyson is debuting a new rotisserie item this year — rotisserie pork loin. "It's a delicious herb-rubbed pork loin that consumers tell us tastes like Grandma's cooking. We anticipate it to be a big hit this season."

Chef Paul Prudhomme's Magic Seasoning Blends, New Orleans, LA, is debuting its flavor value-added meat seasoning program in time for the holiday season, says John L. McBride, vice president of sales and market-



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ing. The program includes peel-off stickers, two-sided header cards and shelf wobblers to be placed throughout the store.

Displays can help rotisserie sales tremendously. Tyson's Simco recommends placing warmers in a secondary spot in the store. "Only 25 percent of your customers shop deli, but 43 percent of your customers will shop a mobile warmer at the checkout."

Party Food Favorites

Dips, spreads, cheese balls and party platters can be picked up on the way to a party.

"Our dips are very popular that time of year," says Reser's McCarthy. "I think a lot of it has to do with the social gatherings that happen then. It's a conversational food."

"Specialty dips become more popular," during the holidays, he says. "They might go a step up from the traditional ranch, such as our roasted red pepper and our spinach artichoke, which you can serve cold or heated up, or our artichoke jalapeño."

Cocktail breads and crackers also sell well for partygoers. "All of Rubschlager's products enjoy increased sales during the holidays because of the increase in entertaining during that time," says Joan Rubschlager, secretary and treasurer, Rubschlager Baking

Corporation, Chicago, IL. "Cocktail breads, the year-round best-sellers, are in 24-hour production from October through mid-December. Squares and Rye-Olas also enjoy increased holiday sales."

To get the most sales, she says, just place the breads in the deli. "We offer promotions on the shipper displays of all our products on the assumption that, if the bread is there — especially in a display — people will buy."

"Putting a display shipper in the deli tremendously increases the possibility of impulse sales," Rubschlager adds. "If customers must walk around a display shipper to get to or from the deli counter, they are very likely to take a bread to accompany the deli purchase. The display is a 'silent suggestion.'"

Appeal To Busy Customers

"Focus on convenience," says Simco. "Why not offer recipes that are all from assembled packaged products available in the store, merchandise them together, and help your customer dress that rotisserie up and take it out on the town?"

"Suggest what they can bring for different events," says Reser's McCarthy. "A lot of people don't have a preconceived idea of what they're looking for."

Also, Simco says, normally impatient people become even antsy during the busy holidays. "Our research shows 10 percent of shoppers leave the line at the deli without making a purchase because they are not willing to wait or because the queuing system is illogical, unfair or inconsistent."

"If you don't have a register in your deli, what would it take to get one?" she asks. "If your lines are unmanageable during peak periods, what about having a staff member on the customers' side of the counter taking orders? How about a treat while customers wait? Eggnog? A holiday treat for kids?"

If you are short on staff, says Simco, "Look to manufacturers for product solutions that remove labor from your prep areas and reallocate that labor to the customer service counter in your deli."

"What a great time to experiment with telephone or on-line ordering, or curbside service!" she muses. "Shoppers will form opinions of your store during this hectic holiday season. Give them reasons to form good opinions by your attention to their needs. It's not just about the product; it's about how you have helped consumers get through one more meal, or how you've helped them delight their family on a busy day." **DB**

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AMERICANS ARE DISCOVERING PÂTÉ

Better packaging, more choices and a growing taste for "luxury" foods mean these high-end spreads are selling better than ever.

By Jacqueline Ross Lieberman

More Americans are discovering pâté, and Laurie Cummins thinks she knows why.

"Transatlantic travel has become more affordable and commonplace, and those travelers want to have those great artisanal foods of Europe here at home," says the pâté aficionado and president of Alexian Pâté and Specialty Meats in Neptune, NJ.

"Pâté has always been very popular during the holiday season. It is perceived as a luxury item, like caviar, and would be reserved for special occasions," she explains. "It has now, however, come to be appreciated as something to be enjoyed on crusty bread with lettuce and sliced tomato, or even as a spread on a warm bagel for breakfast."

Once a cut-to-order item that required standing in line, better packaging has turned pâté into a grab-and-go impulse buy.

"Our 8-ounce slices of pâté are wonderful sellers," says Yvette Etchepare, director of marketing, Marcel et Henri, South San Francisco, CA. "They have an excellent shelf life of seven weeks, so delis will stock them. The color stays fresh and the product stays fresh."

"Pâté seems to be an impulse item, so if it's there, it goes," she continues. Smaller packaging also means less waste for the retailer, she explains, because there is never that last piece from the bulk package that gets old and has to be thrown out before it can be sold.

"Our mini 7-ounce pack sells very well for smaller stores," notes Florence Billot, East Coast sales representative, Fabrique Delices, Arlington, VA. However, she says, "I recommend they buy them in bulk and cut them into a few slices. We sell the re-pack labels."

Her reasoning? "It's because the person behind the counter — if he's smelling it and tasting it, he's going to be able to say, 'Oh, yeah, I love that one,'" to the customer. In other words, simply being in contact with the product will help educate employees "even though it's not done on purpose."

No matter the packaging, Billot believes educating employees is the best way to sell pâté. "Sometimes we'll go into the store and have



PHOTO COURTESY OF FABRIQUE DELICES

a meeting with all the team members and give them a presentation," she says. "Afterward, the turnaround is enormous. So you have to educate your people all the time."

Educating your customers is the next step. "Sampling is a huge way to sell in store. People will come back for it, even if they don't buy it that day," says Billot. "We don't mind giving free products to new customers so they can sample it out in their stores. It's our best business card, really."

"Sampling is the best way to go," agrees Etchepare. "When sampling is done, it's amazing how much goes."

Something For Everyone

"I think people find pâtés appealing because they are interesting and fun," explains Cummins. "Pâté is a great medium for the blending of flavors in the mixture of meats, spices and liquors. Discovering pâtés is

always an adventure for the palate, and pâté has 'panache.'"

"Our mousses do really well," adds Etchepare. "They're creamy and spreadable, and the flavor is quite nice. We have one with porcini mushrooms, ones with truffles. We have a duck with plum wine and bits of prune in it that makes it a little bit sweet."

"We have two best-sellers," notes Billot. "One is the country pâté with black pepper. The other is the truffle mousse. It's a wonderful item made with chicken and duck, truffles and sherry wine. It's a pork-free product, which is a big plus for some people."

"Our duck mousse and truffle mousse are our best sellers," says Cummins. "In my mind, a lot of the coarse cuts out there, until recently, were rather boring."

Alexian's country-style pheasant rosemary pâté, made from pork, pheasant and duck with rosemary, pecans and port wine, is another story. "Pheasant rosemary came out two years ago. It's fabulous. It's one of the best products we've ever made," says Cummins.

All-natural pâtés now have a prominent place in the market. "We have always made all-natural pâtés with no preservatives, artificial coloring or flavoring. Furthermore, we certify all of our meat and

dairy ingredients are hormone- and antibiotic-free," she adds.

"I think there is a greater appreciation today for purity and quality, and a general shift away from 'over-processed' foods," she explains. "We don't want to ingest what is perceived to be unnecessary to the flavor and texture of the food, regardless of how long it may last in our pantry or fridge."

Half of Fabrique Delices' products contain preservatives, says Billot, while the other half are all natural. "Sales of the natural are increasing every year," she notes.

"We keep a tiny bit of nitrates to keep the nice, fresh color. It's just minimal, minimal amounts. We've tried all natural, but the color is very unappetizing. It looks gray. From an impulse point-of-view, it helps if it looks nice," says Marcel et Henri's Etchepare,

"Flavor-wise, it's not a huge difference," says Billot. "And for me, pâté is never supposed to be super-pink. In the natural pâtés, you'll have a bit duller color, but I don't think people mind at all."

For vegetarian customers, more options exist than ever before. "We have a vegetable pâté we make with cauliflower, spinach and carrot — it's got a layer of green, a layer of white and a layer of orange," says Etchepare.

Alexian also makes a layered vegetable

MORE THAN A SPREAD FOR CRACKERS

"In France, we use pâtés for everything," says Florence Billot, East Coast sales representative, Fabrique Delices, Arlington, VA. "We use them for parties, but we also use them for picnics, in a sandwich with cornichons. You can make little hors d'oeuvres with them in pastry shells. It's really endless. You can just take a slice and enjoy it with a salad. It's kind of a fancy fast-food."

For parties, says Yvette Etchepare, director of marketing, Marcel et Henri, South San Francisco, CA, "Pair pâté with wines and cheeses. Or put it along side of a salad."

Laurie Cummins, president, Alexian Pâté and Specialty Meats, Neptune, NJ, even recommends pâté for breakfast. "Dice coarse-cut pâté and chase it around a pan with some eggs." And for holiday meals, "Throw a little coarse-cut pâté in the bread stuffing with dried cranberries." **DB**

terrines, as does Fabrique Delices but, Billot admits, "This is the least-seller. People who buy pâté, they go for the real thing."

More exciting options for those avoiding meat include seafood pâtés, such as smoked salmon. "We have a smoked salmon mousse that's selling very well," says Billot. "For people having a party with friends who don't like liver or don't eat meat, it's a nice alternative."

"For those people who can't tolerate dairy, our chicken-with-port wine pâté is one of the few pâtés available that doesn't have dairy," notes Etchepare.

Alexian even offers vegan alternatives, such as Earthy Mushroom, a combination of

mushrooms, celery and onions in a tofu base.

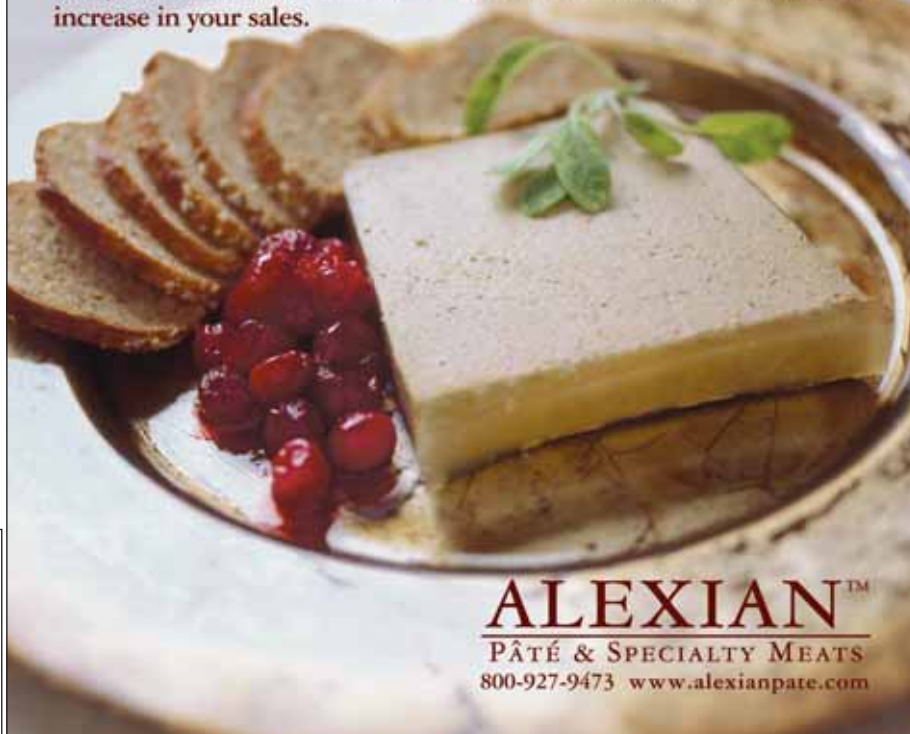
While more and more low-fat, low-cholesterol pâtés appear on the market, Cummins does not worry that the richer pâtés will go out of style.

"Of seven products in the Alexian vegetarian, vegan and seafood category, the average calorie value is 51 calories per 2-ounce serving. In the meat category, the values are much higher, of course, and this is why they taste so good. Because pâté is not eaten on a daily basis, I would say the benefit to the taste buds and to the soul will probably outweigh any perceived risk to health or guilt from consumption of extra calories." **DB**

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Handheld Deli Foods

An old tradition makes a convenient comeback.

By Bob Johnson



From Poppers to Hot Pockets, pizza sticks to flatbread sandwiches, more and more consumers are coming to the deli department looking for handheld foods that are fast and convenient.

"The only thing the handheld category can do is continue to grow," says Demetrios Haralambatos, corporate executive chef for Kontos Foods Inc., Paterson, NJ. "With two-income young families, it is difficult to come home and prepare dinner."

Other suppliers agree that convenience is the key to the growing demand for handheld deli foods.

"Convenience is important to keep in mind when merchandising handheld deli foods," according to Mike Foley, associate brand manager for Heinz North America,

based in Pittsburgh, PA. "The consumers of handheld deli products tend to consume them the same day. They should be easy to prepare, and the packaging should be easy to deal with."

Sometimes convenience can even mean helping the consumer get through the shopping experience unscathed. "Pizza Stixs are a great snack to keep the kids happy while you're shopping," says Kathy Lenkov, communications manager of Nestlé Food Services North America, Glendale, CA. Three-ounce Pizza Stixs are available in a bulk package of 48 or individually wrapped for the cold case.

Where It All Began

Many people date the origins of the

growing category of handheld items to when deli departments started to compete with fast-food outlets several decades ago.

"The emergence of the handheld sandwich category in a retail format really began with Hot Pockets in 1983," says Robert Lux, marketing manager of the warehouse clubs and retail division of Pierre Foods, Inc., Cincinnati, OH. Hot Pockets are offered individually wrapped for the deli, and some products are offered bulk packed for the hot case as well.

"Aside from that, the category has remained largely unexplored with Hot Pockets and its various line extensions [Croissant Pockets, Lean Pockets, Ultra Lean Pockets, Pot-Pie Pockets] dominating the category. The only other notable entry in the category

is Smucker's line of Uncrustables that premiered in 2000."

But others find the roots of this trend in the culinary habits of immigrants as far back as the 19th century. "In my opinion handheld foods have always been an important item in delicatessens," relates Haralambatos of Kontos Foods. "When Italians first immigrated to the United States, they opened salumeria, where you could see the provolone, salami and other products hanging from the ceiling to dry. The salumeria evolved into the delicatessen."

This newly revived tradition has already led to an unprecedented variety of handheld foods available in the deli department.

"Hamburgers are the No. 1 selling sandwich in America," notes Mark Peters, owner of Calzone & Co., Inc. Redmond, WA. "The IDDBA [International Dairy, Deli and Bakery Association, Madison, WI] has a great study showing all kinds of sandwich category data for grocery delis. Also, there have been huge increases in ethnic awareness contributing to growing sales for burritos, spring rolls and sushi. And pizza is always a key product."



Individually-wrapped 8-ounce Hot Pockets are Nestlé's most popular item in the deli cold case, according to Lenkov. Nestlé also has a 4-ounce potpie that does well in the deli department hot case.

"A newer item is our microwavable Hot Pockets brand sub sandwich," Lenkov says. "It gives the deli counter a chance to serve a hot sub sandwich, like meatball and mozzarella or Philly steak and cheese."

Panini sandwiches made with flatbreads are moving out of the Northeast, and out of upscale restaurants and stores, into the mainstream across the country.

However, panini sandwiches are still rarely found in deli departments in most of the country. "Paninis have been growing for a year and a half in the Northeast, but not in the Midwest, in the South outside of Miami

THAT'S A WRAP

Packaging figures to become more important and more varied as the range of handheld deli items expands. One paramount concern in packaging is keeping the product fresher longer.

"The packaging makes a great deal of difference," says Cheryl Miller, operations manager, Flair Flexible Packaging Co., Georgetown, TX. "As we see more varieties in the deli department, packaging becomes more important."

Oxygen and moisture barriers can be extremely important in keeping the product fresh, according to Miller. Both injection-molded and ziplock poly bag packages provide barriers, she explains. "From a deli's viewpoint, maintaining product quality is of paramount importance."

Good looking and better tasting are very closely related in the mind and in the subconscious of most consumers. "The retailer should remember that if it looks good, it's going to taste good," says Demetrios Haralambatos, corporate executive chef for Kontos Foods Inc., Paterson, NJ.

For customers to know the product looks fresh, they must be able to see it. "There are numerous varieties of packaging available," states Katie Biggers, director of retail sales, Amy Food, Inc., Houston, TX. "However, attractive packaging that offers a 'fresh' perception of the food always has great appeal to the consumer."

The package may have everything to do with how the consumer will use the product after purchase. "There are a variety of different ways to package your products and the type of packaging that you utilize depends on the product attributes that you want to emphasize," Robert Lux, marketing manager of the warehouse clubs and retail division of Pierre Foods, Inc., Cincinnati, OH, says. "There are microwavable films and non-microwavable films, butcher wrap paper and MAP packed items, as well as products that employ the use of a succceptor sleeve. The type of packaging you use depends on how you want to position your product."

Many producers offer their goods in a wide range of packaging formats. According to Mark Peters, owner of Calzone & Co., Inc. Redmond, WA, "Packaging diversity is now key for suppliers. For example, we can package in modified atmosphere to extend shelf life to over 50 days. We also shrink-wrap. One of our best packaging methods for the deli business is with our ovenable/microwavable bags. We ship our panini and calzone frozen sealed in these bags. Because of their special clear lining, they can be used in a conventional oven or in a microwave. They seal in the moisture so that our products are perfect whether you bake them for 30 minutes in the oven, or microwave them for three minutes."

If the manufacturer is familiar, the package should show the name. "Consumers prefer brands they know and trust," notes Kathy Lenkov, communications manager of Nestlé Food Services North America, Glendale, CA.

If the product is unfamiliar, a different packaging approach may be in order. "The packaging should tell what the product is and how to use it, or it should direct the customer to a place where they can get recipes," says Haralambatos. The Kontos website includes numerous recipes for panini sandwiches.

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or in California outside of Los Angeles and maybe San Francisco," says Haralambatos. "They are the up-and-coming thing. It is important for deli managers to remain up on the times."

What Will Be the Next Little Thing

As the handheld category continues to grow, producers will compete to offer the next hot little thing in the deli department.

"The bad news is that Hot Pockets has the market when it comes to quick, convenient products, so for other items to be successful, they have to have some level of differentiation from the Hot Pockets category,"

Lux says. "But the good news is that the handheld sandwich category is wide open, so there is a lot of room for growth. Moreover, the frozen and prepared foods category is on the rise because of the rising demand for quality products that take little prep time. Remember to have a good mix of new product innovation and a focus on the basics, and you will have a balanced aisle that keeps the cash register ringing."

Some producers believe the new products will marry the two desires of busy young professionals — convenience and nutrition. "The most important food items in this category today would be products that



do not require a lot of preparation and still hold nutritional value," says Katie Biggers, director of retail sales, Amy Food, Inc., Houston, TX. "Today's consumer continues to be time starved but more educated on nutrition."

Other producers see an entire new line of handheld foods offering the ethnic variety that is becoming available throughout the supermarket. "The key trends we focus on are ethnicity and convenience," Calzone's Peters says. "New flavors and ease of prepa-

ration will drive sales. Also, organics, natural foods and healthful nutritional profiles will continue to grow in consumer awareness."

Still other producers believe new handheld items will have to appeal to tastes across a wider range of day parts. "We have breakfast items for the deli department," Lenkov says. "Fast-food restaurants are showing their biggest growth in the breakfast hours." Nestlé will offer a variety of breakfast Hot Pockets, including new Sausage & Gravy RollerStix.

To know what will be offered in the deli tomorrow, retailers need only look at the restaurants and frozen food sections today.

"A lot of the trends come from restaurants, go to the frozen food section and from there to the deli department," says Heinz' Foley. Poppers have been a popular branded item in the frozen food section for a decade or more. Heinz has moved them into the deli department over the last five years.

Cream cheese jalapeño is the No. 1 selling Popper, notes Foley, followed closely by cheddar cheese. In the near future, Heinz will be offering pizza Poppers and a cheesecake dessert Popper. "The future is to offer more varieties in Poppers," he says.

There is one note of caution when looking at new and different items: The old standards are standards for a reason.

"Product innovation plays a key part in growing the handheld sandwich category," Pierre's Lux says. "New products with different meats, breads, cheeses and flavor profiles will peak consumers' curiosity and encourage trial purchase, but at the end of the day, the basics are always going to win out. Take ice cream for example. With all the different flavor possibilities, the three most sold flavors are still chocolate, vanilla and strawberry."

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FRESH SOUPS Heat Up

Fresh soups hit all the consumer desires — convenience, quality and taste.

By Jason Cangialosi

The soup is on in the deli section as retailers premiere gourmet recipes that make their way from hot displays to fresh refrigerated grab-and-go cups. New product lines put the quality, flavor and convenience of restaurant quality soups into the hands of retail consumers. Even Campbell's, based in Camden, NJ, plans further development of its StockPot refrigerated soups, now at 70 varieties. Today, fresh, refrigerated soups are widely recognized as the fastest growing segment of the soup category.

John Bello, CEO of New York, NY-based Soup Kitchen International, which owns the Original SoupMan brand, says of the brand's grab-and-go retail packages, "We couldn't keep it in stock and now we'll roll the brand out as fast as we can, or as fast as it will allow us to take it."

Sandridge Food Corp., Medina, OH, released its Simmer & Spoon Café line to answer the growing demand for upscale prepared soups characterized by flavor and health. Shirley Leonard, marketing manager, notes, "One of the drivers has been consumers' growing need for convenience, while still offering quality home-style foods. As a result, refrigerated side dishes have grown nearly 8 percent a year since 2000, and of the total refrigerated side dish category, fresh soup is the fastest growing segment, increasing 226 percent between 2003 and 2005.

"We had the capabilities and capacity to make fresh soups a natural line extension to our salads," she adds. "We have an excellent reputation for delivering fresh, reliable, hand-made quality foods with state-of-the-art equipment and safety standards." This reputation reaches to foodservice, "a great market for our soups, as most of these customers serve our soup in their restaurants."

Kettle Cuisine, Chelsea, MA, will celebrate its 20th anniversary in early October. "The company was built to provide chefs and foodservice operators with soup cooked how they would cook them, using ingredients they would use. This philosophy of cooking the right way with the best, natural ingredients has translated well into the retail channel," explains Brian McGinnis, retail business manager. The 10-ounce refrigerated Grab & Go line "got a great response with retailers, providing a natural soup line for grab-and-go cases. It's meant to be a single-serve meal and possibly go along with ready made sandwiches in the deli."

"There is a definite trend towards more natural foods — foods with less processing, fewer additives, preservatives and artificial flavors and colors — and soup is the perfect image builder for deli operators. Soup, especially fresh soups, are perceived to be healthful foods, and with new technologies, restaurant-quality soups can be made available to the consumer with no additives and preservatives at a reasonable cost and a shelf life that can make it through mainstream distribution channels," notes Jeffrey Siegel, president of Brooklyn NY-based Chloe Foods, whose soups are marketed under the Blue Ridge Farms brand name.

New Packaging And Recipes

Most producers are trying to convey a sophisticated, gourmet image that attracts people who like fine dining but without the time and dollar expense.

The soup-and-sandwich connection draws consumers with soups that satisfy big appetites, while the soup-and-salad connection draws consumers that appeal to a healthful lifestyle. "Americans love soup — it

is a comfort food, but it can't taste of chemicals and preservatives. In many ways, soups answer all the consumers' hot buttons — easy to prepare, fresh and healthful, nutritious, reasonably priced and versatile enough to be eaten for lunch or dinner, as a snack or an on-the-go food, perfect for a hot beverage container that fits into the cup holder of a car," says Siegel.

"With our retail Simmer & Spoon fresh soups, a consumer can expect restaurant-quality soup to eat conveniently at home or the office," Leonard says. "The line is sold in eye-catching retail cups and merchandised near salads, deli counters and hot food cases. We have promoted it through coupons and colorful signage."

The SoupMan Heat-n-Serve bags are on the cutting edge of convenient shopping and storage with a less bulky package. "It will continue to simplify, and development will make it easier to take the product home and consume it," says Bello.

Gourmet Taste Meets Variety

Consumers recognize the inherent quality difference between canned and fresh soups. The flavors go far beyond the ubiquitous chicken noodle they ate as kids.

"As consumer trends change, so will the varieties of soup we offer," says Leonard. "Consumers are seeking more healthful varieties, including preservative-free and organic. In addition, new ethnic flavors are more in demand. To respond to these needs, we have added more vegetarian soups, such as minestrone and cream of cauliflower, while also adding some tasty ethnic flavors, such as pasta fagioli and Asian chicken noodle. As we move forward, we will be adding organic soups to the line."

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This does not mean the company has abandoned the basics. "Classics like chicken noodle and chili continue to be some of the top sellers. One of our specialty recipes, Lobster Bisque, is also a favorite," she adds.

"Flavor profiles for soups mirror what our R&D department has found in other prepared foods — mainstream profiles with a new twist are what sell. New exotic varieties are fun to bring in and pick up consumer interest, but the top sellers will be twists on traditional soups, like tomato basil and Tuscan vegetable. Of course, there will be regional and ethnic varieties based on the demographics of a local community that will sell very well," says Chloe's Siegel.

Kettle Cuisine standards, such as grilled chicken and corn chowder, Angus beef chili and New England clam chowder, are still the top sellers, McGinnis notes. "We see growth with the seafood soups in the warmer months; they maintain a greater level of sales than other varieties.

"Kettle Cuisine is slimming down its grab-and-go line to 12 recipes and shifting toward unique varieties," he explains. With flavors such as Thai chicken with red curry and asparagus and Brie, Kettle Cuisine meets the growing demand for gourmet flavors.

"Consumers in the deli section are looking for exciting options and we're attempting to meet that demand. We've had good success with organics, but we haven't seen the level of success to expand the line further in our 10-ounce cups. There is still more demand for the higher protein, non-organic varieties," says McGinnis.

Health and expanding tastes are the barometers of change in climbing soup sales. Wendie DiMatteo, CEO, ASK Foods, Palmyra, PA, says, "Due to customers' requests, we have recently brought out a number of Gourmet Chef Creations with a unique flavor profile. We paid particular attention to ethnic profiles as well as nutritional trends and more healthful lifestyles, for example, in our vegetarian selections. Of course, all ASK soups have no artificial colors, additives, MSG or dehydrated meats or vegetables. A few of our new varieties are Mediterranean grilled vegetable, roasted red pepper, lime chili, and hunter stew.

"The trend seems to go with chilis, clam chowder and Italian wedding. Chicken noodle, vegetable beef and cream of broccoli continue to be strong products. Soups such as chili sell strong all year-round," DiMatteo notes. "While we may see an increase in the seafood soups in the summer, many of the heavier chowders, such as our Alaskan salmon chowder and gourmet clam chowder, sell all year-round."

The SoupMan brand also does well with

Does The Chef Count?

Thanks to cookbooks and the Food TV network, chefs — especially celebrity chefs — are an important part of the gourmet appeal of upscale food.

Al Yeganeh's fame came through a rather unconventional route. The inspiration for the *Seinfeld* Soup Nazi, he turned the recipes from his Manhattan business, the Original SoupMan, into a national business, New York, NY-based Soup Kitchen International.

Other brands may not have nationally recognized chefs — yet — but they do have long-standing relationships with industry-recognized recipe creators.

Chef Volker Frick has been developing soups from scratch for Kettle Cuisine, Chelsea, MA, since 1997. At Campbell's StockPot, headquartered in Camden, NJ, chef Pete Coulter has had a similar role since 1993. Both Frick and Coulter have ties to the prestigious culinary program at Johnson & Wales University, whose primary campus is in Providence, RI, Coulter as a student and Frick as a professor of international and classic cooking. While their names may not be the reason behind soup purchases, consumers have come to appreciate their ingenuity in the kitchen. **DB**

seafood varieties. Bello says, "Our seafood bisque makes up about 40 percent of the volume, with an even split between the turkey chili, chicken vegetable and jambalaya at 20 percent, but there's something there for every taste and we try to satisfy every need out there."

Effective Merchandising

"We're excited to have our own cooler in deli sections. This bodes well for what we see as a success," explains Bello. A display cooler "makes it easy for us to find space in an already crowded section. It's very expensive, but we do double or triple the value with the coolers."

Leonard notes, "Cross-merchandising with the deli is most effective. Soups displayed by the deli counter near fresh salads and sandwiches work best because they make it easier and more convenient for the consumer to buy a whole meal in one place. Our soups sell very well in supermarkets whose customer base is comprised of mid-to-upper scale suburbs and towns. The stores that sell the most soup are those that use our colorful signage at the point of sale,

display it near the deli counter and highlight the nutrition factors of the soup, such as vegetarian, preservative-free, trans-fat free, gluten-free, etc."

McGinnis relates, "In the past two years we've seen the retail side of the business grow at a much faster rate than the foodservice side. It's an indication that retailers are bringing in the same high-quality products that consumers have come to expect from foodservice providers."

"Wild Oats has a wonderful hot soup program manufactured by Kettle Cuisine," says Betsy Gillette, deli category manager at Wild Oats Market Inc, the Boulder, CO, chain with stores in 24 states. "Our product is shipped frozen, and we heat it up for our soup bars. We also, on a case-by-case basis, offer the same products in our hot soup program packaged and sold in our refrigerated cases. We work with Kettle, our 2005 Wild-stock vendor of the year, to develop soup recipes and develop proprietary recipes that meet our unique customers' needs. We also plan to enhance and expand our refrigerated soup program. Given the smaller sizes of some of our older stores and various store footprints, the only place we have the opportunity to merchandise soups is in the deli grab-and-go section."

Wild Oats is not the only retailer selling proprietary recipes under its own private label; Pleasanton, CA-based Safeway, and Carson, CA-based Bristol Farms are also following this trend. McGinnis speaks of a "cohesive branding program," saying separate labeling from the hot soup bars might confuse consumers.

Is there a possibility of soup saturation or will manufacturers be hard pressed to satisfy consumer options? ASK's DiMatteo sees a middle ground. "Customer demographics for soups are, fortunately, very diverse, but I would imagine that there still seem to be some hurdles with customer acceptance. Merchandising and logistics for shipping fresh soups are issues. I tend to believe there is enough market share to go around.

"Ironically, while we have seen all soup sales increase, we have not seen a particularly high increase of our fresh versus frozen line. I believe this has to do with the advancements in freezing; there seems to be less difference in product quality between fresh and frozen. From the customers' prospective, the frozen soups offer less product shrink," she continues.

It is just not yet known what consumers will prefer. Frozen lines gain importance as retailers deal with shelf life and shrink. Qualities of both segments continually improve, but fresh, refrigerated soups are proving to be consumer favorites. **DB**



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Pre-Sliced Deli Meat — No Longer The Department Bargain Bin

High-quality, pre-sliced deli meats are changing the entire category.

By Bob Johnson

Just a few years ago in the deli department, pre-sliced meat meant exclusively low-priced meat for the cost conscious customer. Economy-minded shoppers skirted the relatively upscale deli service counter to pick up the affordably priced sliced sandwich meat.

But pre-sliced is no longer just the deli department bargain bin. To be sure, pre-sliced, low-cost sandwich meat can still be found in the deli section, but these lower-end products have been joined by their upscale cousins, the conveniently pre-sliced premium gourmet delicatessen meats.

"You get exactly the same thing from a pre-sliced pack as from service deli for the upscale products," says Paloma Hsieh, vice president for marketing and sales, Redondo Iglesias USA, Long Island City, NY. "Customers can avoid the long wait in line."

Pre-sliced products bring portion control to the sandwich counter at the deli section by insuring that the same amount of meat is included in each sandwich. But they can also entice customers with a convenient and relatively inexpensive way to explore the world of premium delicatessen meat.

"There is a real opportunity to grow the pre-sliced deli meat awareness and household penetration relative to bulk meat and to the refrigerated peg sections of the store," says Derek Bowen, marketing director, Sara Lee Deli, Downers Grove, IL. "We think that linking pre-sliced meat with other high household penetration categories such as bulk meat and bread is a great way to generate trial for pre-sliced meat. Fortunately for Sara Lee, we have a strong Sara Lee megabrand that enables us to cross-promote our pre-sliced meats and cheeses with our Sara Lee bulk meat and bread."

Trendy, Upscale And Convenient

Recent developments in pre-sliced meats make it possible to offer a variety of upscale meats in a format that is convenient for both



the retailer and the consumer.

"The pre-sliced deli meat category allows deli retailers to offer additional brands and flavor profiles and trendy products to their selection without the expense of shrink and waste from bulk items sold over the service deli counter," notes Christine Adler, marketing manager for Volpi Foods, St. Louis, MO.

The meats offered to a wider group of supermarket consumers today in pre-sliced packages first established a consumer base at the deli counter. "Pre-sliced deli meats have historically mirrored what was sold behind the deli counter," Bowen says. "Our Sara Lee pre-sliced deli meats are high quality and provide the convenience of grab-and-go for consumers. What we have seen recently are the refrigerated peg pre-sliced meats do a better job of linking themselves with deli quality with the types of meat offered and better packaging."

Other suppliers also see pre-sliced products as giving them an opportunity to expand the market for meats already doing very well at the deli counter. "Six years ago Kretschmar premium flavored hams and turkey were doing so well in the service deli we realized there was consumer demand in the self-serve deli case," recalls John Pashea, vice president deli sales at John Morrell and Co., Cincinnati, OH, and general manager for Kretschmar. "So we went to work making sure the quality of our pre-sliced line matched up to the quality of our bulk deli line — same texture and taste."

Smaller pre-sliced packages make it possible for consumers to dabble in higher-end deli meats for the first time.

"Premium pre-sliced meats are usually in a 3- to 5-ounce package configuration, which provides a reasonable trial size for purchase," notes Richard Kessler, vice president, Fromartharie Inc., Warren, NJ. "This creates a 'fixed purchase price' with a relative low unit price, which can help the consumer rationalize the economic risk inherent with the trial. Our French Madrange ham, the leading premium ham in France, and our Busseto Italian-style salamis have witnessed dramatic sales increases the past two years in their pre-sliced schematic."

"Only in recent years has pre-sliced begun to include upscale meats, and for Spanish Jamon Serrano, it just begins now with Redondo," says Hsieh. "Our Redondo package is just four ounces, a quarter pound. People usually are too shy to ask for such a small quantity at the service counter, and four ounces provides a great chance for them to try the item with a smaller financial burden."

Some industry insiders believe the convenient packages of pre-sliced high quality deli



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meats will one day surpass the economy model sandwich meats. "These products will become more important than their lower cost cousins due to quality, convenience and versatility," according to Adler. "At Volpi, we believe that quality is No. 1 and will always be in demand. Convenience is necessary for the time-constrained consumer as well as the retailer who seeks to offer a wide variety of products with higher margins due to less shrink and labor. The versatility of Volpi pre-sliced meats is exceptional. They can be eaten as appetizers, added to a main course or included for entertaining as well as for sandwiches."

Still, retailers would be wise to find a way to service a broad range of consumers by offering a wide range of sliced meat products. "There is a consumer need for both types of products," Bowen says. "Sara Lee serves the premium segment of the market, and we think there are some exciting growth opportunities for our consumers. Retailers need to find a way to serve all types of consumers, however, the premium pre-sliced segment drives a high retail dollar ring and high gross margins, which are great financial benefits for retailers."

A Better Slice, And A Fresher Pack

The recent expansion of pre-sliced deli meats was made possible by improvements in technology.

"Advances in equipment in the 1990s made it possible for stores to slice and package higher quality meats and offer a wider selection of whole muscle meats to their customers," Adler says. "As the technology improved, so did shelf life and presentation. The shift from store sliced to manufacturer-prepared sliced meats is due to better controls and large investments in machinery and equipment necessary to meet the demand."

Not only is the slicing technology more precise and efficient, but the packaging technology has also made it possible to keep the meat fresher longer.

"Freshness can be remarkable in a quality package within and beyond the printed code date," Fromarthie's Kessler says. "So, too, can a freshly sliced product behind the service deli on a recently opened product. Conversely, air, humidity, light, ambient odors — these all take a toll on the aroma and flavor profile of meats that sit in the service deli for any period of time. On balance, a premium, properly packaged, pre-sliced deli meat offers the highest likelihood for freshness to be perceived by the consumer."

New packaging in a wide range of sizes provides this superior freshness. "The packaging in today's industry is state of the art," notes John Morrell's Pashea. "The new zip-

How Large Is That Sandwich Really?

For stores making their own sandwiches in the deli section, pre-sliced meats provide a tremendous help in guaranteeing the same amount of meat is in each sandwich. "You know exactly how much you put into the sandwich, since you know exactly how much the package weighs," notes Paloma Hsieh, vice president for marketing and sales, Redondo Iglesias USA, Long Island City, NY.

This precision can easily make the difference between turning a profit at the sandwich counter and seeing the profit disappear in imprecise meat portions.

"Portion control when making deli sandwiches is very important to maintain your target profit margin," explains John Pashea, vice president deli sales, John Morrell and Co., Cincinnati, OH. "Each slice weighs one ounce and that eliminates any guesswork of what it costs to make that specific specialty sandwich."

Portion control could be even more important for the consumer, who usually does not have the advantage of a scale in the kitchen. "Pre-sliced can obviously help with portion control because it is a fixed-weight product," says Derek Bowen, marketing director, Sara Lee Deli, Downers Grove, IL. "However, since retailers have easy access to scales to weigh the bulk meat that they slice, we think that pre-sliced portion control is more of a consumer benefit when making a sandwich at home."

In some cases, pre-sliced meat can be used to guarantee the proportion of the different meats is a constant in specialty sandwiches that combine numerous meats. "We have recently partnered with a California chain to maximize their portioning of our meats for an Italian sandwich that is part of their new sandwich program," relates Christine Adler, marketing manager for Volpi Foods, St. Louis, MO. "This item includes three different Italian, high-quality meats that are perfectly portioned per their recipe, sliced and packaged for their associates to simply lift and place on a 6-inch loaf of bread. This particular trio pack is being sold also at retail level, eliminating any waste for the deli." **DB**

per packs and deli trays with seal-top lids were designed to maintain freshness and the quality of the product with the consumer in mind. The convenience of being able to reseal deli meats once opened and stored in the refrigerator has eliminated spoilage and extended shelf life."

The result of better packaging technology is a reduction in the amount of product that is wasted, both at the deli section and at home. "Instead of letting a 10-pound loaf sit outside for days, you only open one package for one single use," Redondo's Hsieh says.

Merchandising A Premium Product

These higher quality meats should not be merchandised in the same manner as packages of economy sliced sandwich meats.

"Deli meats are usually merchandised differently than the low-cost, pre-sliced meats," Volpi's Adler says. "Deli meats are in upright self-serve cases with pegs or in cases with pre-sliced deli cheeses. Typically, they are located next to other deli carryout products — olives, salads and fresh breads."

The attraction of this deli convenience carryout section is not economy but, instead, premium quality. "I personally believe that upscale premium product is what the consumer is demanding in today's market," Pashea says. "Price is not the issue any longer. Today's customer wants quality product that is consistent; they are asking for

products that are unique."

The uniqueness of the product needs to be enhanced with easily visible information. "Develop some signage with your premium deli meat suppliers to communicate the quality aspects — usage, flavor, convenience — that these premium products deliver," suggests Kessler. "The consumer may be predisposed to this proposition already. It simply has to be communicated to them the products are available with the product benefits reinforced. This is really an information exercise that can't be left for the consumer to figure out for herself."

The best way to merchandise the product will also depend on the demographics of the customer base. "Effective merchandising strategies are dependent on the consumers who shop the store," says Sara Lee's Bowen. "Most people take a retailer-level approach to merchandising and will implement the same program chainwide. However, we know the real magic happens at store level. We introduced our Deli C.U.T.S Category Management tool that identifies pricing, promotion, and distribution opportunities by store based on the consumer dynamics of at each store at IDDBA [International Dairy, Deli and Bakery Association, Madison, WI] in June. As such, the merchandising programs can and should be different depending on the consumer shopping dynamics." **DB**

World Cheese Update

By Karen Silverston

World cheese community radar is tuning in to application process changes for the Protected Denomination of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) registry, raw milk issues and the importance of competitions.

Recognition of PDO/PGI products is growing, and the newly streamlined application process enables producers outside the European Union to apply directly to the E.U. Commission sans government sanction.

Preserving the cheesemaker's right to legally make cheese using unpasteurized milk is a critical issue. The goal includes preserving the consumer's right to choose to purchase legally made (and legally imported) cheese made from unpasteurized milk.

Competition results profit retailers. Like winning wines, winning cheeses become hot items. Look to the American Cheese Society (ACS), Louisville, KY; the World Cheese Awards, London, England; and the British Cheese Awards, Cheltenham, England, for recognized cheesemakers. Praise them and promote their cheeses to consumers.

PDO/PGI

A new regulation allows non-E.U. producers to apply directly to the European

Commission (E.C.) for inclusion in protected name registries, says Ann Connors, New York, NY-based Sopexa project manager for

With consumers seeking out top-quality cheeses, retailers need to know what is going on with world-class cheesemaking.

the European Authentic Tastes (EAT) campaign. EAT educates retailers, importers and restaurateurs about the certifications.

The PDO/PGI door was already open to non-E.U. producers, but April 2006 streamlining removes the requirement for third-country producers to obtain government approval for applications or for objections. Applications still require proof the product name is protected in its country of origin.

"There already are place-named products in the United States, however, nothing is automatic or guaranteed. The strict requirements might make it challenging for U.S. cheese to get into the register, but it would be rewarding in terms of marketing opportunities. The use of the logos helps retailers, importers, consumers and restaurants confirm the product is authentic," says Jean-Marc Trarieux, Washington, D.C.-based agricultural attaché for the E.C. delegation to the United States.

"The high value of the products translates to what consumers are asking for. The logo provides a framework for telling the product story — the terroir, local characteristics and specialties — which helps portray the added value and links the producer with the consumer. Sales of protected PDO/PGI cheeses bring more income to the farmers who are the producers, resulting in a larger number of farmers staying in the regions. The yield is smaller and their farms smaller, but the model differs from bulk production.

"By enabling farmers to stay where they are, you preserve a certain economic activity in rural areas. The connection can go beyond the food itself — it is related to the local culture," Trarieux continues. "The development of PDO/PGI provides further

incentives for the development of tourism. You can see an impact of PDO/PGI on rural development and local tourism.

"More products coming from smaller U.S. producers, particularly in the case of goat and blue cheese, are very tasty, and there is a demand for that kind of specialty cheese. It is certainly challenging to apply but can be rewarding to be included on this registry. From a gourmet perspective, it means joining the league of prestigious products," concludes Trarieux.

"It is simpler for retailers if there are groups of products that have PDO and PGI certification, because the producers of your food have already had to prove certain aspects of their production to a peer-approved authority," explains Nancy Radke, president of Syracuse, NY-based Ciao, Ltd., a culinary consultancy specializing in marketing Italian food products with a specialty in cheese, and director of the U.S. information offices for Parmigiano-Reggiano and Fontina Valle d'Aosta, PDO cheeses from Italy.

"To qualify for PDO status, cheese must be linked to a geographical location and follow specified production and product assurance methods. The traceability of your food source is very important," notes Radke.

"As countries are faced with losing the true identity for their authentic products, they need to make sure consumers and trade alike recognize the importance of denomination in separating the original products from others," says Lou Di Palo, specialist in Italian cheeses and co-owner of New York, NY-based Di Palo Fine Foods.

"Selling imported cheeses requires knowledge about the traditional and authentic products. Buyers should not lump the American-made Italian-type products with the authentic Italian products. The retailer has to declare this is the authentic product, give the story, show the difference, then let the consumer choose," concludes Di Palo.

Raw Milk Cheese

"We could be under full pasteurization today if it weren't for the advocacy of the Cheese of Choice Coalition [CCC, co-founded by Oldways Preservation Trust, Boston, MA]," says Cathy Strange, national cheese buyer, for Whole Foods Markets,



American consumers appreciate world-class cheeses.

Boulder, CO, speaking at the July 2006 ACS conference in Portland, OR. "It is not a domestic issue. It is global, even in the European Union."

"The raw milk issue is at the forefront from the Europeans' point of view," notes Allison Hooper, president, Vermont Butter and Cheese Company, Websterville, VT, and ACS president. "They hope food authorities will be discerning about risk. Cheeses should not all be viewed in the same way. A Parmigiano-Reggiano is low

moisture and has a much lower risk than a high moisture cheese. Although the level of risk differs from one cheese type to another, with well-made cheese from a maker who is involved at all control points, and where food safety processes are properly in check, the risk of pathogens is very low."

"In France, about 85 percent of cheese sold domestically is made from pasteurized milk and about 15 percent is raw milk," says Emmanuelle Hofer Louis, director of marketing, Anco Fine Cheese, Fairfield, NJ.

PDO Feta

After a 10-year legal battle, Greece won exclusive rights to the name Feta, one of 20 PDO Greek cheeses. "It took time to establish ourselves as the sole producers of this product named Feta, and we expect it will take time for producers and consumers to understand it," says Spyros A. Abatzopoulos, economic and commercial general counselor, head of office for the Greek General Consulate, New York, NY. "Feta has different tastes at different times, depending on which of the seven producing regions it comes from and what herbs the animals are grazing on. When you taste Feta, you will find it differs according to locale. It is different in Macedonia, for example, than in the Peloponnese." **DB**

"There is international support for safe hygiene in cheesemaking through procedures, such as HACCP, which are established and monitored by national governments, and for the 60-day aging law as it exists today," says Strange. "The CCC direction is to encourage all efforts to promote artisanal, farmstead, traditional and other locally made cheeses crafted by skilled cheesemakers and to discourage new efforts to require mandatory pasteurization of milks used in cheesemaking."

"The ACS opposes any ban of aged raw milk cheeses," states Marci Wilson, ACS executive director. "The negative impact of a ban to the small cheese producers, many of whom are our members, would be considerable given the expense of converting equipment and/or purchasing new equipment for the pasteurization process. We support the freedom of choice for cheese consumers."

"The ACS is a founding member and continues to support CCC efforts. It was formed to advocate for raw milk cheese in North America and oppose the current regulatory direction regarding the issue. The ACS joins the CCC in its support of the current 60-day age restriction for all products made using raw milk in the North America, Europe and elsewhere," she adds.

In June 2006, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) removed semi-soft cheeses from France from Import Alert 12-03, advises John F. Sheehan, director, Division of Dairy and Egg Safety, Office of Plants and Dairy Foods, FDA Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition. "The alert is now exclusively concerned with soft and soft-ripened cheeses imported from France. This

THE TALE OF TWO FONTINAS



ONCE UPON A TIME, LONG, LONG AGO in a tiny village nestled high in the Italian Alps, a magnificent cheese was born: FONTINA VALLE D'AOSTA, a firm and supple cheese renowned far and wide for a unique flavor that reflected the lush alpine grasses, succulent wildflowers, and pure mountain air.

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The American Cheese Society

157 producers from 28 states and two Canadian provinces entered an astounding 941 cheeses, almost 200 more than last year's record 749.

Unprecedented entries and attendance characterized the 2006 23rd Annual American Cheese Society (ACS) Conference, held in Portland, Oregon.

"The Annual Conference remains one of the most unique events of its kind in the United States. Rarely does such a large group gather for the purpose of sharing ideas and techniques that help shape and drive the [specialty cheese] industry," states David Grotenstein, chairman, ACS Competition Committee.

The American Cheese Society is an active, non-profit organization that encourages the understanding, appreciation and promotion of farmstead and natural specialty cheeses produced in the Americas and Canada. By providing an educational forum for cheesemakers, retailers and cheese enthusiasts, The Society fills an important gap in today's specialty food world.

Membership in the ACS is constantly growing, with memberships available at the Associate, Individual, Small Business, Corporate Sponsor and Multi-Unit Retail

levels. ACS members identify themselves according to the following professional demographics.

- 25% cheesemakers/buttermakers
- 13% distributors/brokers
- 35% retailers
- 6% academic/technical affiliates
- 3% writers/authors or communications specialists
- 4% restaurant/foodservice specialists, such as chefs
- 2% suppliers/dairies
- 12% enthusiasts, who are mainly consumers or cheese-lovers

Membership in the American Cheese Society is available to anyone involved in the trade or simply passionate about American-made specialty and artisanal cheeses.

For more information about ACS, the next conference or American artisanal cheeses, call the American Cheese Society at 502-583-3783 or visit www.cheesesociety.org

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means French raw milk semi-soft cheeses may lawfully enter the United States and move in interstate commerce provided they comply with all applicable federal statutes and regulations. For example, all such raw milk cheeses would have to be aged for a minimum of 60 days, per the applicable standard of identity, 21 CFR 133.187. With the assistance of French government representatives, we developed a comprehensive list of French soft cheeses, making the alert a more effective compliance tool for FDA. The soft and soft-ripened cheeses listed in that attachment must be made from pasteurized milk in order to lawfully enter the United States," explains Sheehan.

Competitions

Cheese retailers could learn from wine retailers. "Wine competitions definitely have an impact on sales," notes Dixie Gill, director of marketing and communications for San Francisco, CA-based Premium Port Wines, the U.S. importer for Oporto, Portugal-based Symington Family Estates.

"A competition in one market may be influential in another. In a leading competition such as San Francisco's, receiving a gold medal can have an impact on national sales. One of our brands won in a niche competition and this translated to immediate, significant sales regionally of an expensive wine. There are many people who want to buy an artisan product and to enjoy the experience that accompanies it," states Gill.

"An award is only good to those who have read about it or seen it. It is not enough just to get the award — it is press in a vacuum unless you promote it. We have a wine that won a gold medal in San Francisco and is on our shelf talkers. Placing a sticker on the packaging, point-of-sale material and shelf talker underscores the quality," notes Gill.

"Whether the win becomes important or not is up to the retailer," says David Grotenstein, master cheesemonger for New York, NY's Fairway Markets, a four-store specialty chain, and chair of the ACS competition.

"The competition has become an important tool for the retailer, but I would not make the mistake of thinking it is something automatic in terms of sales. The awareness of cheese, especially American cheese at this level, is a whole new category for most consumers, and you may need to be able to answer the question, 'Who is the American Cheese Society?'" he explains.

"Cheeses come in with all kinds of information about them. How well the product sells depends on how good a job the retailer does in getting that information to the consumer. In many stores, superior products sit because nobody really defines them. Con-

Raw Milk Stilton?

In 2006, in Nottinghamshire, England, Joe Schneider set out to make cheese according to the Stilton recipe, from the milk of 150 British Friesians. Schneider wants to support the tradition of raw milk cheesemaking and to make Stilton PDO cheese, two incompatible goals.

Stilton was available in raw milk and pasteurized versions, but in 1990 makers agreed to pasteurize, says Nigel White, secretary, Stilton Cheesemakers Association, Surrey, England.

Stilton makers suffered a sharp drop in all Stilton sales following a listeria scare with one maker who was not pasteurizing. After reassessing their unique process steps, they decided against using raw milk, writing pasteurization into the Stilton Certification Trade Mark Regulations and also into the PDO requirements, which were granted in 1996. They acknowledge pasteurization does not negate the requirement for a very clean operating environment to exclude the introduction of environmental pathogens or other unwanted bacteria or molds.

Whether Schneider becomes the next licensed Stilton producer or the maker of a new, raw-milk cheese that cannot be named Stilton remains to be seen. **DB**

sumers have to know the product is there.

"Having award-winning cheeses you've tasted and liked lends credibility to your cheese department and makes people think you have an eye for better cheeses. A win like Cabot Clothbound Cheddar is tremendous. It gives credibility to every product Cabot makes and makes it easier for the retailer to push that product line. You could put a whole program in with the winner as the centerpiece," Grotenstein advises.

"I like to carry American cheeses I can put in the display with all my world cheeses because I want them to be part of a global cheese scene. I want my Rogue River Blue to be in there with Roquefort, Gorgonzola, Cabrales and Stilton. I want Cabot Clothbound Cheddar right next to my Keen's Cheddar.

"We're always being compared with European cheesemakers, so I would tell the story about Cabot Clothbound Cheddar aging in the cellars of Jasper Hill Farm and compare it to the farmhouse aging of Keen's Cheddar in Somerset, England. A sign and a ribbon may get your attention but to open the door to increased sales, you still have to promote the product by talking about it and sampling it," concludes Grotenstein. **DB**

Grana Padano

By Jacqueline Ross Lieberman

To enjoy Grana Padano, one need only take a bite. Start with a piece aged at least 16 months. The first thing you will notice about this hard cow's cheese from northern Italy is its sweet, not-too-salty, slightly nutty flavor. It is milder than Italy's more well-known grana cheese, Parmigiano-Reggiano, because it is lower in fat.

The second thing you will notice is a distinctive crunch. The younger cheese is tasty, but it will have a less developed flavor and lack the crumbly, crunchy texture of an 18- to 30-month-old Grana. As the cheese ages, amino acids in the milk develop into protein granules.

Whether this is how granas got their name is debatable. Some say the word "grana" comes from the cheeses' characteristic grainy texture; others say it is because of the grain-sized curds they are made from.

Padano means "of the Po." Almost all of Italy's Grana Padano is made in the Po River Valley north of the river, with a few exceptions to the south, which is where Parmigiano-Reggiano is made. This valley is ideal for milk production and therefore for production of one of Italy's great cheeses.

Cheese With A History

Grana Padano is a Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) product, so each wheel is guaranteed to have been made according to traditional methods in the region it was traditionally made. It is a guarantee of quality and

authenticity, backed by the Consorzio Tutela Grana Padano (Consortium for the Protection of Grana Padano Cheese). The Consorzio inspects each wheel before stamping it with the identifying Grana Padano markings.

"It is one of the great classic Italian prod-

With a 1,000-year history and a reasonable price, Grana Padano is the world's most widely consumed PDO cheese.

ucts," says K. Dun Gifford, president of Oldways Preservation Trust, Boston, MA, a nonprofit "food issues think tank" promoting traditional, sustainable foods and healthful eating. "It is protected as to how it is made, so there's not any cheating on it. There will not be any dumbing-down of it that some of these products have seen over the years."

Grana Padano may have been Italy's first cow's milk cheese. Before it, cheese in Italy was made from goat's or sheep's milk. In 1,000 A.D., Cistercian monks from France and Switzerland introduced cattle to the Po River Valley. A sudden abundance of milk combined with a lack of refrigeration led to making Grana Padano.

"The monks discovered that if they created a rind, it was a good way to use the milk without refrigeration," says Paolo Grandjacquet, Consorzio spokesperson.

Since then, the cows are milked twice a day and cream is skimmed from the top. The resulting low-fat milk is formed and aged up to 30 months to make Grana Padano.

"The method has not changed for 1,000 years," says Lou Di Palo, co-owner of the specialty shop Di Palo's Fine Foods in New York's Little Italy.

"One thing they noticed —

this cheese could withstand the test of time. It could last through years, even through temperature changes." Di Palo, says Grana Padano is always refrigerated today.

The cows are raised as they always were, eating only forage and mixtures of cereals and forage, in line with strict principles laid down in the production regulations adopted by the Consorzio. The only differences are updated facilities and a few minor changes to maintain modern health and hygiene standards. The result is a cheese that tastes much as it did when monks first made it all those years ago.

Although his family-run shop carries over 300 varieties of cheese, Di Palo would not dream of leaving out Grana Padano. "Grana Padano is so important to the history of Italy. If something lasts for 1,000 years, it has to be something special."

New Markings

Recently, the Consorzio changed its markings to make the cheese more easily identifiable and added a date. The newer wheels of have the signature lozenge marking closer together than in the past so customers buying even a small piece of cheese can see they are getting true Grana Padano.

"There are a lot of grana cheeses that are not made in Italy," says Di Palo. "The Consorzio of Grana Padano now has made it so that on every piece of cheese, you will see the markings of Grana Padano."

The date on the wheel lets retailers know the year and month the cheese was made. Having the age stamped on the cheese lets retailers know what is inside — whether it is a younger, more pliable cheese with less flavor and crunch or an aged cheese that is worth more.

Retailers can sell the younger cheeses as is, letting customers know it is a milder and softer cheese than an aged, or age it, as more and more retailers have begun to do.

"It is a good asset for the retailer," says Di Palo, who says the date stamp helps him maintain consistency and quality. He keeps the cheese in his store's aging room until it reaches its peak.

Educating Customers

"People want to know what Grana



New markings (on left) will assure consumers receive true Grana Padano

Padano is," says the Consorzio's Grandjacquet. He says sampling the product is the best way to show them.

Di Palo could not agree more. "You must give the people a taste. The taste is where it sells. The aroma, the flavor — this is where you get the true identification of the cheese."

Once customers have tried Grana Padano, it helps to let them know about its "hidden" nutritional qualities. It takes more than 16 quarts of milk to make just over two pounds of Grana Padano cheese. This is

where it gets its rich flavor. It also means that while it is lower in fat than many other cheeses, it is also high in protein and calcium. Enzymes that develop during the production process also make it easier to digest. All of this makes it a great choice for the health-conscious customer.

"One nice thing about Grana Padano — pound for pound, it has the same protein as meat," notes Grandjacquet.

And while the nutritional content makes it great for those watching their health, the

Enjoying Grana Padano

Lou Di Palo, co-owner of the specialty shop Di Palo's Fine Foods in New York's Little Italy, recommends serving freshly cut Grana Padano in chunks as a table cheese. Then, as the cut cheese begins to form a rind, he recommends grating the hard outside to use in recipes. The inside will still remain fresh, and therefore good on its own.

Because of its mild flavor, Grana Padano is a versatile cheese. It pairs well with fruit, such as apples and pears, or slices of aged meats. A crisp white wine will complement the cheese nicely.

Other recommendations include:

Stir grated Grana Padano into eggs. "It's a great breakfast cheese," says Di Palo. "In omelets, it's just fantastic."

Add shavings to tossed salads to add crunch and flavor. "It doesn't get soggy in the vinegar and oil," Di Palo notes.

Make a fancy snack or appetizer by grating Grana Padano. Place small piles of the cheese in a hot nonstick skillet to make crunchy cheese crisps as a high-flavor alternative to potato chips.

Stir grated Grana Padano into risotto. It will not overwhelm the subtle flavors the way Parmigiano-Reggiano can.

Serve grated Grana Padano as a topping for pasta or steamed vegetables.

Add Grana Padano to some of your deli products, such as prepared macaroni and cheese or party platters, to encourage customers to try it on their own. **DB**

price (averaging about \$10 a pound, says Di Palo) makes it great for customers watching their budget.

"Twice as much Grana Padano as Parmigiano is made each year," says Di Palo. Italy produces about 4 million 75-pound wheels of Grana Padano a year, making it the most consumed PDO cheese in the world.

"It is a cheese that's sold very, very reasonably, in my opinion," says Di Palo. "You're getting a cheese that's aged anywhere from 16 to 30 months. A cheese that's higher in protein and lower in fat, has the ability to satisfy your palate without overindulging, is great on the table as well as in recipes and is guaranteed to be personally inspected by an independent inspector from the Consorzio — what better true value can you get?"

The Consortium for the Protection of Grana Padano Cheese offers training, display kits and recipe booklets for use in stores. **DB**

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Say Cheese... American Cheese

By Liz Campbell

While American specialty cheeses may have been a minor phenomenon as little as 10 years ago, there is no doubt that today they have become a significant factor in the world of North American artisanal food.

Just how significant these cottage industries have become is reflected in the sheer numbers of cheesemakers and cheeses to be found in America today. At the annual competition of the American Cheese Society (ACS), Louisville, KY, held in July this year in Portland, OR, more than 940 cheeses were entered — nearly 200 more than last year!

Each was lovingly made by the hand of the 157 cheesemaker members who entered the competition. They represented 28 states and two Canadian provinces. So it is not surprising that at a time when Americans are looking for a real connection to the food they consume, they have embraced American artisanal cheese with enthusiasm.

Again and again, it is the stories behind the artisanal products that impress consumers — stories of cheesemakers who have eschewed corporate jobs where they earned double the salary, now contentedly producing an extraordinary array of farmstead and specialty cheeses. A cheesemaker might be an ex-Xerox executive in Wisconsin,

a group of families in Vermont, a doctor in Virginia or a biochemist in Oregon. Some of their cheeses are facsimiles of European

The winners of the 2006 ACS awards are unique, delicious and distinctly American.

classics like Feta, Parmesan, Mozzarella, Cheddar and others. Some are uniquely American in both the style of production and the name.

What the cheeses have in common is the stories of the cheesemakers who craft them — and that helps sell them. After all, who can resist a cheese made from the milk of animals grazing on the hillsides of Vermont in dandelion season? Or a cheese whose maker hand-tends each blue-veined block as it ages in a cave in Minnesota?

These are the cheeses winning prizes at the ACS competition. The contest is extremely rigorous. To qualify, cheeses must be made in North or South America, from a North or South American milk source. They

must be entered as whole wheels, loaves or blocks. The judges, selected from the academic, dairy industry, dairy science, cultures manufacturing, food distributing and retailing, and food press communities, work in pairs — one aesthetic and one technical judge. While the technical judge subtracts points from a perfect score of 50 for technical defects, the aesthetic judge adds up to 50 points for aesthetic qualities and values.

In order for a cheese to win a blue ribbon (first prize), it must achieve a minimum score of 91 points; 2nd place winners must achieve 81 to 90 points and third place 75 to 80 points. Consequently, it occasionally happens that there is not a first place winner, only a second and third. This is important since it indicates a cheese that wins any prize has met very demanding criteria. There are 22 categories with 91 sub-categories, so potentially 273 ribbons could be awarded each year. Finally, all the judges share in deciding the Best of Show winner, taken from among the blue ribbon winners.

Cheddars

This year's Best of Show was Cabot Clothbound Cheddar, which had also won the Blue Ribbon in the Aged Cheddars (12 to 24 months) category. Montpelier, Vermont-based Cabot Creamery Cooperative has been in operation since 1919 and is owned by the dairy farm families of Agri-Mark, one of the Northeast's premier dairy cooperatives.

The company boasts an impressive history of victories at major national and international competitions including the World Cheese Awards (London, England), the National Milk Producers Federation (Arlington, VA), the International Fancy Food Show (held annually in San Francisco, CA, Chicago, IL, and New York, NY) the U.S. Championship Cheese Contest (Milwaukee, WI) and most recently, at the prestigious World Championships in Wisconsin and the ACS competition.

Cabot cheese maestro Marcel Gravel makes one vat at a time from the milk of Holstein cows. The result is a unique, old-world-style Cheddar. A special, proprietary blend of cheese cultures gives an unpasteurized note to this pasteurized milk Cheddar,

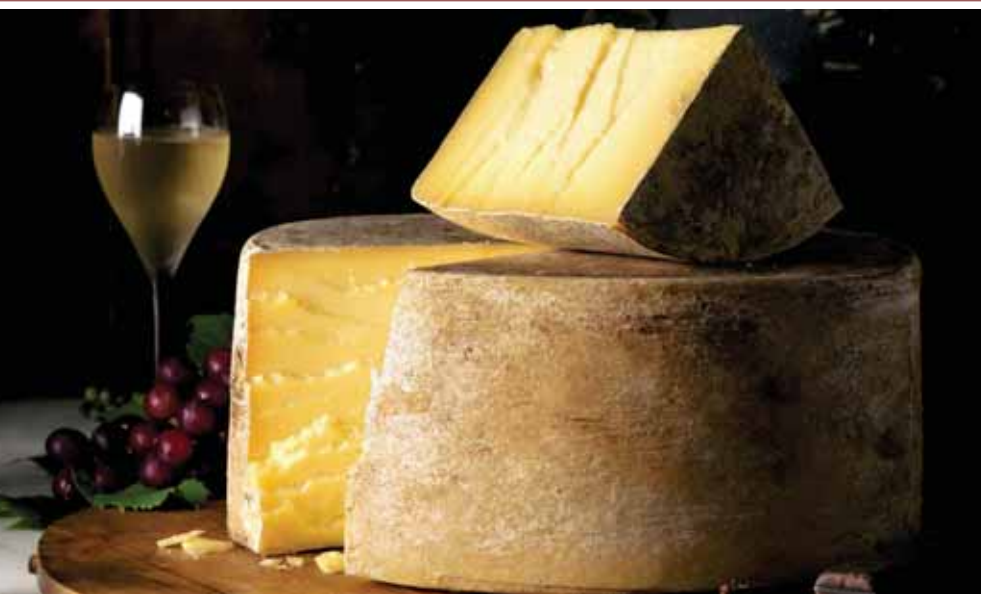


PHOTO COURTESY OF CABOT CREAMERY COOPERATIVE

Cabot Clothbound Cheddar was Best In Show at this year's ACS competition.

while traditional hooping and cloth binding add an old-fashioned look and feel.

After their creation, the wheels of Cheddar are sent north along the Revolutionary

**"THE CAVE-AGED
WHEELS BENEFIT
FROM SPA-LIKE
PAMPERING AND
CONTROLLED,
MOLD-RIPENED
MATURING TO
DEVELOP THEIR
BEAUTIFUL, NATURAL
RIND."**

**— Mateo Kehler
Jasper Hill Farm**

War-era Bayley-Hazen Road into the care of Andy and Mateo Kehler, fellow Vermont cheesemakers and affineurs. Affineurs are



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROTH KASE

Roth Kase's Gran Queso took first place in the Hispanic and Portuguese Style Cheese, all milks ripened category.

cheese-aging specialists. These two are co-owners of The Cellars at Jasper Hill Farm, Greensboro, VT. "Here, the cave-aged wheels benefit from spa-like pampering and controlled, mold-ripened maturing to develop their beautiful, natural rind," says Mateo

Kehler, co-owner of Jasper Hill. "It's all about spruce boards, hand turning and tender brushing." Cabot Clothbound Cheddar's texture and flavor owes its balance and subtle tones equally to both parts of this team effort and the story of how this cheese is

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**CHEESES WITH A BITE
MIGHT BE A GOOD
DESCRIPTION FOR
SOME OF THE
WONDERFUL BLUE
CHEESES ENTERED IN
THE COMPETITION.**

Cheddars. The bandage-wrapped Cheddar from Fiscalini Farms, Modesto, CA, took top honors for Cheddars aged more than 26 months, with Beecher's Handmade Cheese of Seattle, WA, a close second. For those ready to take a bite of cheese that bites

back, there is the 10-year-old Cheddar from Hook's Cheese Co., Mineral Point, WI

Blues

Cheeses with a bite might be a good

description for some of the wonderful blue cheeses entered in the competition. The Wisconsin Farmers Union Specialty Cheese Co. (WFU Cheese), Montfort, WI, took a blue ribbon for an excellent blue-veined

Selling Artisanal Cheeses

Stocking artisanal cheeses is only the first step. How do you get customers to buy cheeses that typically may be priced significantly higher than commercial cheeses?

Tell the story: Artisanal cheeses are handmade and unique. Their domain of origin and their creators have a story. Ensure that staff knows that story. Customers will find it hard to resist if your deli staff can tell them about the cheesemaker or the farm.

Offer a sample: This need be only a tiny nibble. Encourage customers to try a sample. The flavor will sell itself. And it allows customers to reassure themselves that they are buying something they will like, especially if the cheese has a relatively high price.

Suggest a small quantity: Many artisanal cheeses have big flavor profiles. In most cases, a small quantity is enough. Cheesemongers can assist customers in making the decision to try these products by suggesting they buy only a quarter pound. This has two advantages: first the cost is lower (\$5 seems much less daunting than \$20), but more importantly, the consumer is less likely to leave the cheese in the refrigerator for too long only to have it deteriorate.

Wrap cheese properly: Cheese is a living product. Ensure that the wrap you are using is correct for the cheese. And tell customers how to rewrap cheese at home. Information on this is available through cheese-oriented websites. **DB**

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cheese while its Gorgonzola-style cheese took third place. WFS Cheese was established to add value to milk produced by Wisconsin farmers and to make fine Wisconsin cheeses available direct to consumers from farmers.

Amablu, made by Faribault Dairy, Faribault, MN, and matured in Minnesota caves, took second place. This unique little company was born only five years ago. The only company to cave-age its cow's milk blue cheeses in the French manner, Faribault ages it Amablu and St. Pete's Select cheeses in sandstone caves carved from the river bluffs.

Pure Luck Dairy, Dripping Springs, TX, gets the organic milk to make its Hopelessly Bleu cheese from Nubian goats. And Shepherd's Way Farm in Northfield, MN, makes its Big Woods Blue from sheep's milk. Both garnered top honors in the competition.

Farmstead

Farmstead cheeses are a special category in the competition. These cheeses are made on the farm from milk that comes from animals raised on the same farm. This category often includes organic cheeses since the farmer can control every step of the production including the growing of fodder for the

animals to eat. This year's winners included Tarentaise, an organic Vermont alpine cheese made from Jersey cow milk by Thistle Hill Farm, North Pomfret, VT.

**THE GOOD NEWS IS
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HANDLE CHEESE
WITH CARE.**

Estrella Family Creamery, Montesano, WA, received top honors in the farmstead category for its goat's milk cheese, Caldwell Creek Chevre. All the cheeses from this

family-run farm are handmade by Kelli Estrella and can be found in such prestigious shops as Dean & DeLuca in New York.

The top farmstead sheep's milk cheese was La Panza, made by Rinconada Dairy, Santa Margarita, CA, run by Jim and Christine Maguire. An organic raw sheep's milk cheese, La Panza is made from the milk of East Frisian ewes and has a golden, whey-washed rind and a wonderfully robust flavor.

While it is impossible to describe each of the 200+ winners of medals in the competition, they have a few things in common: They are all superb, unique American products, they all are made with hands-on care and they all require equal care in handling. Indeed, one of the topics under discussion at the ACS annual conference was the marketing of cheese.

Cheesemakers and distributors discussed how mishandling can destroy a great cheese. The goal is to maintain the cheese at peak flavor and moisture content.

The good news is that so many retailers — from little cheesemongers to large deli departments in major supermarket chains — are learning to handle cheese with care. As a result, more and more Americans are learning to appreciate superb artisanal cheeses. **DB**

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Food Labeling: Guidelines For Voluntary Nutrition Labeling Of Raw Fruits, Vegetables And Fish

25.jul.06

[Federal Register: (Volume 71, Number 142)]

[Page 42031-42047]

[DOCID: fr25jy06-8]

21 CFR Part 101

[Docket No. 2001N-0548] (formerly Docket No. 01N-0548)

AGENCY: Food and Drug Administration, HHS.

ACTION: Final rule.

SUMMARY: The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is amending the voluntary nutrition labeling regulations by updating the names and the nutrition labeling values for the 20 most frequently consumed raw fruits, vegetables and fish in the United States and clarifying guidelines for the voluntary nutrition labeling of these foods.

Availability of the updated nutrition labeling values in retail stores and on individually packaged raw fruits, vegetables and fish will enable consumers to make better purchasing decisions to reflect their dietary needs.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Jan. 1, 2008.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Mary Brandt, Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (HFS-840), Food and Drug Administration, 5100 Paint Branch Pkwy., College Park, MD 20740, 301-436-1788.

Bill To Ban Carbon Monoxide Meat Packaging

31 July 2006 11:03:02 GMT

Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) has introduced a bill in the U.S. Congress that would ban the use of carbon monoxide (CO) in meat packaging. Noting that Canada, the European Union and Japan have all outlawed the use of CO in packaging, DeLauro said that while the gas itself is safe, "When the gas is injected to deceive customers into purchasing unsafe meat, then there is no doubt that it would be harmful to consumers.

"I understand the meat producers' desire to cut costs that result from discarding meat that has begun to turn brown, but is still safe to eat," she said in a statement. "However, ground beef treated with carbon monoxide still could have the appearance of being fresh months after its sell-by date. Consumers often do not know until they open the package at home and smell its contents that the meat has spoiled."

The meat industry has pointed out that while rancid meat may still appear fresh in CO packaging, the sell-by date and the odor of the meat are more than enough protection for the consumer. Additionally, the added

shelf-life afforded by MAP packaging, including versions that include CO, offers a distinct consumer benefit and makes it even more unlikely that consumers would purchase meat that has spoiled, when compared to traditional packaging with very short shelf life.

Source: Meating Place

Poorly Prepared Salmon Can Be Packed With Parasites

01.aug.06

Anchorage Daily News (AK)

Ann Potempa

<http://www.adn.com/life/story/8027390p-7920606c.html>

Wild fish like salmon can carry harmful parasites such as *anisakis* and *diphyllobothrium latum*. Both are rarely reported among Alaskans, but the full extent is unknown because the state does not require doctors or laboratories to report illnesses caused by these parasites.

Anisakis is a type of roundworm. Larvae live in the guts of the fish and migrate to the muscle after the fish dies. After people eat the fish, the larvae can penetrate their gastrointestinal tract. In some cases, abdominal cramping and vomiting can develop within hours. Other symptoms can occur later, such as coughing that may bring up blood.

Diphyllobothrium latum is a tapeworm found in the muscle of fish that people eat. Once inside a human, the larvae can grow into worms. *Diphyllobothrium* is the longest tapeworm hosted by humans — growing as long as 30 feet, according to a state health bulletin.

Ron Klein, food safety and sanitation program manager with the state Department of Environmental Conservation, was quoted as saying, "The safest thing to do is assume it's there," and that means properly cooking or freezing the fish.

Klein was also cited as saying fish should be cooked long enough to reach an internal temperature of 145° for at least 15 seconds and that smoking fish to at least 150° for 30 minutes also should kill the parasites.

Another option is flash-freezing fish before serving it raw. That means freezing the fish to -4° or below for at least seven days or freezing it to -31° or below for 15 hours.

The Department of Environmental Conservation currently does not require restaurants and stores that sell fish for raw consumption to freeze it prior to sale. The department has proposed updating these regulations, however, and they are now open for public comment and could be approved

Martin Mitchell, technical director of the Refrigerated Foods Association (RFA) and managing director of Certified Laboratories compiles TechNews.



The information has been compiled from press releases, news articles and government announcements and policy clarifications. Additional information may be obtained by contacting RFA by phone at 770-452-0660 or online at www.refrigeratedfoods.org.

by fall, Klein said.

The new requirements would mandate the freezing process mentioned above for stores and restaurants that sell ready-to-eat raw or partially cooked seafood other than mollusks or tuna.

In the meantime, people should ask stores or sushi restaurants this question: Do you freeze raw fish before serving it?

Senate Holds Hearing On National Uniformity For Food Act

On July 27th, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pension (HELP) Committee held a hearing on the National Uniformity for Food Act, S. 3128. Both proponents and opponents discussed the bill. Those testifying at the hearing included Senators Saxby Chambliss (R-GA), Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Diane Feinstein (D-CA).

Senator Chambliss said the bill "will not only remove unnecessary and costly impediments to interstate commerce, but even more importantly, it will provide consumers with clear and useful information."

On the other hand, Senator Boxer stated, "This legislation poses a threat to the health of Americans in every state in the Union."

The House passed a similar bill last March and the full Senate could vote on the bill in the next few weeks. However, Congress is scheduled to adjourn for the year on Oct. 6th, so it is unlikely there will be time, even if the Senate passes a bill, for the House and Senate to pass a final bill.

The bill would establish a federal standard for all food safety requirements and warning labels. It would preempt certain state laws regarding food labels to create uniform, national standards set by the FDA. Enforcement of food safety standards would remain at the state level.

Cashing In On Cook & Carry



By
Sharon Olson
*President
Olsen
Communications
Chicago, IL*

The fresh revolution coupled with consumers' desire for convenience should favor the deli as much as it favors the produce department. Just when we think we have the consumer value proposition nailed, a new category emerges — Meal Assembly Centers (MACs) — where consumers gather to prepare a week's worth of meals.

The Easy Meal Prep Association [Cheyenne, WY] says there were 284 U. S. meal prep companies with 775 outlets as of May 2006. We wanted to know

more about these centers and to learn how supermarket delis might tap into this multiple-meal solution opportunity. So we interviewed consumers and sent our staff out to report on the experience first hand.

There are several trends driving this phenomenon.

Convenience — The press talks about the MAC experience of parties and complimentary wine, but the consumers we spoke with said the convenience was the big benefit.

Without exception, consumers loved the idea of assembling a meal, walking away from the mess and leaving it for someone else to clean up. Some MACs even offer fully prepared refrigerated or frozen meals for the really time-starved. Local advertising and good websites make these centers easy to find, but most of our consumers learned about their favorite MAC from friends.

Entertainment — When we asked consumers about the experience, we were told, "The experience definitely adds value, but the convenience is unbeatable." We were also told, "It's fun to pretend like you're on a cooking show."

Emotional Satisfaction — The emotional gratification of having a hand in preparing a meal is a benefit for consumers. Most noted they felt this food was fresher and more healthful than frozen dinners or restaurant food. They liked being in control and able to use more or less seasoning to their own taste to satisfy their family. Incredibly clean and inviting facilities added to the appeal.

Nutrition — Consumers told us nutrition was an afterthought. However, fresh ingredients and mostly baked or grilled entrées provided a halo of healthfulness.

Value — Most consumers looked at MACs as an alternative to restaurants or takeout, so a per-serving cost of up to \$3.50 for an entrée seemed reasonable. All noted it was more expensive than cooking at home, but not having to clean up was a huge time saver. Most noted side dishes were suggested but not included so additional shopping and planning were required.

Variety — Classic comfort foods with an interesting twist appeal to consumers. They talked about pork chops made with red wine, dried cranberries and raisins, ingredi-

ents they would not usually have at home. Others talked about spices and rubs they would not typically purchase.

MACs appeal most to mainstream consumers with families outside of city centers in major metropolitan areas. Our suburban and rural consumers thought the concept was great because they were still cooking, but it was easier. These were not consumers without cooking skills.

In one secondary market, the franchisee told of a customer with no cooking skills at all who had to be guided through every step. The staff was happy to give cooking lessons to gain loyalty.

Urban consumers noted a wide variety of independent ethnic restaurants where great takeout can be had for less than the cost of a QSR meal. Limited freezer space and a myriad of easily available culinary choices made MACs far less alluring.

We interviewed some major supermarkets to find out what they thought of these new competitors and if any had planned a response. Although familiar with MACs, none had planned a specific response. Most simply answered, "Well, our customers could buy a few rotisserie chicken meals."

That is a wake-up call for our industry. No matter how great your rotisserie chicken meal is, the ante just got higher.

Consumers asked how they might feel about this kind of service from their favorite supermarket did not seem to think it would work. Reasons included the isolated physical space and sanitation requirements that made them feel comfortable in a meal assembly center.

Here are few things to consider to respond to your time-starved customers' needs for convenience, value and variety and to get your share of the meal solution business.

- **Re-engineered physical space** — If you have space to run consumer cooking classes, think how easily some might become do-it-yourself dinner solutions with the introduction of some stainless steel prep tables on wheels.

- **Chef-inspired ethnic meals** — If you have a chef or use local chefs as resources, think how you can take advantage of their expertise and ability to work with your customers. For example, your customers might enjoy taking home a week's worth of Mediterranean fare they prepare in your store with your chef's supervision.

- **Sensational sides** — Fill the gap in what MACs do not offer — complete meal solutions with sides. Put together the entire package for your customers in the deli. Do not ask them to shop the entire store to pick up sides and salads to accompany their creation.

There is no one in a better position to satisfy consumer needs for freshness, value and variety than the supermarket deli. It is worth a few minutes to think about how you might want to add some entertainment to the mix and build your business.

Without exception, consumers loved the idea of assembling a meal, walking away from the mess and leaving it for someone else to clean up.

Blast From The Past

Q

ueens, NY-based Sabra Blue & White Foods was founded in 1986. Yehudah Pearl, who bought the company in 1994, orchestrated a re-branding campaign and parlayed a budding consumer interest in Mediterranean cuisine to bring Sabra into the mainstream.

The new truck wrap shown in the large picture is part of Sabra's new branding. The old truck design (inset) was in use for many years, but after the packaging and marketing materials were changed to reflect the new Sabra, the trucks were changed to do the same.



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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