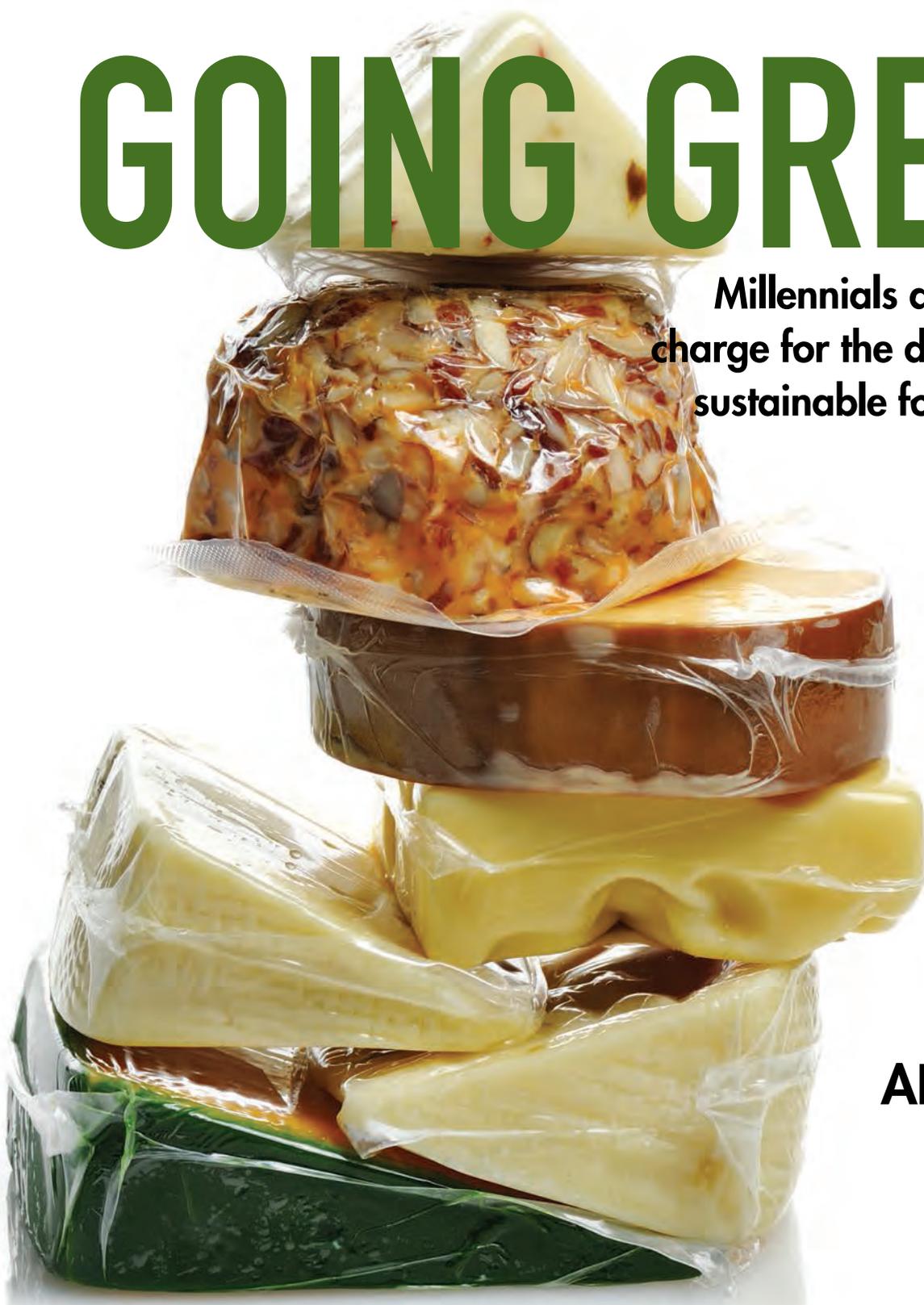


# GOING GREEN

Millennials are leading the charge for the development of sustainable food packaging



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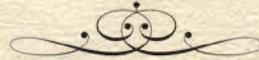
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## MIKE EARDLEY HAS BEEN APPOINTED PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAIRY-DELI-BAKERY ASSOCIATION (IDDBA).



Eardley, whose career in grocery started at his family's supermarket while he was in grade school, spent 29 years working for D&W Food Centers in Grand Rapids, MI, where he reached the position of vice president of Fresh Foods.

"I'm looking forward to working with the talented and hard-working IDDBA staff and board, and welcome the opportunity to develop and meet new short- and long-term goals that keep the association relevant and a vital resource for the industry," says Eardley.

A former chairman of IDDBA's board, Eardley was also recognized as a chairman's award winner for his outstanding contributions to the industry and the association.

"I've been active in the association for a number of years; it's a great association in a great industry and I anticipate getting up to speed quickly," he says.

## COMING NEXT ISSUE IN DEC/JAN

**COVER STORY**  
Retail Trends

**PREPARED FOODS**  
Take-Out Foods

**FEATURE STORIES**  
Flatbreads

**DELI MEATS**  
Natural Meats

**MERCHANDISING REVIEWS**  
Olives  
Dips and Spreads

**CHEESES**  
Blue Cheese

**PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES**  
Italian Foods

### COMING IN FEB/MAR

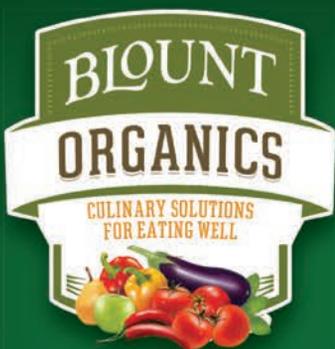
DELI BUSINESS will feature an exclusive research project developed by Sharon Olson, president of Olson Communications. The study will explore the foodservice and deli consumers' perspectives on ethical choices that impact their decisions when they dine out or choose products from the deli. The study will explore the psychology of the choices consumers make and how non-tangible aspects of the experience play into their decisions.

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# DELI WATCH

## Announcements



### CHEESE EXPERT ANNOUNCES STARTUP

Max McCalman, America's first Maître Fromager, has created MAXVOL Inc., a new company where he will offer training, education and events for private and corporate clients, as well as provide consulting for restaurants, retailers and cheese-makers. McCalman also plans on writing articles, blogs and a new book, and developing a new cheese app along with an educational web-based program. He formerly served as Maître Fromager and Dean of Curriculum at Artisanal Premium Cheese for more than a decade.

[www.max-mccalman.com](http://www.max-mccalman.com)

## New Products



### A NEW FONDUE

Emmi USA, Monroe, WI, presents a new fondue with the prominent flavor of Swiss Le Gruyère AOP cheese. The nutty and fruity notes of Gruyère naturally complement the proprietary blend of ingredients, all found in the ready-to-use pouch. The fondue blend is made with all-natural ingredients and is gluten free. The meal is geared for parties and tailgates, as well as sharing.

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



### A MODERN DESIGN

Placon, Madison, WI, has introduced Fresh 'n Clear Envisions. Sleek and recyclable, these up to 100 percent post-consumer trays and lids have a modern design that allows for maximum product visibility at almost every angle. The bases, available in clear or black, are offered in either a shallow and smooth, or deeper tray style. The 10" x 7" shallow tray is designed for fresh foods from baked goods, sandwiches and sushi, while the deep tray is well-suited for chopped salads, cut fruits or veggies.

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



### ORGANIC SOUP LINE DEBUTS

Blount Fine Foods, Corp., Fall River, MA, has introduced a line of 16-ounce organic soups. This launch represents a channel expansion, as Blount-branded soups, while available at club stores nationally, have traditionally only been sold at grocery stores in the Northeast. In addition to single 16-ounce cups, Blount is also introducing 4-cup bulk packs for club stores. The new lineup includes Organic Vegetable Chili, Minestrone Soup, Tomato Bisque and Lentil & Chick Pea Soup.

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



### FLAVORFUL WELSH CHEESES

Atalanta Corp., Elizabeth, NJ, offers a wide range of flavorful cheeses from the Snowdonia Cheese Co. The vibrant-colored waxed cheeses are from North Wales. Varieties include the Little Black Bomber, an aged Cheddar enrobed in black wax, and the Red Devil, a spicy concoction of chilies and crushed peppers, which infuses an extra-mature Red Leicester cheese. Ten varieties are offered in Snowdonia's Cheddar line.

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



### ANTIBIOTIC-FREE MEAT

Coleman Natural Foods, Golden, CO, offers Antibiotic-Free Premium Meats that contain no MSG and are veggie fed, gluten free and lower in sodium. Turkey, ham and chicken varieties are available in both pre-sliced/pre-packaged and whole lobe styles. Pre-sliced items have a zipper pack and resealable packaging for added convenience, while whole lobe products have grip and tear packaging for easy opening.

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



### HUMMUS LINE DEBUTS

Green Giant, Salinas, CA, has added eight all-natural hummus flavors to its offerings. Varieties include Classic Hummus with Sesame Seed Topping; Roasted Red Pepper Hummus with Red Pepper Coulis Topping; Roasted Garlic Hummus with Roasted Garlic Topping; Roasted Pine Nut Hummus with Pine Nut and Sundried Tomato Topping; Artichoke Spinach Hummus with Roasted Red Pepper & Spinach Topping; Garden Vegetable Hummus with Roasted Vegetable Topping; Mediterranean Hummus with Tapenade Topping; and Sundried Tomato & Basil Hummus with Onion and Balsamic Vinegar Topping.

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



### NEW TAKE ON NAAN

Stonefire Authentic Flatbreads, Concord, Ontario, Canada, now offers a new take on nutritious snack food with the launch of Stonefire Naan Crisps. Available in four unique flavors, including Original, Everything, Garlic Parmesan and Tandoori Spice. Stonefire Naan Crisps are prepared using authentic ingredients and are flame-baked for a satisfying crunch. Like all Stonefire products, Naan Crisps are made without artificial preservatives, additives, artificial colors, trans fat or hydrogenated oils.

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

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by Jim Prevor, Editor-in-Chief

## Is Your Deli A Must-Visit?

The Specialty Food Association funds an annual consumer survey to "... explore consumption of and attitudes and behaviors toward specialty foods." This year it discovered only 59 percent of U.S. consumers reported purchasing specialty foods, a huge drop compared to 74 percent of consumers surveyed in 2013. *Sacré bleu!* Is this signaling some sort of collapse of the American palate? Does it represent a flight to basics caused by economic distress? Perhaps the "local" movement is causing a massive rejection of foreign specialties?

The answer would be no, no and no. In fact, this decline signifies nothing more than the Sisyphean task of the specialty food trade, which continuously promotes specialty items, but then loses credit when the items become best sellers. This year Mintel, which conducts the research on behalf of the Specialty Food Association, redefined specialty foods and, more importantly, changed some of the examples. So Greek yogurt, which was a specialty food, now is a mainstream product.

The inchoate characterization of specialty foods as "foods of premium quality, that are often made by small or local manufacturers, or have ethnic or exotic flavors" inevitably leads to inconsistencies. On the one hand, the field skews toward high end families with household incomes of more than \$75,000, which are far more likely to purchase specialty foods than those with incomes under \$25,000. Yet Hispanics – not a high income demographic – are far more likely to buy specialty foods than Whites or Blacks. Of course, to Hispanics, many of the specialty items are mainstream. The whole field is, to quote Winston Churchill in a different context, "A riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma."

You can see the blend of an ethnic demographic with a foodie psychographic in the fact the Pacific Region of the U.S. is more likely to buy specialty foods than any other region in the country. You can also see the experimentalism of youth in the fact that once people get past the economic stringencies of being 18 – 24, the percentage of the age cohort making specialty food purchases peaks between 25 – 34 years of age and declines in each subsequent decade.

For the deli, it is great news cheese is in the top three specialty products, but the important thought-process around specialty foods is not really product-related; it is process-driven. Specifically it is a rebuttal to what passes for category management in much of the industry.

One way of thinking about specialty foods is

that each item is a product passionately important to a small subset of the population. It may be a very expensive bottle of vinegar, important to only the most affluent, or a Hispanic, Asian, Kosher or Halal product, important only to certain religious or ethnic groups. The key is these consumers really value these products -- so much so they may alter their choice of shopping venue depending on a store's willingness to stock these products.

Therein lies a tale --- and the story is how dangerous category management can be. If a category manager handles cookies, and if he perceives his charge as being to maximize cookie sales and profits, he will always be inclined to discontinue the exotic Scandinavian biscuit that is the slowest selling cookie and replace it with a 14th place chocolate chip cookie, which may well outsell the Scandinavian treat.

The problem is the Scandinavian specialty cookie is loved by a certain segment of consumers, and if they can't get it there they will go elsewhere and bring that store their business for expensive salmon, wine and much more. So the challenge is how to instruct and compensate the cookie category manager so he cares about sales of wine.

Indeed in the deli, where so many prepared foods are proprietary, the challenge goes beyond that. The challenge is not just to carry specialties consumers are looking for; the challenge is to consciously develop and promote proprietary prepared food items so consumers will only consider buying them from your banner. In other words, the goal is not just to have a pizza program or sub shop that meets the convenience needs of nearby workers or residents; the goal is to have unique flavor profiles and innovative products so the kids insist on the lasagna from your market.

Easy? No, but Trader Joe's has specialized in creating not just private label product but product so good that consumers who move away from a Trader Joe's neighborhood still find ways to get its sauces. Costco has legions of fans that covet its salmon or rotisserie chicken. This is why a "good enough" selection of specialty cheese or prepared foods – never is, because it won't build passionate loyalty. So the challenge is to use specialty foods to make your market, well, special. **DB**



*James Z. Prevor*

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by Lee Smith, Publisher

# Whole Foods, Whole Paycheck

## A letter to Walter Robb, co-CEO of Whole Foods

I always cringe when I hear “Whole Foods, Whole Paycheck.” So what if it costs more to shop at Whole Foods? Who says every food merchant should price its offer to the lowest common denominator?

So, please Mr. Walter Robb, co-CEO of Whole Foods, don't get too deep into the battle of low price comparisons as a measure of worth or value.

Your company offers better food in cleaner stores with better customer service than most of your competitors, and Whole Foods should be compensated. Your reputation is built upon its commitment to provide high-quality, nutrient dense foods while safe-guarding the environment, committing to the humane treatment of animals, providing organic alternatives, supporting small businesses and the fair treatment of employees who are offered room for advancement and personal growth.

Your company has a commitment to training. In the cheese arena, Whole Foods has sent hundreds of employees to the American Cheese Society Conference to take the Certified Cheese Professional Exam. I've seen their angst before their test and their cheers and high-fives when they are finished. When they receive the CCP pin, their prestige is enhanced and they are recognized by peers as authorities on cheese — and rightly so. I can say that because I've shopped in your stores.

As a consumer, I can easily connect with your associates, who are confident of their knowledge and willingly engage in conversation. The deli associate knows the prosciutto is organic, what it means and why it is important. Then he will offer you a sample. The scenario plays out in the cheese, meat and seafood departments — every department in the store.

This image is reinforced by neat, clean and well-groomed employees who are in pristine smocks and jackets. That costs money, too.

It's just fine with me your company's mission is supported by locating stores in higher-end malls with bright lighting, clean and polished floors and well-stocked shelves. The shopping carts are plentiful, in good condition and not strewn all over the parking lot. The parking lots are clean and free of debris.

Once in the store, the displays offer an uncommon level of customer service. Cheese counters are manned and all cheeses are available cut to order. Produce is hand-stacked, trimmed and available in

bulk. It's expensive to do that. Lots of extra labor. Higher shrink, too.

Is it a value to everyone? No. Some people can't afford the extras, and some people don't think what you offer is worth the extra cost. Some people think buying prosciutto is a waste of money, much less organic prosciutto. Some people find the atmosphere intimidating and snooty. They have other places to shop. Nothing wrong with that.

If it wasn't for Whole Foods my local grocer probably wouldn't be carrying organic milk, eggs, yogurt and butter. Unfortunately, I moved and there is no longer a Whole Foods nearby, so I have to shop at one of your competitors. They have really great stores, too. In fact, I drove an extra half-hour to get there and I spent \$82.00 on 15 items — mostly organic meat and some really great cheeses. I thought it was a good value, even if it was a 40-minute ride. The store was packed. They also offer many of the same things you do. Guess the concept works.

Sure, it is important that standard grocery items are fairly priced, but don't be afraid to say it costs more to shop at Whole Foods. There are lots of people who shop for quality and service. And, you have some really sharp competitors. I've been in their stores and they are no less expensive than you are.

I'd like to mention something else about how Whole Foods helps the working guy. A lot of the products you sell are made by small companies — artisans that can't produce large batches, which would reduce the cost to you. They often do not want to take the shortcuts that would increase yield or lower labor. They want to keep food real. If it costs me a few more pennies or even dollars, it's worth it. I like keeping them in business. I like farms, trees and clean waterways. I appreciate having clean air and the smell of pine trees when I walk around. I'd like to encourage more people to get into sustainable agriculture, to start their own businesses; they need companies to buy their products — even if it costs more. **DB**



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## Millennials are leading the charge for the development of sustainable food packaging in deli departments

BY LISA WHITE

**S**ustainable packaging programs are becoming a point of differentiation for manufacturers and their product lines. This segment may soon be something more.

*The Future of Sustainable Packaging to 2018*, a report by Smithers Para, reveals that consumer demand, government legislation and technology advances will create a \$244 billion sustainable global packaging market by 2018.

Sustainable packaging can take on a number of different qualities.

“Some focus on recyclability, while others put the emphasis on recycled content, and there are those who look at renewable raw materials and energy,” says James Foster, marketing manager at Clear Lam Packaging of Elk Grove Village, IL.

Another big sustainability initiative is lightweighting, or using less or lighter packaging to minimize the amount of waste produced.

“Water bottles, for example, have gone through several years of lightweighting,” says Foster. “That effort saved an enormous amount of plastic from the supply chain. Along with the weight savings, it reduced

the amount of trucks and railcars necessary to distribute the products and the fuel consumed and greenhouse gases generated along the way.”

*The Future of Sustainable Packaging to 2018* lists the most common sustainable packaging trends as downsizing or lightweighting; increased recycling and waste recovery; increased use of recycled content; increased use of renewably sourced materials; and improvements in packaging and logistical efficiency.

### Defining Sustainable

Being familiar with the terminology is important in this segment. Eco-friendly and sustainable are terms used interchangeably to describe this type of packaging.

Eco-friendly packaging is generally thought to be recyclable and can be reclaimed in recycling streams to be reused, while organic packaging is biodegradable in landfills.

Packaging companies have developed new technologies and materials that are more environmentally friendly.

Fitchburg, WI-based Placon's EcoStar PET facility is accepting, recycling and then extruding roll stock with up to 15 percent

post-consumer recycled thermo form packaging flake, in addition to PET bottle flake.

“Our recycled lines of stock PET food packaging are thermoformed with EcoStar's FDA food-grade PET, meaning we're recycling, using and reusing the packaging that we've created,” says Jeff Lucash, Placon's director of sales, stock products. “This is a big step in truly closing the loop on PET plastics recycling.”

Placon's goal with its green packaging lines is to decrease landfill disposals by diverting recyclable packaging to reclaimers and extrusion facilities that can recycle the packaging for reuse as new packaging.

Although some may be environmentally friendly, sustainable packaging technologies that reduce production efficiencies or increase costs are not always commercially viable.

Because it makes the most sense financially and logistically, manufacturers are more apt to use packaging that incorporates more recycled paper and plastic, as well as containers that are more lightweight with less material.

“Packaging that is recyclable, has recycled content or is produced from renewable bio-based materials, are all sustainable pack-

aging variations,” says Foster. “Also, a lot of effort is being made to create lighter more efficient packaging that replaces pre-formed cans, jars, composite cans or trays.”

Clear Lam recently launched its Prima-Pak technology, which produces a flexible, stackable, recloseable package that is designed to enhance cubes throughout the supply chain, reduce weight, improve merchandising and decrease costs.

EcoTensil, located in Corte Madera, CA, offers recyclable utensils made from paper that are packaged with prepared food and used for in-store demos. Both the production method and material make this a sustainable product.

“There is a linear trend with packaging that uses less material and then a circular path or cradle to cradle, where a product is recycled, composted or reused without a finite end,” says Peggy Cross, EcoTensil’s founder and chief executive. “Manufacturers need to look at both paths simultaneously [when developing these products].”

Eco-Products, Boulder, CO, only works with materials made from renewable materials, such as sugar cane fiber or recycled fiber. Although the majority of its business is with restaurants, there has been increasing interest from supermarkets and deli departments.

It’s the perception of eco-friendly packaging that has created the lag time between the retail and foodservice segments.

“There’s a difference between the association consumers have with restaurant take-out packaging as compared with retail items in the supermarket,” says Wendell Simonson, Eco-Products’ vice president of marketing. “We’ve had more success on the foodservice side, but that will change as consumers look for the same packaging qualities in retail.”

### Benefits To Going Green

Sustainability is not only being driven by consumer demand, but also by companies that are focusing on operating greener.

As a result, a number of companies are aligning strategic growth strategies with their sustainability initiatives.

“Additionally, there are goals being established by some retailers that are pushing to increase the amount of post-consumer content used in packaging,” says Laura Stewart, Placon’s vice president, sales and marketing.

In recent years, consumers have become more cognizant and more educated about the environment and harmful materials.

This has led to higher expectations when it comes to packaging and its impact on the environment.

“People also recognize that every partici-

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partment in the supply chain has a responsibility," says Clear Lam Packaging's Foster. "In addition, companies have seen that if they execute sustainable technologies properly, then cost savings can also be achieved."

Global Green USA, Santa Monica, CA, is a non-profit that works with companies to incorporate sustainable packaging into their repertoire. Its focus lately has been on back of house wholesale packaging, such as mushroom-based Styrofoam alternatives.

In many cases, it can be something as simple as the coating, and not the actual materials, that render packaging unrecyclable.

In the past, many packaging manufacturers coated cardboard with a petroleum-based wax, which works well to protect the material against moisture, but creates a container that's not recyclable.

Today, recyclable box prices are now more in line with the cost of wax paraben boxes.

"Regular cardboard is very valuable, and theft of this material is becoming more common in big cities," says Lily Kelly, senior program associate for Global Green USA's coalition for resource recovery. "There is a big incentive to divert more waste."

Reducing packaging is a positive step toward environmentally friendly packaging, yet it must be recoverable.

Another factor is reducing landfill waste, which not only takes up valuable space, but also creates methane gas, which many attribute to global warming.

"Like recyclable packaging, materials that can be composted also are considered sustainable," says EcoTensil's Cross.

Much of the innovation in sustainable packaging has been on the material side. Plastics are now available that look traditional, yet are made from renewable resources and are either recyclable or compostable.

Also, as more recyclable plastic materials are being produced, there is more opportunity to use these products in packaging.

"Most activity is around the availability of non-traditional materials," says Eco-Product's Simonson. "It's a fact the use of traditional plastics in the long term isn't beneficial."

As consumers become more educated in what is and what is not sustainable, recyclable and compostable, they are asking questions and letting their dollars talk.

Consequently, end-users have high expectations in terms of the businesses and companies they do business with.

This is why places like big stadiums and hospital chains are switching from traditional containers to sustainable packaging.

"One of the more recent examples is the new San Francisco 49ers stadium, which is the gold standard from a sustainability point of view," says Eco-Products' Simonson. "Foodservice packaging is a big part of that."

Retail operations are the next big frontier, due to the growing number of people looking to reduce their carbon footprint.

"As more people become aware of the environment, sustainability ties into other aspects of clean living, like organic and antibiotic-free," says Simonson. "People are going to be looking at packaging through a waste lens."

For packaging manufacturers like Eco-Products, there is a big involvement around waste generation products and avoiding the use of materials that would end up in a landfill.

### Primed For Growth

Improvements in sustainable packaging due to newer technologies and materials have brought costs down and

increased the durability of these products.

Just a decade ago, sustainable packaging was only a concept. Today, the waste collection and recycling programs, in addition to composting capabilities, have created greener pastures.

"Most major cities today have curbside programs that accept PET, the most widely recycled material in the United States," says Placon's Stewart. "Packaging shouldn't just be left to decompose in landfills. We need to dispose of it properly, whether recycled or composted, to ensure the packaging's end of life is as designed."

Millennials, in particular, are the driving force for change.

Social media also has helped spur a movement and educate consumers about the benefits of sustainable packaging and the materials involved.

Blogs, online forums, Facebook and other platforms are buzzing with information on how people can reduce their carbon footprints and live more environmentally friendly.

"We're learning more about what is and isn't recyclable, what can and can't biodegrade," says Placon's Lucash. "Consumer opinions have evolved due to the wealth of information available to them."

Consequently, CPG's are incorporating sustainable packaging as a way of doing business; it's no longer the exception, but the rule.



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This is due to consumers' expectations that packaging will be recyclable or won't be as wasteful.

"Consumers have become more aware of sustainability terms, but best understand the concepts of recyclable or less plastic," says Clear Lam Packaging's Foster. "However, other terms, such as recycled content, renewable, biodegradable and compostable still cause confusion."

In addition, there is a growing demographic that has shown a willingness to pay a

little more for sustainable packaging. This includes those purchasing organic foods.

There also have been advancements in compostable and recyclable materials.

Global Green USA is working on developing greener to-go packaging, including burger clamshells.

"In terms of sustainability, much of it has to do with coatings," says Global Green USA's Kelly. "With plastics, there are advancements with additives. Also, there's been the suggestion from retailers looking for

more convergence on fewer resin types to simplify recycling sorting."

EcoTensil meets with large CPG companies and retailers who are looking to operate greener businesses.

"Everyone understands that it's a math equation. They are producing waste and need to do the right thing," says EcoTensil's Cross. "Companies need to look for cost-effective solutions."

Despite having to deal with the upfront cost of a redesign, in the long run, there is an opportunity to save money, as well as the environment.

"Companies that can redesign with function, reduction in material and sustainability will be winners," says Cross.

EcoTensil recently developed a ceiling lid for granola that snaps onto a parfait cup and a spoon lid that snaps into the top of the granola section. This not only eliminates the conventional lid, but the spoon adds value for grab-and-go use.

"All of our packaging focuses on adding utensils while providing convenience, which is a huge [packaging] trend," says Cross. "There needs to be innovation that addresses consumer demands with less material. Companies that can use the least amount of material but still provide convenience, now that's the sweet spot."

There is no doubt that the sustainable packaging segment continues to grow. As materials become more advanced and technology is developed, costs will become more in line with conventional containers. This will spur more manufacturers to jump on the green bandwagon.

"The more we grow, the more scale we can achieve, and prices will start to come down," says Eco-Product's Simonson. "The main issue for most people holding out from switching away from traditional plastics is cost. Like any emerging technology, over time this will come down and companies that held out will see it as a viable switch."

The industry may still be years away from this type of packaging becoming commonplace due to the necessary optimization of supply chains, but it is headed in the right direction.

Packaging manufacturers will find it not only makes sense from an environmental perspective, but also from a business standpoint.

"Sustainable packaging is and will continue to be an integral part of good package design," says Placon's Stewart. "By creating packaging using existing resources, whether it's post-industrial or post-consumer, we're conserving virgin material while making the best use of our existing resources." **DB**

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# Hummus Remains on the Upswing

A dip delis are excited about

BY KEITH LORIA

**H**ummus has been a growing favorite of Americans in recent years, as have been all things Mediterranean. In fact, the past 10 years for the hummus industry have been the most evolving years the industry has ever seen, as there's been a transition from the ethnic food eaters and health food extremists to mainstream consumers.

What was once a relatively unknown product has grown into an almost \$1 billion business in the United States. While this growth was initially because of a few big players in the market, the smaller competition has really proved itself to be a large fac-

tor in the rising interest of the consumer.

"Hummus is becoming less of a niche category and becoming more of a staple in the American diet," says Will Burger, marketing director for Hope Foods, Boulder, CO. "In the past, it was broadly seen as purely an ethnic food to be eaten with other Mediterranean offerings. Now companies like Hope Foods and others are pushing the creative envelope and offering dozens of new flavors."

Steve Kontos, owner of Kontos Foods, based in Patterson, NJ, says everyone enjoys hummus in 2014.

"Younger people see eating hummus as trendy or chic. Older audiences see it as a healthy product, high in vegetable protein

and lower in fat and calories," he says. "But its mass appeal is across the board. Retailers can mix hummus with other ingredients (e.g., roasted red peppers), making prepared dips in many varieties they can sell in the deli section by the ounce."

Jennifer Fancher, director of marketing for Green Giant Fresh, Salinas, CA, says the expansion of flavors has been a big factor in the popularity of hummus.

"But, as with many items now, the increased focus on Mediterranean foods in magazines and on the Food Network has given consumers the confidence and desire to try hummus," she says. "We've also seen that diet trends like the Mediterranean diet have opened up the door for hummus."



PHOTO COURTESY OF KONTOS FOOD, INC.

John McGuckin, vice president of sales for Sabra Dipping Co., headquartered in Astoria, NY, says the hummus category for 2014 has seen double-digit growth.

"There's much more innovation to the category to take advantage of the growth, but we are still seeing it under-spaced, especially in the deli," he says. "We have a full portfolio of dips. We are trying to create for the deli space an allocation for premium dips so consumers can go to the deli and find something new, flavorful and fresh."

McGuckin says the trade — although not necessarily consumers — are pushing manufacturers for great-tasting organic hummus.

Margie Lewis, assistant brand manager for Tribe Mediterranean Foods, headquartered in Taunton, MA, says the biggest trend in hummus is the rise of the grab-and-go segment.

"We recently launched Tribe To Go, a portable pack of hummus and pita chips, looking to capitalize on this trend and the growing consumer desire to eat better while on the go," she says.

Aimee Tsakirellis, director of marketing for Cedar's Mediterranean Foods, based in Ward Hill, MA, says new trends include integrating unique flavor profiles (like sriracha, falafel, etc.) and ingredients (agave, jicama, green garbanzo beans, etc.) into traditional hummus flavors.

"Also adding twists on traditional ingredients — like swapping in edamame beans for the chickpeas in hummus or kale for

different greens in flavor profiles — has been a recurring trend this year," she says. "Using ethnic or regional ingredients as a main flavor profile or as just a front runner ingredient or call-out in Mediterranean foods has been trending as well."

Greg Greene, marketing director for Sabra, says the latest trends in hummus revolve around usage and the experience of discovering a new, delicious, better-for-you food that generates a lot of passion.

"More and more people are discovering

how versatile hummus is and are going beyond dipping and into enjoying the process of finding many ways hummus can elevate eating occasions," he says. "For those new to the category, dipping remains an easy way to initially enjoy hummus, often at a party. As we go into tailgating season, we always see an increase in hummus consumption. But once it is in the home, we have an increasing number of fans who are finding endless ways to enjoy it — as a snack, spreading on toast with an egg, using as a salad dressing, or even baking it as an ingredient."

According to Green Giant Fresh's Fancher, hummus sales have continued to grow significantly, just under 20 percent dollar sales growth year over year — quite impressive for a category that is nearing \$1 billion a year.

"Hummus sales are definitely higher on the East Coast, with more than a quarter of the sales coming from the Northeast region," she says.

### What's New?

When it comes to what's new and exciting on the market, it's all about innovation, especially with flavors.

Tribe currently has 17 flavors and is adding a Farmer's Market line this fall that will launch with three garden-inspired tastes.

According to Burger, Hope Foods will soon be introducing innovative flavors never seen in the product category. Flavors include sriracha, spicy avocado, Thai-coconut curry and more.

### Merchandising Potential

"As competition increases and consumers have more options to choose from, quality and unique flavors matter more than ever," says Burger. "If retailers are seen by consumers as being drivers of this innovative push in the hummus market, it will continue to support the category as a whole."

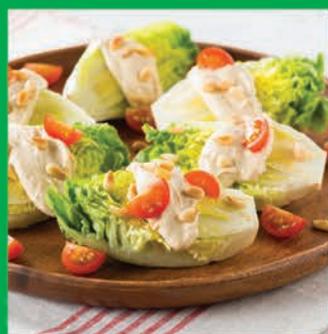
Tribe Mediterranean Food's Lewis agrees retailers should carry a variety of flavors to increase sales.

"Consumers not only like options, but we've noticed that those who purchase our classic flavors are often willing to try our new, more innovative flavors because they are loyal to our core product," she says. "It is important that consumers see the top of the hummus. Some retailers are now tilting the bowls on shelves so consumers can see the fresh product, along with its mouthwatering and distinctively designed toppings."





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Cedar's Mediterranean Foods' Tsakirellis says deli operators should create a destination on the shelf for not only hummus, but complementing items from the Mediterranean category, including Mediterranean salads and Greek yogurt dips.

"This will give the overall category more presence and will allow the hummus to shine within that destination shelf space," she says. "Retailers can really take advantage of the 'all-natural' trend and choose brands that appeal to consumers and have certifications such as Non-GMO Project Verification and gluten-free certification."

In Kontos' opinion, retailers can optimize sales using additional placement in the deli section and tie its use into breads and other meal occasions.

Greene says Sabra's iconic red rim is a visible note to consumers; and the company is teaming with its retail partners to offer delicious, fresh-tasting dips and spreads for parties and entertaining, and for everyday occasions.

"At the moment, one might find salsa in various places throughout the store; same with dairy-based dips; guacamole as well. Sabra and retailers are developing a 'Dips Destination' where consumers can discover, with confidence, everything they need in

terms of dips and spreads," he says. "And they can feel great about finding it in a refrigerated section, knowing fresher tasting hummus, guacamole, Greek yogurt dips and salsa will make the shopper a hero at home."

Cross promoting is important, Fancher says, and deli operators should focus on healthy snacking ideas and creative additions to meals.

"In-store demos are a great way to attract new consumers to the category," she says. "Include in ads and POS materials educating uses not just for snacking but as a flavorful cooking ingredient, as well. Retailers should also call out hummus as a healthful, convenient option and perfect for their diet-conscious consumers."

### Health Attributes

Health-conscious consumers and people with active lifestyles tend to be frequent purchasers of hummus due to its nutritious profile, significant amount of protein, fiber and low fat content.

"There is no question that hummus is a healthier dip option than many other conventional, highly processed, shelf-stable dip options in the market place," says Hope Foods' Burger. "As consumers become increasingly aware of the dangers of GMO's

and harmful pesticides in their food, organic and non-GMO offerings are more popular than ever. These products should be highlighted, promoted and supported in the retail environment."

With most brands, hummus is an all-natural source of protein and fiber, is vegan, trans-fat free and cholesterol-free.

The better-for-you attributes, especially Non-GMO Project Verification, has been and still continues to grow in terms of importance to consumers as it has been gaining more awareness through retailers, brands and individuals promoting, educating or talking about it more.

Industry insiders reveal the hummus demographic is typically women, ages 24 to 40. In recent years the demographic has become broader as people and families seek out better-for-you snacks.

"As consumers are increasingly more health-conscious, we're offering a wholesome, satisfying snack that still delivers the crunch associated with snack time," says Lewis. "Tribe To Go Classic is only 230 calories and Tribe To Go Sweet Roasted Red Pepper is 200 calories."

All the forecasts show continued strong growth in hummus sales as the market shifts in a fresh, healthy direction. **DB**

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# For the Love of Pizza

An evolving category brings in new customers

BY ANTHONY STOECKERT

Pizza purchased in a grocery used to mean square, frozen pizzas that weren't big on taste or creativity. While the frozen food section has gotten livelier, the real pizza action is taking place in deli departments of many retailers, where pies are served fresh out of pizza ovens.

Pizza from supermarkets offer an affordable tasty dish with wide appeal — after all, who doesn't love pizza? It's convenient, especially when purchased at your local retailer. Instead of having to place an order over the phone and wait for delivery, or drive to a restaurant to pick up, the grocery experience allows customers to order a pizza, shop, then pick it up

before leaving the store.

According to Alan Hamer, vice president of Stefano Foods in Charlotte, NC, trends that are happening in pizza restaurants are influencing what's happening in deli departments.

"Make-to-order programs have expanded greatly," says Hamer. "Taking the cue from Mexican restaurant chain Chipotle Mexican Grill, pizza restaurants now feature programs that enable customers to choose the type and quantity of toppings on their pizza. Using new oven technology, the assembled pizza bakes in minutes. This style program translates extremely well to the supermarket deli, where retailers use the selection of sandwich toppings as pizza toppings and employ toasting ovens to bake personal pizzas."

## Hot Trends

These days pizza means lots of variety beyond the usual cheese, and traditional toppings of pepperoni, sausage, peppers, mushrooms, onions and the like. Modern pizzas use different kinds of cheeses and toppings. Just about any vegetable is game for pizza these days, and many fruits are popular toppings.

Jenni Bonsignore, marketing manager for Valley Lahvosh Baking Co., based in Fresno, CA, says one key trend is a growing market for new types of pizza.

"I think that consumers are more willing to try alternative types of pizza with different types of crusts and gourmet toppings," says Bonsignore. One alternative crust is a cracker bread that Valley Lahvosh sells for foodservice and retail purposes.

Quality is another issue, as shoppers look for pizzas that are a step above the traditional offerings found in the freezer case. Sometimes that means buying dough, fresh ingredients and making a pizza at home.

"I do believe that consumers are willing to put a little effort making a pizza that's healthier and made with fresh ingredients," says Bonsignore. "Our Valley Lahvosh Rounds make an easy, quick pizza crust that can be topped and cooked in 15 minutes."

Dave Foran, director of business development for Little Lady Foods, based in Elk Grove Village, IL, says specialty pizzas are a big trend. He says shoppers want unique toppings and flavor-infused crusts. He adds that Little Lady Foods specializes in gourmet and artisan pizzas; organic, all-natural, nutritious pizzas; healthy pizzas aimed at kids; and pizzas with ethnic and cultural-inspired ingredients.

Foran says flatbread pizza is another

popular option. "It is commonly used as a chic alternative for pizzas and sandwiches," he says, adding that it's a perfect solution for meals or appetizers in both retail and foodservice departments.

**Popular Pizzas**

Deb Crisan, senior vice president of sales and marketing for Rao's Specialty Foods in New York says Italian Neapolitan pizza is still the top-seller, followed by artisan pizza, grilled pizza, deep-fried pizza, breakfast pizza, dessert pizza and assorted flatbreads.

"The Margherita Pizza uses imported Italian flour for a thin crust with very simple ingredients to appeal to every consumer," she says. "Rao's makes an authentic Italian pizza sauce using vine-ripened plum tomatoes and sweet cherry tomatoes grown in the rich volcanic region of Italy to recreate this classic with fresh Mozzarella and basil."

Rao's also makes products for purchase to make homemade pizzas. When asked if this option is growing in popularity compared to traditional frozen pizzas, Crisan responds, "Who doesn't love a homemade pizza over frozen?"

Hunter says Stefano's Take & Bake pizzas have been a growth area for the past



eight years. Take & Bake pizzas are made for refrigerators, and are hand-stitched with semolina crust and panko bread-crumbs for flavor and texture. Sizes range from 12 to 16 inches.

Among the variety Stefano's offers is a

pepperoni pizza, made with Mozzarella, Provolone, Romano and Parmesan cheeses, as well as a lot of pepperoni.

"As happens with any product category, in time, innovation gives way to price competition and consumer fatigue," says

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Hunter. "We believe hot pizza is a great way to change the game and deliver exceptional quality and freshness. Frozen pizza dough can deliver results that meet or surpass the quality from local pizzerias and easily eclipse the national pizza chains. Many retailers have made the necessary commitment to pizza and have realized outstanding sales and an enhanced fresh foods reputation."

Stefano's also sells frozen pizzas, as well as ingredients for foodservice pizzas, including frozen pizza dough.

Another key is pizza for people with food allergies, which Foran says is growing at a huge rate.

"Today, allergen-related claims like 'gluten-free' on restaurant menus have increased 200 percent," says Foran. "Retail follows restaurant trends and provides what consumers are looking for."

### Marketing Pizza

Pizza does, for the most part, sell itself. But it's a category where shoppers have a myriad of options. That can be a challenge for sales at deli departments. However, there are ways to increase pizza purchases, according to the experts.

Bonsignore says pizza has natural appeal because of its convenience, but there are other advantages to pizza from the deli department that can be used to promote and increase sales.

"It's important to show the consumer that take-out and frozen pizzas are not the only option," she says. "Promote making healthy pizzas at home and show the consumer that it's easy to do."

Foran notes pizza has lots of potential for cross-promotion with products in the outer perimeter market, such as produce.

"Encourage consumers to add additional toppings in whole or as part of the pizza to make the meal uniquely their own," says Foran. "Perhaps promote 'Topping Ideas of the Day' with signage or recipe cards. Of course, the ingredients should be readily available nearby."

According to Valley Lahvosh Baking Co.'s Bonsignore, there are many natural cross-merchandising opportunities for pizza right in the deli department. Making pizzas at home, for example, allows people to make whatever pizza they want. It also can be a family activity or the basis for a party.

"Pizzas are perfect for cross-merchandising opportunities; almost everything in the service deli can be used as a topping," says Bonsignore. "Also, recipes and demos are always a great opportunity to educate the consumer and encourage them to try making pizzas at home. Suggest an ingre-



dient bar so that everyone can make their own personalized pizza... it's a great interactive family activity."

Rao's Specialty Foods' Crisan suggests offering shoppers a taste of fresh pizza to entice them to buy.

"Sampling a freshly made pizza during

peak hours, lunch and dinner will capture your audience to buy now, take it home or back to the office, or stay in the store and eat it right now," she says.

**Merchandising Opportunities**

When it comes to fresh pizza, Crisan

says one of the keys to merchandising is to create an atmosphere that puts shoppers in the mood for pizza — one that gives shoppers a hint, and some aroma, of how inviting pizza can be.

She also suggests making it easy for people to know what you sell and for them to order, by creating a menu board with "clear, mouthwatering descriptions of each pizza available."

Make the finished product part of your scene.

"Display your pre-made pizzas to sell either by the slice or whole pie, and use all of your ingredients as merchandising enhancements — fresh tomatoes, fresh basil, Italian cheese, mushrooms, peppers, pepperoni, salami, whatever varieties you are selling," she says.

When it comes to packaging frozen pizzas, Little Lady's Foran says it's important to make sure the actual pizza is visible.

"Consumers need to see the product in order to get a sense of the fresh-made concept," he says. "Pizzas should be positioned by other ready-to-eat items so the choice is clear."

And that can lead to another clear choice — that pizza from the deli department can make for a terrific meal. **DB**



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# Something to Cluck About

## The latest trends in fried chicken

BY KEITH LORIA

One of the staples of deli departments has always been fried chicken — whether it's chicken wings, chicken fingers or fried chicken sandwiches, the category has always been a winner.

Jay Cipra, chief executive and president of Broaster Co., based in Beloit, WI, says a popular trend for fried chicken is a move toward fresh tenders, in regular and spicy flavors, and with a crispy coating.

"Grocery stores are moving away from frozen chicken in their deli departments and returning to fresh chicken. Food brokers have echoed this trend," he says. "The concept of restaurant-quality food served

with deli department convenience really connects with the consumer."

Cliff Toothaker, president of food programs, better retail at Charley Biggs Food Co. in Noblesville, IN, says a few of the latest trends with fried chicken include customized breading to appeal to local preferences, sweet and savory flavors mixed together, topical seasonings and new sauces for dipping.

"We work with retailers to customize their fried chicken program to maximize appeal for consumers' tastes," he says.

### By The Numbers

Eric LeBlanc, vice president of market-

ing, deli, convenience store and bakery for Tyson Foods, headquartered in Springdale, AR, says fried chicken meal deals continue to be an important part of the U.S. meals category, contributing nearly \$35 million in sales annually.

As a category, fried chicken is up 6 percent in dollars and 5 percent in volume year over year, according to the Nielsen-Perishables Group, 52 weeks ending July 26, 2014.

"Eight piece is by far the most prevalent way to sell fried chicken, making up about 65 percent of dollars and 50 percent of unit sales."

Single piece is also extremely important

to the category, only making up 9 percent of dollars, but 34 percent of units sold. Larger piece counts — more than 20 pieces — are growing more than last year; the “snack” or one-person serving of two or four pieces is also growing. As a category fried chicken is up 6 percent and 5 percent in volume.

### Merchandising Matters

Fried chicken is enjoyed in different ways by consumers all across America — from the inner city to the rural areas. It is important for a retailer to know what sells best in his/her market. This is best done by selling all pieces and seeing which sell the best.

According to Cipra, consumers age 45 and older still prefer bone-in chicken, white meat and wings, while dark meat does well with various ethnic groups. Kids, teens and young adults trend toward fresh tenders. Younger age groups also do well with boneless skinless chicken breast.

“Eight-piece cut chicken remains a center of the plate entrée item, while the perception of wings, tenders and popcorn chicken are more of an impulse purchase, appetizer item or an item for watching sporting events,” he says. “Merchandising needs to reflect this distinction, as subtle as it may become.”

Fried chicken is most commonly merchandised in a hot service table, which is a perfect location for lunch and dinner meal combos, as it carries a strong freshness perception. Limiting merchandising to this location, however, just means shielding business from a lot of eyeballs.

“The number one reason shoppers purchase deli prepared foods when they had not planned to make a purchase is that they saw it. Lesson? Merchandise the fried chicken where they can see it,” says LeBlanc. “The deli is shopped by 25 percent of the shopper population, but a check-out warmer is shopped by 43 percent of the population. It’s simply a numbers game.”

Another area to consider is cold self-service, considered the most highly shopped area of the deli.

“More eyeballs mean more sales, especially given that visibility is proven to drive impulse purchases in deli prepared foods,” says LeBlanc. “Another advantage to being in this area is that cold food purchased from this area is eligible for purchase under the SNAP program (Supplemental Nutritional Assis-

tance Program, the nutrition assistance food program), which opens up a whole new segment of the market for the deli prepared foods program. And it’s important to note that 43 million Americans participate in the SNAP program, so the market size is very significant.”

### Tips For Success

Along with offering snack-type lunches and full dinners, the biggest tip Cipra offers retailers is to offer home replacement meals, especially at night. Cipra suggests offering to-go packages ahead of time and having them ready to sell from 4 to 8 p.m.

“Include tenders and popcorn chicken in this offering, and make sure offerings are seasonally correct,” he says. “A customer expects the same product they have come to know each time they order. If the product is consistent and has a taste profile the consumer likes at an affordable price, the

consumer will return.”

Another great tip is to make a phone number available for call-ins so fresh chicken can be prepared ahead of time.

Shelf engagement is higher at hot self-service locations than at any other merchandising location in the deli, so packaging is important, too.

“Clear containers that communicate freshness are going to be critical to winning in this area,” says LeBlanc.

Other tips include offering a punch card in which after 10 meals, customers get a free meal of equal value; calling on surrounding businesses to carry your lunch and dinner menus; and creating a monthly value meal special.

According to Charley Biggs’ Toothaker, delis should merchandise a full-meal program that includes a combination of traditional and healthy sides.

“Studies show that consumers still consider a meal purchased from the grocery as a value over restaurant meal options,” he says. “Merchandising meals is a great way to incent trial of other deli offerings while providing solutions to consumers who are challenged with feeding their families daily.”

### Holiday Happenings

During the holiday season, Tyson frequently offers consumer promotions that feature other products that pair with the fried chicken consumption occasion. This could be a starch, a beverage or another item.

“Providing an easy completion of the meal with a value incentive that targets a particular calendar event is a very effective way to build sales, and the benefit is not just driven by the promotional offer. The mere presence of signage promoting the offer raises awareness and will drive incremental purchases,” says LeBlanc. “Finally, offering large packages — a 50-count offer, for example — makes fried chicken a perfect fit for larger social gatherings and helps capture purchases that might well have gone to a foodservice establishment.”

Broaster’s Cipra recommends running promotions on home replacement meals since everyone is usually in a rush and has little time to cook. He also suggests working with multiple vendors to develop holiday promotions tied to various themes.

“Football is huge during Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s, so wings would be an excellent item to promote during these holidays,” he says. “For Lent and Easter,





there is NCAA Basketball, so wings and seafood combinations would fit very well. During the summer months and picnic holidays like Memorial Day, July 4th and Labor Day, chicken bucket promotions are winners.”

#### The Health Card

Cipra says more and more customers are moving toward a healthy eating mindset, which is why the company has reduced saturated and regular fats.

“We start with a fresh, never frozen,

product and we introduce our taste profile in the marinating process. This allows us to use very little breading to seal the product shut and hold in the flavor,” he says. “In grocery stores, consumers are becoming more aware of how products are prepared, as well as the cause and effect of trans-fats and food allergies. Operators are starting to offer smaller portions of the same products and turning traditional offerings into salads, wraps, etc.”

According to LeBlanc, trans fat was a much bigger deal a few years back than it is today.

“Our research shows definitively that the deli fried chicken buyer, in contrast to the deli rotisserie chicken buyer, places no premium on health benefits and does not even claim to read labels for nutritional information,” he says. “Health claims will not sell more fried chicken or even raise satisfaction with the purchase, great taste will.”

#### It’s All About The Oil

Cooking oil can alter the texture, color and taste of fried food, and if the oil is not changed or filtered in a timely manner, it will negatively affect food quality, flavor consistency and, ultimately, your brand and reputation.

“It’s important to establish a consistent filtration program. Filtration systems allow operators to get the most value from their cooking oil without compromising food quality, taste or their brand, and can stretch oil usage by 20 to 50 percent,” says Giovanni Brienza, vice president of Frontline International, doing business in Cuyahoga Falls, OH. “Filtration equipment also helps maintain the quality of oil, allowing opera-

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tors to produce better-tasting fried food time after time.”

Filtration procedures heavily depend on store volume and the types of food that are being fried. Breaded products like fried chicken need filtration more often, as these foods produce more fall-off particles, thus degrading the oil.

### Breeding Issues

What drives satisfaction in fried chicken are three attributes: the crispiness of the breading, the seasoning in the breading (especially pepper) and the moistness of the meat. While there is some attempt to reduce the ingredients in the breading, the target audience for the product is really only going to be concerned with the sensory attributes of the product.

“Breeding adhesion is another thing, altogether. If your current breading profile has a lot of blow-off (voids in the breading), that will decrease the visual attractiveness and the sensory experience,” says LeBlanc. “There are a lot of retailers who are looking at offering gluten-free breading profiles. The very significant caution with this is the recognition that for people with high sensitivity to gluten or celiac disease — even if the product contains no gluten in the formulation, if it is prepared in the same area where products which contain gluten are handled — the risk of contamination is high and the consequences are potentially grave.”

Cipra has seen more requests for a crispier breading lately, and spicy Cajun breading is doing well. Lighter breading, he says, keeps food costs down, extends oil life and is definitely a healthier option. **DB**



## WHAT'S UP WITH POTATOES?

One of the most popular add-ons when consumers buy fried chicken comes from the potato category — be it French fries, potato wedges, potato salad or prepared foods. Industry insiders suggest nearly 40 percent of all chicken sales at the deli have some sort of potato sale included.

Patty Amato, director of sales for Farm Ridge Foods, Islandia, NY, says twice-baked potatoes are on an upward trend.

“Twice-baked potatoes offer an eye-appealing, delicious side dish or center of the plate entrée that is healthy and tastes great,” she says. “There are no trans fats; they are convenient, cost-effective and flavorful.”

Farm Ridge Foods also offers prepared mashed potatoes, including creamy deluxe, garlic, redskin, sweet and loaded, as well as cheddar and bacon scalloped potatoes and sweet potato casserole.

“It’s important for retailers to make sure their customers know what they offer and put the potato dishes front and center,” she says. “By creating special companion sales, it can increase both the chicken and potato sales.”

Susan Hannah, vice president of marketing and product development for Pacific Valley Foods, operating out of Bellevue, WA, says recent potato trends include specialty items such as seasoned fries, coated fries, potatoes with healthier ingredients (such as all-natural, lower fat, etc.) and mashed potatoes available in a variety of flavors.

“People don’t want to forego good taste anymore on items such as potatoes. They want to enjoy their comfort food, but also know they are still eating something healthy,” she says. “French fries are always the most popular potato item, but specialty fries and specialty potato products are giving consumers more options.”

Hannah says there was a time when potatoes got a bad rap for being a carbohydrate/starchy food,



PHOTO COURTESY OF PACIFIC VALLEY FOODS

but today’s consumers understand that not all carbohydrates are bad, and potato items have many nutrients.

According to Seth Pemsler, vice president of the Idaho Potato Commission in Eagle, ID, potatoes are a universal food, enjoyed by old and young alike.

“Part of winning the battle is making sure stores carry an assortment that meets the proper demographic,” he says. “Millennials aren’t cooking a great deal, so offering grab-and-go options that they can just partner along with their chicken purchases is a great idea. Variety is key. By offering a selection of choices, it will increase sales.”

In today’s age, a greater number of people are looking for ready-made meals from the deli, and that includes potato items.

“Potatoes are always great to market as a side dish to meat, chicken, etc.,” says Hannah. “More potato products can also be marketed as a meal or snack on their own, such as stuffed baked potatoes that may have bacon and vegetable potato stuffings.”

Typically, most potato products have zero trans fat as manufacturers adapt their ingredients.

“Consumers looking for healthy potatoes have that available to them, and in a variety of flavors and styles, so the potato category has not really been affected,” says Hannah. “Some of the high value-added potato products may not be completely trans-fat free, but like any good comfort food, we are allowed to indulge ourselves every now and then.” **DB**

# THE MARRIAGE OF HEALTHY AND OILS

Not the strange bedfellows of days gone by

BY LINDA BROCKMAN

**T**he romance between Americans and fried foods is still going strong. Even with so many consumers being health-conscious, deli owners understand that a paradox exists among their customers, who are trying to rationalize a love for something unhealthy that tastes so good.

Can you serve your customers healthful food and still offer the same tasty stuff that got them to your deli in the first place?

Absolutely, says Mary LaGuardia, market manager for Indianapolis-based Dow AgroSciences. "There is definitely still a place for fried foods. By using healthier oil, you are giving patrons permission to eat what they love. Fried foods are not necessarily health food, but people love it; so healthier oils help create a better nutritional profile for the foods that people still crave."

The product LaGuardia is touting is Omega-9 oils, a naturally stable oil which "contains the lowest level of saturated fat among any oil, combined with high omega-9 fatty acids, in line with dietary guidelines calling for lower saturated fats and higher unsaturated fat."

"The cooking oils industry has been evolving significantly during the last 20 years," says LaGuardia, as operators worked to remove trans fat and lower saturated fat from their operations."

In general, all oils have a mixture of unsaturated (good) and saturated (bad) fats. The

oils with more of the good unsaturated fats and less of the bad saturated fats are the healthier ones, says LaGuardia. The various ratios of these fats contribute to how the oils affect customers' health.

"Using a healthier, naturally stable cooking oil can positively impact four important foodservice business aspects: food cost, food quality, nutrition and sustainability initiatives," says LaGuardia. "And of course, taste continues to be the key decision maker for consumers."

LaGuardia says Omega-9 canola and sunflower oils have a clean, neutral taste that lets the flavor of the food come through.

While Omega-9 may seem more expensive per JIB (jug in box), it can save money since the oil lasts longer, says LaGuardia. "So basically, you are buying less oil. That's the beauty of it. The oil doesn't break down in the fryer and start smoking, so you are not changing the oil or recycling as often. The oil lasts up to 50 percent longer, which significantly reduces the amount of oil that you're buying."

According to the American Heart Association, saturated fats should be limited to less than 7 percent of daily calories. Saturated fats occur naturally in foods like meat and dairy products. Like trans fat, saturated fat contributes to the risk of cardiovascular disease, stroke and cancer because it raises the level of LDL or "bad" cholesterol.

Monounsaturated fats and polyunsaturated fats are "heart healthy" fats. Monounsaturated fats can help increase the amount of HDL or "good" cholesterol in the body, reducing the risk of heart disease. Polyunsaturated fats contain essential fatty acids that cannot be produced by the human body.

Solid fats are solid at room temperature, such as shortening. A vegetable oil can be made into a solid through hydrogenation, the process that produces unhealthy trans fats. Trans fat raises LDL ("bad" cholesterol) while lowering the level of HDL or "good" cholesterol, thus contributing to heart disease. Healthier, unsaturated fats are liquid at room temperature.

## Cleaning Up

The trend is toward "clean" labels, says Suraj Bhojwani, managing director at Los Angeles-based Western Pacific Oils. Big box retailers like Whole Foods and Walmart are encouraging their co-packers to use clean labels. "Operators are willing to pay more for cleaner-label products. We only add natural beta carotene for color and citric acid as a natural preservative, but eliminate other ingredients," says Bhojwani.

A cleaner label means it has chemical-free, wholesome ingredients with recognizable names. And less is more. While palm oil has equal numbers of good fat and bad (saturated) fat, Bhojwani says Western Pacific's palm-based oils, for cooking and baking, are



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trans fat-free and GMO-free.

"Palm has a longer fry life than soy and the price is comparative and sometimes less. It gives food a golden brown color and texture, and it's less smoky when used in deep fryers," says Bhojwani.

So how does a deli operator translate those nutritional choices to the customer? Bhojwani says retailers can ask for certification from manufacturers and then advertise their oil products as GMO-free or trans fat-free as a selling point.

"Delis have evolved from choosing a specific oil to help flavor food, to focusing on oil management practices that ensure the oil is always top quality," says Jim English, director of retail accounts for Restaurant Technologies, Inc. (RTI), Mendota Heights, MN. "This allows the flavor of the food, not the oil, to flavor the dish."

### Oil Management

Oil management systems, like those offered by companies like RTI and Frontline International, allow deli and foodservice businesses to use oil efficiently, safely and economically.

"The deli staff used to have to tote buckets of oil out to drums behind the store, where a company would come and pick up used oil," says Christina Campbell, a representative from Frontline International, based in Cuyahoga Falls, OH. "You could spill grease while transporting it, then your employees could slip and fall."

Frontline provides Smart Oil Management systems for foodservice operators. "With a push of a button, fresh oil flows to



the fryer," says John Palazzo, president and chief executive of Frontline International, Inc. "Same deal for emptying the fryer. Push a button, and filtered, higher-value waste oil flows in known capacity to the waste tank. The no-touch, directly plumbed system eliminates the potential for burns or slippery spills. Alerts are sent automatically to the waste oil collector when the waste tank is nearing full."

### Sustainability

The used oil is directly drained into containment tanks and sold to a waste vegetable oil collection company and turned into

biodiesel to be used for automotive fuel and heating. "You own the equipment, so you own the oil and you can sell your oil to your own renderer and negotiate the rebate amount," says Campbell.

"Waste vegetable oil is now a commodity. Beyond the system's financial benefits, it is safer and there is a sustainability message to customers that you are contributing to helping the earth."

Earlier this year, Frontline introduced a re-engineered system called EZ Oil that includes an integral pump to draw the fresh cooking oil from the storage rack to the fryer. "EZ Oil is automatic, hands-free, and now easier than ever to set up," says Campbell.

"This allows operators to stack fresh oil boxes on a space-saving storage rack, which is plumbed to the fryers. Jugs are stored upside-down, so basically you are getting every drop of oil."

Like the Frontline system, Restaurant Technologies' oil management system recycles waste fryer oil into biodiesel and eliminates the need for plastic and cardboard packaging, avoiding dumpster fills and reducing landfill space, says English of RTI, which consults, designs, manufactures and distributes the equipment to aid in the storage, handling and disposal of cooking oil. RTI works with supermarket retailers with in-house delis, such as Wegmans, Winn-Dixie, Bi-Lo, Shaw's, Acme, Jewel/Osco and Albertson's.

For reporting and process improvements, RTI managers can monitor data for single or multiple locations, analyze oil quality, usage and filtration statistics via an online portal. **DB**

Oil management companies have created systems that allow delis to increase the usable life of their cooking oil supply.

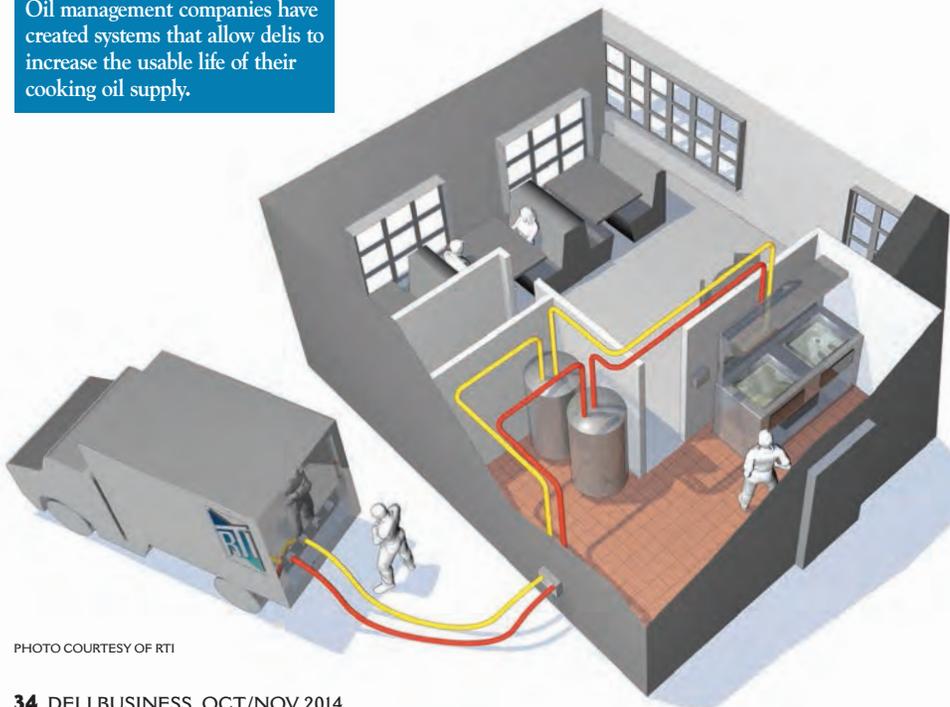


PHOTO COURTESY OF RTI

# Holiday Meats Offer the Premium Touch



Special meats for special occasions from Thanksgiving to New Year's

BY BOB JOHNSON



As the calendar turns toward the holidays, the deli enjoys a seasonal opportunity to offer foods that add something special to social gatherings.

Many consumers are willing to spend a little more for higher-end meat products during this entertaining season.

"Every retailer puts more premium meat out there for the holidays," says Sherrie Zebrasky, who works as a retail adviser to Principe Foods, Long Beach, CA. Zebrasky spent 25 years at Wegman's, including a stint as vice president for deli. "If you look at what the price clubs have in

June and what they have in December, it's totally different."

Suppliers notice increased demand for their higher-end products the final weeks of the year.

"The deluxe items in our line appeal the most at holiday times — consumers are ready to open their wallets and splurge on the 'good stuff' that they've been hearing about all year," says Kate Whittum, northeast sales and marketing for Redondo Iglesias USA, Garden City, NY. Redondo Iglesias produces a line of high-end meat products made from heirloom Iberian hogs.

Deli retailers have both the challenge and



opportunity to catch harried shoppers' eyes and minds with entertainment solutions that are interesting, convenient and a cut above everyday fare.

### The Season for Higher Expectations

The economy has created a more cost-conscious brand of consumer; but during the holiday time, consumers are willing to spend a little more to entertain in style.

"During the holidays our expectations are raised a bit, and I think this is also true when it comes to food preferences both for us and for entertaining," says Laurie Cummins, president and chief executive of Alexian Pate and Terrines, Neptune, NJ. "This is the time of the year when expense might be sacrificed in favor of quality, novelty or luxury. Meats such as serrano hams, dry

sausages, smoked duck, smoked chicken breast and pâté, as well as duck rillettes, are very much appreciated for those reasons."

Because the season leaves many of us even more rushed than usual, convenient meat products that pair well with others fare particularly well.

"Pre-sliced prosciutto packages do well because you can serve them with olives and cheese," says Garrett Digney, marketing supervisor at Campofrio Food Group America, Colonial Heights, VA. "We sell Italian and Spanish meats, and we have prosciutto, hard salami and pepperoni that do well at the holidays."

Digney refers to these packages as "entertaining meats" and advises retailers to make them as easy as

possible for consumers to use.

"It's really about giving the consumers an idea of what to prepare it with," says Digney.

Grab-and-go packages of sliced higher-end meats also do particularly well during the entertaining season.

"With the retailers who carry the whole format jamon serrano and Iberico, I encourage them to bring in pre-sliced packages for the fourth quarter, so they don't lose people that don't want to wait in line to have something sliced," says Whittum.

The easiest way to let consumers know how to use the "entertaining meats" is to offer them already paired.

"If someone wants ham, turkey, salami and cheese, they're going to buy party trays," says Principe Foods's adviser Zebrasky. "The prosciutto and specialty salami are paired

with specialty cheeses. Specialty cheese sections will frequently include charcuterie."

Because customers are buying for many, their desired package size may increase substantially during the entertainment season.

"Over the holidays our large loaves of pâté, especially mousses with faux gras or other higher-end garnishes, are more popular," says Camille Black, marketing director at Les Trois Petits Cochons, Brooklyn, NY. "People are entertaining, and often the larger packages are not enough. We have a five-pound terrine and a three-pound terrine; it depends on the deli and what their customers want. Some delis like to carry both."

This is the season to consider a few additional meat products to enhance a festive section.

"Consider adding two or three 'novelty' SKUs to provide the solution for the search for something new and different, or 'special,'" suggests Alexians' Cummins.

While prosciutto and pâté enjoy unique opportunities in the final weeks of the year, products that are more natural or healthy are also earning a place among the premium meats.

"The holidays could be a good time to introduce healthy, natural deli products leading into dieting season at the start of January," says Chris Anderson, director of marketing at Meyer Natural Foods, Lexington, KY.

Meyer specializes in providing natural, organic and premium beef products without hormones or antibiotics.

Willmar, MN-based Jennie-O has introduced reduced sodium turkey breast, as well as buffalo and smoked chicken breast, and cranberry sage and smoke-house turkey breast.

A significant number of consumers are taking the small step from all-natural to organic.

"The antibiotic-free and organic products have a customer base," says Principe Foods' adviser Zebrasky. "It's small, but it's



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALEXIAN PATE AND TERRINES

going mainstream.”

Quality, not cost, is the only way to compete with the price club competition.

“You cannot compete price-wise. The only way to compete is to promote quality,” says Zebrasky. “You can do sampling, and maybe have a weekly give-away of a tray. That tray will go to a party where 25 or 30 people will see it.”

Fortunately, familiarity with higher-quality meat products is on the rise.

“As the availability of these products has become more reliable and there is more buzz from chefs and tastemakers, at the distributor level there is more comfort at bringing high-end products in earlier,” says Whittum. “There has been an explosion of smaller producers with keen followings in their local markets expanding into a national presence — Olympic Provisions, Olli, Fra’Mani, Creminelli, La Quercia — and this high tide has raised all of our boats, so to speak.”

There is an art to determining which mix of premium meat products will gain acceptance among your customers.

“It depends on the demographics. If you have a store in northern Virginia, and a store in rural Pennsylvania, you don’t bring in the same things,” says Zebrasky. But she adds, “You shouldn’t be afraid to put something out there.”

### Show Them and They Might Buy

Holiday customers frequently do not know what they want, but they know they want something exciting, which makes capturing their attention paramount.

“This is the time to get demos into high gear, because customers are out shopping and they are looking for new things,” says Black from Les Trois Petits Cochons. “For the holidays, we suggest to retailers that it is the perfect time for demos. Some customers are unfamiliar with pâté, and the best way to take a chance is to take a taste.”

Demos are certainly one way to draw attention to “entertaining meats,” but sampling is a related way.

“Sample, sample, sample! Ask your vendors if they have sampling programs, which will help defray the additional cost,” says Alexian’s Cummins. “Meats that move very well during the holidays, or meats that are brought in exclusively for the holidays, need to be aggressively advertised and sampled if possible. This can be done through a variety of means, including circulars, ads, email blasts and in-store signage.”

Producers can help defray the cost of sampling, and they can also go the extra mile in helping with displays.

“We do a lot of floor displays during the holidays. We sometimes also do smaller

shelf displays,” says Campofrio’s Digney.

Promotional specials fare well during the entertaining season.

“Offer specials, like if you buy a certain amount of party food, we’ll give you plates and napkins,” suggests Zebrasky.

The internet can be another low-cost avenue for letting consumers know the possibilities for the holidays.

“You can try mailings via email to people who have bought holiday items in the past. Maybe offer coupons, or consultation with a

party coordinator,” says Zebrasky. “You have to keep it out in front of the customer with displays, posters in the store, maybe even a picture of the party coordinator.”

The time to begin enticing consumers with special holiday meat products is now.

“Plant the seed early with specials and demos, so your customers will come back during the holidays knowing what they will get. Promotions after Halloween are too late,” says Redondo Iglesias, Whittum. **DB**

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# Switzerland's Gruyère AOP

Demand for this mountain cheese grows steadily

BY MAX MCCALMAN



**G**ruyère is one of the world's most popular cheeses and one of the most widely imitated. Year after year, Gruyère AOP wins more top awards than any other in major cheese competitions.

Gruyère is a member of the so-called "mountain-style" cheeses, a style typified by the pastoral practice known as *transhumance*, the seasonal movement of dairy animals.

Transhumance is the practice of moving animals into the high mountain pastures, where wild grass, flowers, herbs and pristine water supply the cows with optimum nutrition. Starting in the spring, as soon as the mountain snow melts, the animals begin their journey upward, returning to the valley as winter approaches.

Analyses of milks derived from the upper elevations indicate greater molecular complexities, which results in a more flavorful cheese. In addition, grass-fed cows produce milk that is higher in Omega 3 fatty acids, and the cows produce as much as 12 percent less methane.

Through the centuries, the mountain cheeses evolved to larger and more durable formats so they could be more easily transported back down into the valleys and eventually on to more distant markets.

There was a time when any cheese of this type could be called Gruyère. The Gruyère style came into its own and the word "Gruyère" designated any hard or semi-hard wheel-shaped cheese made in or near the Alps. As definitions became more precise, the quality of Gruyère rose.





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It was not until 1762 that the Académie française specified the name “Gruyère,” which refers to a cheese from the eponymous region in western Switzerland’s Canton Fribourg. At the 1951 Stresa International Convention for the Use of Appellations of Origins for the Designations of Cheeses, it was stipulated that Gruyère be listed by its characteristics, though not by its origin. In 2001, Gruyère finally received AOC status, protecting its geographical origins, and then in 2011, Gruyère received its AOP status throughout Europe.

While worldwide demand for Swiss Gruyère has continued to grow, the average annual increase in total production is a mere 1 percent; slightly more than half of today’s production of 30,000 tons is consumed domestically. Switzerland, like most of Europe, is a nation of cheese eaters. The largest export markets are Germany, the United States and France. Increase in demand within Switzerland is limited by the country’s small population of 8 million, so producers look to the global market for future growth.

Approximately 100 gallons of milk are required to produce one wheel of Gruyère, which means the average yearly output of one cow can create approximately 14 wheels. The production of Gruyère AOP is permitted in the Swiss Cantons of Neuchâtel, Vaud, parts of Bern, as well as Fribourg.

In Switzerland, the farms are small, with an average of 27 cows per farm. The dairy farms must be located no more than 12 miles from the cheesemaking dairy and where milk will be collected twice a day. For the production of Gruyère, the cows are not allowed to be fed silage or growth hormones, and at least 70 percent of the diet must come from its own farm.

No pasteurization or microfiltration is permitted; copper vats must be used; and the cheeses must be aged a minimum of five months on spruce wooden shelves within the protected region.

When the cheeses are graded they must meet additional criteria before they can be sold as Gruyère AOP: the wheels must be uniform; some isolated small holes or cracks of up to 6 mm are permitted in the paste; the appearance must be uniform; a range of dimensions is spelled out in height, diameter and weight; the aroma, flavor and texture is defined; the fat in dry matter can range between 49 and 53 percent; the water content can range between 34.5 and 36.9 percent; and the salt can range between 1.1 and

1.7 percent. There are many other restrictions spelled out for the producers and ripeners — all of them designed to preserve the high quality of Gruyère AOP.

The milk for the production of Gruyère AOP is relatively low in lactic acid bacteria so the acidification is slow, and the expulsion of whey is also more gradual. The volume of milk required to create one wheel of Gruyère is so large that cheesemakers have found ways to expedite the process. The curd is cut small but not



as small as in the production of its ancestor, Sbrinz, and the curd is scalded to around 127° F (53° C) as opposed to around 135° F (57° C).

Gruyère is a raw milk cheese made by combining milk from the evening milking and morning milk. The evening milk is left to rest overnight and some cream is skimmed off the top. The morning milk is full fat and added to the evening milk. None of the milk is ever chilled and GMOs are strictly forbidden in all of Switzerland, so Gruyère is naturally GMO-free. And, since GMOs are banned, all cheeses made in Switzerland are GMO-free.

The young cheeses are ripened in moderately cool caves held at 55° F and at about 90 to 95 percent humidity. The higher heating temperature of the curd and cooler aging temperature prevent eyes from forming in the paste, as occurs in the production of Gruyère’s younger but much larger sister, Emmental.

There are very strict time limitations on the making of Gruyère. There must be no

more than 18 hours from the time of the evening milk to the finished cheese. Generally speaking, the milk has been turned into cheese by 9 a.m. There is only one production allowed per day and cheese is made 365 days a year.

As Gruyère matures, it is regularly washed and brushed with low salt water brine. Nothing else may be added to the brine. The cheese can be sold as early as five months of age when it is milder and more elastic; to reach full maturity it must age a minimum of 10 months. It is at this more advanced age when a Gruyère begins to acquire its magnificent flavors and the exquisite tyrosine crystals within.

Gruyère is excellent in hot dishes, and when melted as a topping it gives an excellent not-too-dry crust. With Emmental, Gruyère is most commonly associated with fondue, a utilitarian dish originally conceived to use up leftover cheese scraps and stale bread.

Fondue made from a blend of Emmental and Gruyère, white wine and the addition of kirsch, garlic, white pepper, and occasionally nutmeg, is considered the height of culinary sophistication. The ratio employed between the two cheeses is a matter of personal preference, but if other cheeses are substituted, the classic fondue flavor and texture is compromised.

Some people may dismiss the idea of having a little piece of Gruyère on its own, without melting it down and adding other ingredients, yet an aged Gruyère AOP can offer exquisite taste sensations all by itself. **DB**

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# Blast From The Past

## From Recipes to Retail



**P**

ocino is a family owned company with three generations involved in its operation — and it all started with a handmade recipe book.

Bringing his family recipes from Italy, Frank Pocino immigrated to the United States with the dream of opening his own meat shop and introducing Americans to traditional Italian food.

In 1933, he opened his first prepared Italian deli meat store, which employed the entire family.

Through the years, the business grew and expanded to a larger location. In the 1970s, Pocino Foods opened a state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in City of Industry, CA, in order to meet the growing demand from its foodservice, restaurant and retail clients.

Pocino Foods was one of the first to develop a heat-and-eat meal concept. The Pocino “Meal in a Minute” program offers fully cooked protein meal solutions, such as Mexican Style Carne Asada & Carnitas, Traditional Pot Roast and Asian-inspired Barbecue Pork.

Today, Jerry Pocino, the grandson of the founder, is president of Pocino Foods and continues the tradition of creating innovative, high-quality foods. “Providing the highest-quality products in the industry has always been a cornerstone of Pocino Food products,” he says. “The industry and today’s discriminating consumer demand safe products; we are excited to integrate the most modern systems in the industry into our plant.”

The seasoned expertise of executive chef Dennis Pocino, Jerry’s brother, allows Pocino Foods to provide its customers the unique service of creating new, innovative recipes that can be brought to market quickly. “I love what I do and experiment with new recipes all the time,” says Dennis. “Right now, we are working the Japanese market to develop unique Chashu recipes and options — food fusion at its best.”

Pocino Foods is looking to expand within the next five years to meet the demands of the Pan Pacific markets by supplying new Asian-inspired meats, in addition to its Italian lines.

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 email [DeliBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com](mailto:DeliBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com). For more information contact us at (561) 994-1118.

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Beemster	18	Dutch Cheese	908-372-6024
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Blount Fine Foods	7	Soups	800-274-2526
Castella Imports	27	Party Toppers	866-CASTELLA
Couturier North-America, Inc.	2	French Cheese	518-851-2570
Delorio’s Frozen Dough	24	Pizza Dough	800-649-7612
Ecotensil	15	Tasters	412-924-0233
Ecotensil	Insert	Tasters	412-924-0233
Emmi Roth USA, Inc.	39	Specialty Cheeses	608-845-5796
Farm Ridge Foods, LLC	22	Pickles	631-343-7070
George E. DeLallo Co.	44	Olives & Antipasto	800-433-9100
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Green Giant Fresh	21	Hummus	831-751-38000
Henri Hutin	11	Fromagerie	800-659-2603
Nuovo Pasta Productions, Ltd.	43	Pasta	800-803-0033
Piller Sausages & Delicatessens Ltd.	37	Deli Meats	800-265-2628
Pocino Foods Co.	26	Deli Meat	626-968-8000
Roth Kase	41	Fondue	888-KASE-USA
Rubschlager Baking Corporation	30	Deli Breads	773-826-1245
Stefano Foods, Inc.	25	Pizza	800-340-4019
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  - Amps up deli's visual appeal with a high-quality, gourmet destination —
    - Incremental dollar sales in the deli —
- Offers a self-service luxury for consumers to choose their own assortment, usually purchase more —
  - Inspires Mediterranean recipe creations with more ingredients —
  - Boosts your total shopping cart dollar —
  - Just to name a few reasons —