



# DELI

# BUSINESS

MARKETING MERCHANDISING MANAGEMENT PROCUREMENT

FEB/MAR 2015 \$14.95

## REDEFINING CUSTOMER VALUE

How deli customers' values  
influence their purchases

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Entertainer



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Co-CEO,  
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## LITEHOUSE, INC. ANNOUNCES SALE OF COMPANY TO EMPLOYEES



The employees of Litehouse, Inc. are now its owners. The Sandpoint, ID-company, which sells salad dressing, sauces, dips, herbs and cheese, has sold 100 percent of its stock through an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP). Founding

partners Doug Hawkins, Edward Hawkins and Wendell Christoff say they are committed to 100-percent employee ownership.

The 650 Litehouse employees throughout the country, as well as future employees, have the opportunity to become owners of this industry leading brand, which has been family owned for more than 50 years. Litehouse first formed an ESOP plan in 2006 selling 30 percent of the company as a commitment to their employees and their communities. The move to 100 percent ESOP ensures continued local ownership.

"We are incredibly proud of our company and want our legacy to be shared with the talented and dedicated employees who have contributed to its growth," says Doug Hawkins, chairman of the board. "The move to 100-percent employee ownership allows every employee to be an owner and ensures the future success of Litehouse for generations to come."

In 1997, the Litehouse brand, founded by brothers, Doug and Edward Hawkins, merged with Wendell Christoff and his family's salad dressing company, Chadalee Farms of Lowell, MI. Doug, Edward and Wendell will continue their roles as active board members. In 2010, Jim Frank was named president and chief executive of Litehouse and continues to lead the company in double digit sales growth.

With the move to 100 percent ESOP, Litehouse joins a growing list of forward-thinking companies, with executives who believe firmly that employee ownership is beneficial to companies and their teams. The participatory management structure of ESOPs has been shown to increase employee satisfaction and retention.

## COMING NEXT ISSUE IN APRIL/MAY

**COVER STORY**  
Sandwiches

**DELI MEATS**  
Salami

**FEATURE STORIES**  
Mexican Foods  
Food Safety

**CHEESES**  
American Sheep Cheeses

**MERCHANDISING REVIEWS**  
Ribs And Wings

**SUPPLEMENT**  
The Annual IDDBA Dairy-Deli-Bake Seminar and Expo 2015 Guide. Read all about what's coming up at the Georgia World Congress Center in Atlanta, GA, June 7-9. It's never too early to start preparing to make this year's show a real win for your business.

**PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES**  
Cheese Importing

**PREPARED FOODS**  
Food Bars

**COMING IN JUNE/JULY**  
DELI BUSINESS will feature the 11th Annual People's Awards.

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COMING NEXT



# DELI WATCH

## Announcements



### CHIPS GET NEW LOOK

That's How We Roll LLC, Fairfield, NJ, has announced that Party Tizers Dippin' Chips has added value as the first non-GMO-certified chip designed for dipping. To promote the new non-GMO platform, Party Tizers Dippin' Chips is launching a new look, with an enhanced brand image and full color package. The dippable tortilla chip is made with 100-percent non-GMO, gluten-free ingredients. The recipe starts with U.S. homegrown corn and a blend of premium inclusions such as veggies, beans and grains mixed right in. The product comes in four different varieties: veggie, fiesta bean, super grains and potato sea salt.

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



### HISSHO TO OPEN AT PDX

Hissho Sushi, Charlotte, NC, has recently signed a 10-year contract at Portland International Airport. The company will serve freshly made-to-order sushi, Bao specialties, Ramen dishes and breakfast items in its new location. Hissho Sushi is a growing sushi franchise that now has 745 locations in 40 states and operates in two locations at Charlotte Douglas International Airport.

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

## New Products



### NEW SOUP ADDED TO LINE

Boulder Organic! has added a new soup to its growing line of Certified Organic, gluten-free and non-GMO verified soups: Tuscan White Bean. This hearty soup is satisfyingly loaded with nutrient-dense white beans, fresh vegetables like tomatoes, carrots and celery, and Italian spices reminiscent of hearty farmhouse cooking. It also includes organic chicken broth and a dash of organic cream to add an element of richness.

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



### EXPANDED BBQ SAUCE LINE

Renfro Foods, Fort Worth, TX, has expanded its BBQ Sauce category to include two new exciting flavors – Chipotle and Ghost Pepper – while reformulating its Classic Hickory BBQ sauce, which is now gluten-free and contains no high fructose corn syrup. Chipotle BBQ Sauce has a gentle smokiness and heat from authentic chipotle pepper, while the Ghost Pepper BBQ Sauce has as much fire as flavor. Comes in 16-ounce glass jars. Available in foodservice sizes.

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



### YOGURT AND BEAN HUMMUS

A&M Gourmet Foods, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, has introduced hummus with flageolet beans and yogurt. Featuring the gourmet bean of France, the line has a light flavor. It is free of preservatives and artificial flavors. The company's dips, spreads and desserts blend wholesome, natural ingredients into classic, innovative recipes.

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



### MINI FLATBREADS

Kontos Foods Inc., Paterson, NJ, has launched grilled Cocktail Flatbreads. The soft, flexible, two-inch pita disks are ideal for creating appetizers and hors d'oeuvres. The Cocktail Flatbreads, which have the same flavor and texture as the company's larger flatbreads, can also be used for cheese spreads, dips and bruschetta. The line, which contains no trans-fat and is 100-percent vegetarian, comes in 20-piece retail packs.

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



### BEEF BACON REBRANDED

Pocino Foods Co., City of Industry, CA, has rebranded its Smoke Bar Ranch brand to make it more relevant to consumers. Made of 100-percent beef, Smoke Bar Ranch smoked beef bacon has 45-percent less fat than pork bacon, one-third the sodium and no sugars. It is cured with the finest ingredients and smoked with natural hickory to achieve maximum flavor. The packaging off the shelf makes it easy for consumers to find the product.

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

## Transitions



### VAN HOLTEN'S HIRES CONTROLLER

Van Holten's, Waterloo, WI, has announced the addition of Fred Sharkey as controller. In this role, he will lead all aspects of accounting, finance and cash management within the company. Sharkey also will manage the internal IT infrastructure. He brings more than 20 years of accounting and finance experience with a background in a variety of industries, including public accounting, manufacturing, high tech and leasing/services. Most recently, Sharkey was a controller for RPM Beverage at ORBIS Corp.

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

by Jim Prevor, Editor-in-Chief

# Operating In The Real World

As always, Sharon Olson and her Culinary Visions Panel have provided deep insight into the minds of shoppers in the supermarket deli. Now the question is how should the industry take advantage of these insights.

That is a question without clear answers — possibly because the answers are specific to the retail banner, the store or the brand.

One issue posed by all research is that when targets become clear, everyone goes after them, so it is difficult to turn these clear targets into a business edge. For example, for many decades grocery store research has identified three key areas as crucial for consumers when selecting consumer shopping venues: Price, Cleanliness and Assortment.

Obviously some stores emphasize price a bit more and others focus on assortment; some are even cleaner than others but, basically, there are no mainstream chains that aren't basically clean, reasonably priced and with a useful assortment. So these characteristics function as a kind of ante — the base necessary to play the game. The fact that 98 percent of consumers say cleanliness is important in choosing a shopping venue does not imply Kroger would boom if it quintupled the cleaning crew.

In addition, sometimes broad phrases mask deeper expectations. Consumers may yearn for local — but that may mean more than geography. In DELI BUSINESS' sister publication, PRODUCE BUSINESS, we've done substantial research on consumer attitudes toward "local," and what we found is consumers often prefer local but do so for a complex set of reasons. In produce, for example, they expect locally grown produce will first be more flavorful — pointing to the idea local growers can keep products on the vine or tree longer to ripen and thus produce sweeter and tastier fruit.

Second, they expect local will be cheaper, pointing to the lack of need to transport the produce long distances. Third, they expect local produce will be safer, seeing a local farmer as more vested in keeping the community safe. Fourth, they expect buying local will help the environment, pointing to a lessened carbon footprint due to less transportation, and fifth, they expect buying local will help the local economy by keeping money in circulation in the community.

Now all these points are quite arguable, but for our purposes the question is whether the branding effect of the word "local" is so strong that consumers will sustain a preference for purchasing a local product, even if it does not provide advantages in these areas, especially in readily observable ones such as taste and flavor.

In many cases, we have to surmise the effect on

purchasing is weak. For example, although more than 50 percent of shoppers say organic is a strong motivator to purchase in deli/bakery, less than 1 percent of farm and ranch land in the United States is certified-organic. So the math means that not too many consumers are taking home organic pastrami sandwiches on organic bread with some nice organic stone ground mustard from their local deli.

It is not surprising deli customers over-index for many of the hot trends in the food scene today. The very fact that it is a fresh department, where a lot of creativity is exerted, means the department attracts people in sync with today's trends. But the very fact that words such as "local," "whole grain," "all natural," "no high fructose," "hormone-free" and "grass-fed" resonate with this shopping cohort makes it hard to discern real-life purchasing behavior. These are all good things, but we can't be certain to what degree consumers will prefer these choices even in the face of lower priced alternatives.

Like driving a sports car or a Prius, these choices define people in a positive way. Just imagine someone saying they want to load their children up with hormones and high-fructose corn syrup and get the cheapest food from the cheapest laborers at the end of the earth. So these expressions are not neutral and thus must be interpreted carefully.

Yet real world concerns — like affordability — actually drive a lot of purchasing behavior. And the fastest growing retailer in America today is Aldi, not Whole Foods.

Interestingly enough, though, even Aldi's success may point to a thought that could help in capitalizing on Culinary Visions' consumer research. Lots of consumers are going for private label, and, indeed, Aldi is almost exclusively private label. But it dresses up each product in a private label brand, so a consumer selecting the least expensive items has a cart filled with brands indistinguishable from those of other shoppers. In contrast, many grocery stores offer tiers of pricing in private label, and the cheapest items are often packaged in a distinctive way — such as black-and-white basics. So the cashier and other shoppers clearly see this person is buying the cheap stuff.

Maybe the research tells us consumer aspirations are expressed especially in the deli and retailers need to find ways to help consumers be their aspirational selves, but on a budget they can handle.



DB

*James J. Prevor*



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by Lee Smith, Publisher

# The New Retail Foodservice

To no one's surprise, the deli department is becoming more prepared food oriented, which has led to a new definition of the word foodservice. For many years, foodservice implied meals served in a restaurant or in an institutional environment, such as schools, hospitals or prisons. Today, the word is also used to describe deli department prepared foods that would typically be found in restaurants. Hence, the hybrid term "deli foodservice."

Overall, every retailer with a deli department has incorporated foodservice into its offering. Now, it is time for deli departments' unique abilities to blossom and create world-class products. Foodservice is not for upscale retailers, it is for all retailers. It is part convenience and part necessity as our lives become more diverse and complicated.

The most striking difference between traditional foodservice and deli foodservice is the delivery method. Restaurants will either deliver food to your table or package it for takeout and immediate consumption. Most options require the customer to pre-order their food. The only notable exception is buffet-style restaurants — the restaurant equivalent of food bars.

While it can be argued that all foods purchased from any department are "takeout," the deli department gives the term its own, unique meaning, and it is a marvelous concept.

In the deli, takeout food is usually synonymous with fully prepared items — available hot or cold that requires little to no work on the part of the consumer. It may be entirely self-service or custom made. One option is fully cooked foods available for reheating at home — an option rarely offered by restaurants without an impending loss of quality. The deli can combine high-quality food with the convenience of a fast food restaurant.

What no restaurant has been able to offer is the wide variety of prepared foods available for self-service. Consumers can go into a typical supermarket deli and pick up an entrée and variety of side dishes without having to place an order. They can buy vastly different foods they wouldn't be able to make at home that also mirror many different restaurant concepts.

In Deli Business, we often call this concept "Grab-N-Go." Regardless of what it is called, it is becoming a more important part of traditional delis. Prepackaged foods offer consumers endless variety,

and when combined with a hot entrée or made-to-order sandwich, side dishes enhance the ring and customer satisfaction.

These prepackaged items offer useful clarification from providing nutritional information to the merchandising of new products, such as organic and gluten-free. While sometimes packaged at store level — often these products are prepacked by food manufacturers or the retailer's own commissary. Either way, these offerings are fresh, safe and often have longer shelf lives than restaurant food.

Many delis take foodservice to new heights by offering hot and cold food bars, sandwich stations, custom pizzas, etc. Some retailers are providing restaurant-style seating areas with coffeehouse style furniture and newspapers. Others incorporate full-service restaurants into their departments.

While deli departments must look to include foodservice in their departments in unique and customer pleasing venues, there are still significant issues to overcome.

Operational challenges always accompany foodservice operations. Trained chefs are hard to come by, and assuring safe food handling as well as consistency of offerings is difficult when relying on associates that historically had very high turnover rates.

It is for this reason deli departments evolved into its own entity with its own senior management team and requiring staff with foodservice skills. Corporate chefs that understand recipe development, menu planning and can work with manufacturers to develop high-quality prepared foods with the required shelf life and operations supervisors that can develop training and certification programs for all deli associates are necessary for most deli departments.

More important than what is happening now — is the future. Today's young people are demanding but also love deli departments. Maybe instead of competing with restaurants, the deli departments of the future will be the restaurants of today — newly envisioned and shaped for contemporary America. **DB**





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# REDEFINING CUSTOMER VALUE

**T**oday's consumers have so many choices when they visit the deli. They expect to find delicious food — whether it is healthful or indulgent, for every day or a special event. At the same time, they are beginning to scrutinize the provenance of the food they purchase and the treatment of everyone who plays a part in bringing it to the table.

A new consumer study conducted by Culinary Visions Panel, titled "Mindful Dining: How Consumers' Values Influence Their Meal Choices," explored the deli customer's perspective on ethical choices that impact their decisions when shopping in the deli. More than 1,200 consumers nationwide were surveyed in 2014 about the choices they make when shopping and dining out, and how their own values influence what they purchase in the deli. Consumers were asked about their views on such issues as sustainability, fair trade, vendor reputations, community support, employee satisfaction and the role they play in defining value.

The study found that Millennials, at 41

percent, are the generation most apt to have purchased food from an in-store deli over the past 30 days. Use of the in-store deli increases with family size, as those with three or more household members are 13 percentage points more likely than single-member households to purchase food from the deli department.

## INFLUENTIAL CLAIMS

The top three product claims influencing deli shopper decisions are local, whole grain and all natural. Although these characteristics were important to all of those surveyed, they were found to be more important to deli shoppers.

More than half of the consumers surveyed identified factors related to the methods of producing the foods they buy as important to their purchase decisions. Those factors include being hormone-free, 60 percent; grass fed/pasture-raised, 60 percent; free-range/free-roaming, 57 percent; antibiotic-free protein, 57 percent; sustainably caught/raised, 57 percent; non-GMO (genetically modified organisms), 56

percent; fair trade, 56 percent; and organic, 54 percent.

Millennials, defined as young adults who are 19- to 36-years old, are the most likely to place importance on nearly all of the claims studied. This group is most inclined to purchase from the deli when items offered are local, whole-grain and all-natural.

Men and women do not differ significantly on most of the claims, the study found. Their values diverge, however, on claims related to the ethics of food production and imported products. Women are at least 5 percentage points more likely than men to say they are influenced by such claims as local, hormone-free, grass fed/pasture-raised, antibiotic-free protein, cage-free and organic. The only claim more likely to influence men relates to items imported from another country known for quality, which affects purchases among 51 percent of men compared to only 39 percent of women.

With all of the food industry's attention to gluten-free and the wide range of new products with that designation, it is interest-



## How deli customers' values influence their purchases

BY SHARON OLSON

ing to note that less than half of deli shoppers are influenced to purchase by that claim.

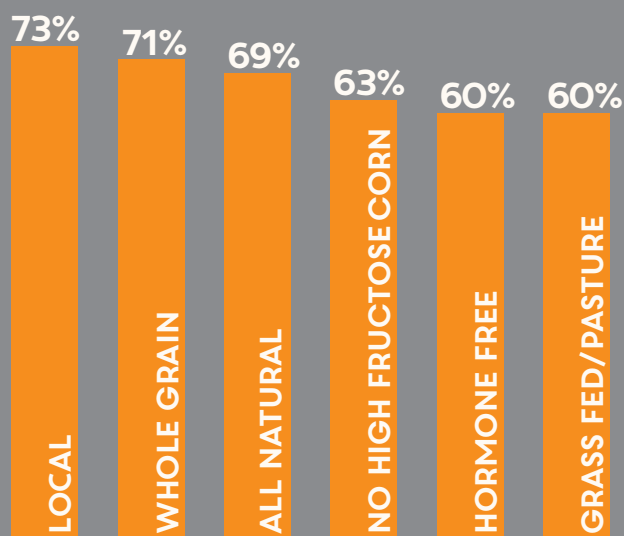
### IMPORTANCE OF CLAIMS

In-store deli customers are more interested in product claims/certifications than consumers in general. The top five claims/certifications that more than 60 percent of deli consumers say would increase their interest in purchasing an item are: product of the USA, 69 percent; 100-percent local, 68 percent; FDA-approved, 64 percent; certified all-natural, 62 percent; and USDA-certified organic, 61 percent.

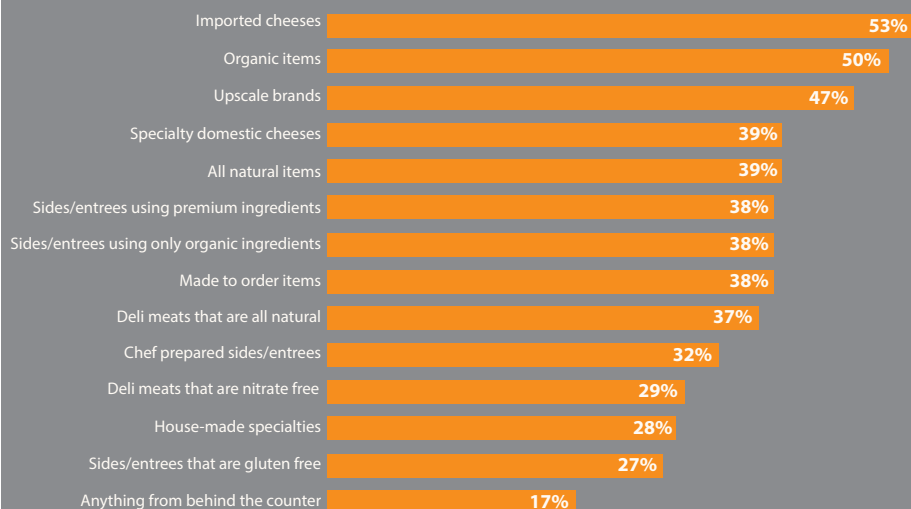
Those who have purchased food from an in-store deli within the past 30 days are more influenced to buy an item with these certifications on the package. In addition, nearly all the other claims/certifications listed would help to persuade more than half of deli consumers to purchase the item. Interest in buying with most of the listed certifications is at least 10 percentage points higher among deli customers than consumers overall.

This speaks to the value of deli buyers

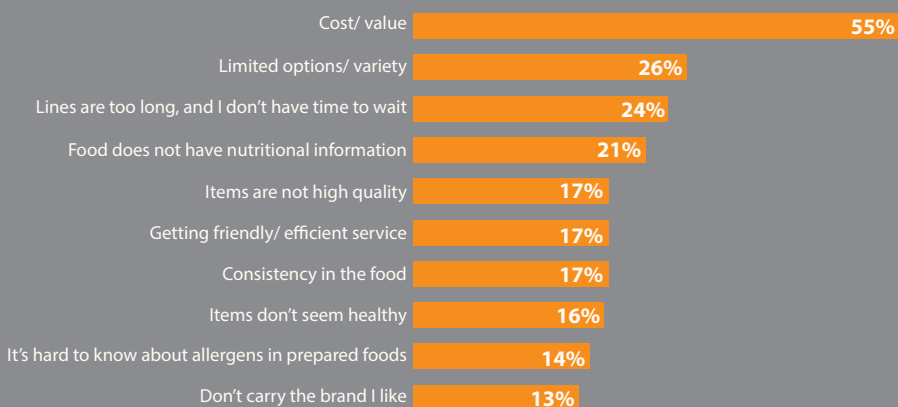
## INFLUENTIAL CLAIMS IN THE DELI



## PREMIUM PRICE EXPECTATIONS



## CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN THE DELI



sourcing products with appropriate claims/certifications, and including those claims/certification seals and references on store signs and in ads. They communicate added value to consumers and build trust.

### PREMIUM PRICE EXPECTATIONS

In many cases, consumers expect premium offerings without a premium price tag. The exceptions are imported cheeses and organic items, for which at least half of all consumers surveyed say they expect a premium price. Interestingly, the expectation of a premium price does not carry over into prepared sides/entrées made with organic ingredients, as only 38 percent expect to pay more in that case.

Imported cheeses seem to have the clearest path to higher prices. On the positive side for retailers, women, who are often the household shoppers, are at least 10 percentage points more likely than men to expect a higher price on imported cheeses, 58 percent; organic items, 55 percent; and upscale brands, 53 percent.

The expectation to pay premium prices for items with upscale qualifiers generally increases with age. In most cases, Millennials are the least likely to expect premium prices, while seniors are the most likely, followed by Baby Boomers.

Premium-price expectations show the greatest variance by age on made-to-order items. Only 29 percent of Millennials expect to pay higher prices for made-to-order items compared to 53 percent of seniors. This may reflect how the made-to-order proposition in fast-casual restaurants has conditioned Millennials to expect personalized service in all food channels.

### DELI CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED

Cost/value is the only challenge listed by more than half — 55 percent — of respondents when they visit an in-store deli. This underscores the idea that value pricing is ingrained and expected in all food channels. Women, 58 percent, and Baby Boomers, 61 percent, are the most likely to believe that cost/value is a challenge in the in-store deli. The challenge that rates second highest is limited options/variety, but that is by only 26 percent of those individuals surveyed.

Since Millennials are the biggest users of the grocery store deli, it is interesting to note where they stand with the challenges. They often are looking for fresh, healthy and organic offerings. At 48 percent, they are the least likely to consider cost/value a

challenge. They are more likely to believe that the in-store deli suffers in the areas of consistency in the food, 24 percent; getting friendly/efficient service, 22 percent; items are not high quality, 21 percent; and items don't seem healthy, 21 percent.

### ENTICING CUSTOMERS

Survey respondents were given the opportunity to write in what they would like to see more of at the in-store deli. The comments were dominated by requests for fresh, healthy and organic items, with fresh leading the group. Some merely wrote in the word while others further defined it, as in fresh bread, fresh-prepared sandwiches made-to-order, and freshly made entrées and salads.

Mentions of healthy offerings tied as the second leading write-in item consumers

would like to see more of in the deli. Healthy was further defined by some as healthy casseroles, healthy meals to go, healthy meat options (that are hormone-free), healthy items made responsibly, and healthy items that are less processed. These comments point to an opportunity to make nutritional information readily available and perhaps compare some items' nutritional statistics to similar items from quick-service restaurants.

Consumers also noted they would like to see more organic items in the deli. Besides organic in general, some respondents wrote in organic breads, organic prepared dishes, organic cheeses, organic vegetarian items and organic preservative-free, all-natural items.

Some specialty items like vegetarian, vegan, kosher and halal did not rank highly in the national sample of consumers surveyed. Yet there may be individual markets where these specialty offerings could create a significant point of difference for a retailer.

Descriptive words are especially important to tempt deli customers — more so than consumers overall. Only the word fresh would help convince more than half of consumers overall to purchase a food item from a restaurant or store, but 72 percent of deli shoppers respond to fresh offerings. More than half of deli purchasers also are attracted by the terms natural, 55 percent, and local, 52 percent. Deli customers are 10 percentage points more likely than average to be enticed by the terms natural and organic.

### LURING FOODSERVICE CUSTOMERS

This study covered consumer perspectives across multiple away-from-home venues, and some of the insights point to opportunities for delis to expand or refine their foodservice offerings. Millennials are key to developing this opportunity. They are deli “super users” at 41 percent and state they have shopped at an in-store deli in the last 30 days. They also are most apt to purchase food from quick-service, fast-casual and casual-dining restaurants and convenience stores. In addition, Millennials are the most adventurous eaters when dining out, with 57 percent saying they always or usually like to try new dishes and flavors.

Many supermarkets and convenience stores are building their share of foodservice sales with customized programs that appeal

to their customers as tempting alternatives to quick-service and fast-casual restaurants.

Harris Teeter's The Sub Shop offers submarine sandwiches that shoppers can cus-

tomize by selecting from a list of bread types, cheeses, dressings, toppings and fillings. Those in a hurry can place their order online. Whole Foods Markets fresh prepared foodservice programs rivals many restaurant chains in size. Mariano's Chicago operations have sushi and oyster bars.

Convenience store chains like Wawa and Sheetz have well-developed foodservice programs that include made-to-order sandwiches at Wawa and full-service kitchens with in-store seating at Sheetz.

### VALUE IS PERSONAL

Today's consumers evaluate much more than price when it comes to food and dining decisions. They are smart, savvy and well connected to a network of friends, family and resources that provide them with the information they want to inform their meal decisions. Supermarket delis already are serving up many of those extras that add value for their customers. The important thing is to make sure customers are aware of the value they are getting when they buy from the deli.

**DB**

*Sharon Olson is executive director of Culinary Visions Panel, a division of Olson Communications based in Chicago, IL. Culinary Visions Panel is a food-focused insight and trend-forecasting firm that provides original consumer and culinary professional research for companies in the food industry.*





# All Roads Lead to Italy

A look at the latest trends in America's favorite ethnic cuisine

BY KEITH LORIA

**I**talian foods have always been hugely popular with American consumers, and industry insiders predict 2015 will be one of its biggest years ever at the deli for the foods of Italy. New meats, cheeses, condiments and specialty meats have sparked increased interest in the category, and companies are beefing up their efforts to get the word out about Italian products.

Deb Crisan, senior vice president, sales and marketing for Rao's Specialty Foods, Inc., based in New York, predicts the sale of Italian food items will continue to outpace expectations in 2015, as consumers wax nostalgic for home-cooked meals and enjoy entertaining and family gatherings.

"The trend we see is many artisan and hand-crafted specialties

being used to create an elegant platter containing such Italian antipasti as grilled vegetables, roasted peppers, specialty meats and cheeses for easy entertaining," says Crisan.

Greg Caloia, marketing coordinator for Delorio's Frozen Dough in Utica, NY, agrees. "We're noticing an increase in the desire for "higher-end" items for delis and pizzerias. For example, pizzas and breads made with finer flours and/or artisan style crusts or flatbread."

Flatbreads present an artisanal flair and the perception of healthier eating. Deli operators can offer their health-conscious patrons flatbread as an alternate way to have pizza, says Caloia. "It cuts down on the portion size and still leaves you with an authentic Italian eating experience. You could also use wheat dough or even a blend for pizzas and





bread related items.”

Another healthful Italian food is pasta, a complex carbohydrate that offers a feeling of fullness for a longer period of time, says Marco De Feo, marketing manager for Manhattan-based De Cecco. “When you eat good quality food, you can be satisfied with less. Preparation, colors, fragrance and quality ingredients — rather than quantity — all contribute to make Italian food a healthy eating option.”

Jim Pierson, vice president of sales for Pocino Foods Co., based in City of Industry, CA, says more sandwich-makers are offering Italian-specific selections with such lesser-known Italian meats as capocollo and soppressata as consumers thirst for new experiences.

“From subs to hand wraps, the mechanics of the sandwich will become more creative,” he says. “I expect continued growth ahead for 2015. Given the increased demand

we’ve seen this year for our mortadella, capocollo, soppressata, Italian dry salami and pepperoni, there is a signal from our customers of further adoption in upcoming years.”

Another trend Pocino is seeing is the increased demand for natural meats.

“From our primary research this year on our natural products, consumers are telling us they want more natural meats and cleaner labels that easily identify what they are eating,” says Diane Slome, marketing manager for Pocino. “Too many ingredients equals something they won’t eat.”

Anna Gallo, director of marketing for Savello USA, Inc., in Wilkes-Barre, PA, says there has been an increase in consumer knowledge and interest in Italian specialty foods over the last five years.

“I believe consumers will always look forward to Italian specialty foods,” she says. “Today’s consumers are more conscious of healthful foods and sustainability. With the Italian producers I work with, they have or are working on more gluten-free, natural and organic products and pre-packed foods. With the economy the way it is and with such busy schedules, consumers are tending to gear themselves more to the ‘ready-to-go’ type of foods as well.”

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Davide Dukcevic, co-owner of Daniele Inc. based in Pascoag, RI, says today's Italian foods are all about America and the progress that has been made here over the last decade.

"What I mean by that is the deli industry in the U.S. has gotten its sea legs, similar to how in the 1960s and '70s California vineyards were making wines just as good if not better than the wines in France," he says. "What I'm seeing here is that people are awakening to the fact that we have these great resources and the best beef is being raised in the U.S., the best hogs in North America, and the artisans and skill-set here has matched the terrific quality of the raw materials the land is producing for us."

Dukcevic says certain farmers in New England are raising heritage hogs for the company, which is also bringing local cheeses and other products to the stores. "This local line is the most exciting thing we have going on," says Dukcevic. "Not only is it a nice story for local sustainability and the economy, but it also helps push the envelope on high quality food and drink."

John Stephano, director of marketing and training at Atalanta Corp., headquartered in Elizabeth, NJ, says customers are demanding more quality and selection from a single brand so the company has followed suit.

"One of the biggest additions in the Italian arena for us — and the biggest push — is the fixed-weight market," he says. "The industry is demanding sets of five, 10, varieties of an Italian category — not just cheeses. We also have accompaniments, so we are co-marketing them."

### What's New?

Many suppliers are focusing on new products that are quick and easy to prepare for better entertaining. "Rao's just produced a beautiful Artichoke Sauce made in Italy using long-stem Italian artichokes and the finest Italian tomatoes," says Crisan. "It's delicious over pasta or served over baked chicken and fish."

Crisan is also seeing Italian prepared 'ready to go' entrées to heat and serve family style at home. Rao's has a variety of "open and serve" antipasti, including roasted peppers with pine nuts and golden raisins, roasted peppers with portobello mushrooms, grilled artichokes, grilled mushrooms, and grilled Italian olives.

Pocino Foods' also has begun to offer a natural deli line, which contains no artificial ingredients or preservatives, is nitrate and nitrite-free, has no MSG or fillers, and is minimally processed.

"And it's clear on the front of our label, which is simple and makes an impact," says

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Pierson. “Our complete line includes uncured Italian dry salami, pepperoni and soppressata; oven-roasted turkey, pastrami and roast beef.”

In addition to offering specialty cheese and meats, Savello USA also has expanded its line with Italian specialty grocery items.

### Say Cheese

Jamie Wichlacz, marketing manager for BelGioioso Cheese Inc., headquartered in Green Bay, WI, has seen an increased awareness in the different types of specialty cheeses among consumers.

“The latest trend is American-made Italian foods, and consumers feel good about supporting locally made cheeses,” says Wichlacz. “We offer Burrata, American Grana and CreamyGorg, and we recently won first-place honors with a few of these cheeses.”

BelGioioso also introduced Crescenza-Stracchino cheese, which Wichlacz describes as “a fresh cheese with an addicting flavor, similar to a Brie but without a rind. It can be spread on bread or used as a spread for sandwiches, melted in sauces or on hot focaccia or pizza.”

### Looking To Foodservice

Many manufacturers of these specialty items are turning to restaurants for ideas and following the latest popular trends. Crisan says one thing that’s trickled down from the restaurant segment is the idea of “small plates,” with choices from antipasto bars, assorted pasta and pasta sauces, paninis and artisan-made Italian pizzas.

Pocino Foods’ Pierson says restaurant offerings are helping the category in the retail environment, and he’s seen whole meal replacements — specifically “fresh” whole meal replacements — as being a major shift from frozen foods.

Wichlacz has seen Burrata — fresh Italian cheese made from Mozzarella and cream — pop up on more restaurant menus this past year, and as a result, more delis are carrying it.

“Once consumers discover it, they love it,” she says. “They want to replicate restaurant dishes at home, and Burrata is now easier to find in their local markets so they can do that.”

Savello’s Gallo has noticed more white tablecloth restaurants are changing their menus about four times a year, which allows them to specialize in high-quality foods. “This way they offer a smaller selection, so they are able to concentrate more on their specialties,” she says. “This sort of defined approach is being carried over in the retail environment.”

## TOP 10 WAYS TO MERCHANDISE ITALIAN PRODUCTS

1. Create Italian themes at various departments within the store.
2. Merchandise your prepared meals stations, showcasing everything from antipasto to dessert.
3. Build special displays that are eye-catching and bright. Also, keep the items at eye level so consumers will see everything.
4. Highlight different products each week with signs, and offer specials on these products.
5. Hold in-store tastings so customers can experience the difference among select items. Educate your customers about new meats and cheese offerings.
6. Create a theme, and have a story behind each cheese or brand.
7. Make sure the name of the brand is clearly visible. Create a beautiful visual behind the deli glass so it’s easy to read and see.
8. Invite manufacturers of the Italian foods to hold in-store product demonstrations. This will help get the word out about new products.
9. Cross merchandise with produce, honey, jams, bread or herbs. Run specials that offer savings on Italian foods when you mix and match with certain other items.
10. Offer recipe books that contain Italian meal ideas that customers can use to make great meals at home.

### Selling Tips

From a manufacturer’s point of view, there are three “musts” for increasing sales at a retail level, says Pierson. “We want our product at eye-level, we want family grouping and a clean label that ‘pops,’ and we want to be clearly visible among the competitive clutter.”

In Dukcevic’s opinion, telling the story at the point of sale is a great driver for increasing sales, and he credits Trader Joe’s with doing it best.

“When you’re buying the products, they have these great tags that offer information on where the product came from and pairing suggestions,” he says. “People are craving this information, and it’s just such a huge tool and gives people reason to pay a pre-

mium for high-quality things. When there’s a story, you understand why you’re paying more.”

Stephano says Atalanta has a new strategy for 2015 behind the glass that should help increase brand loyalty and sales of its specialty products.

“Our whole momentum for next year is not only to secure the relationship in the deli but also in the foodservice arena for the retailer in salads and spreads,” he says. “This cross utilization in prepared foods and the deli section is larger than ever.

“The buzzwords you’re going to hear in 2015 are ‘culinary uses and applications,’ says Stephano. “Getting those products incorporated is going to take on a new importance.”

**DB**





# GETTING IN THE GAME

Grab-and-go provides a way to compete with foodservice on a whole new level

BY LISA WHITE

In the past, fast-food chains were the only option consumers had to grab a quick lunch or snack. As the grab-and-go market has expanded, supermarket delis have recognized the profit potential and become bigger players in this segment.

Grab-and-go meal offerings are now key elements of many successful foodservice venues in both commercial and noncommercial segments, according to Technomic, a Chicago, IL-based research firm. While restaurants may have started the trend, supermarkets and other retail operations are offering stiff competition and upgrading to-go meals with variety, fresh offerings, clear packaging and user-friendly containers.

"A grab-and-go section keeps consumers in the deli, even if their buying choices have shifted," says Adam Deardorff, sales man-

ager at Lifestyle Foods, based in York, PA.

The total supermarket grab-and-go segment was valued at about \$2.8 billion in 2012, according to Technomic. Supermarkets grabbed 22 percent of the market.

This is no surprise, given that prepared-food orders during lunch hours increased 29 percent between 2008 and 2013 in retail stores, according to "The Retail Prepared Foods Market: Assessing the Competition," a report by Port Washington, NY-based NPD Group.

## A Strong Segment

An increasing number of supermarket delis are incorporating more grab-and-go options, including fresh salads, sandwiches, wraps, snacks, dips, fruits, vegetables and specialty drinks.

"The deli has shrunk by 5 square feet,

but grab-and-go sections are showing up in most delis where they did not exist in the past," says Brenda Killingsworth, trade marketing manager at Reser's Fine Foods, Beaverton, OR. "In order to stay competitive, supermarkets are adding these sections into the mix and calling out the convenience factor with bold signs."

Retailers dictate the types of products and size of this section. While some stores have positioned grab-and-go sections to compete with fast-food chains and other foodservice outlets, some retailers are testing the waters with less-extensive offerings.

"There has been an interesting ebb and flow between store preparation and vendor-supplied items," says Alan Hamer, vice president of sales and marketing at Charlotte, NC-based Stefano Foods. "Retailers tend to adjust the mix based on gross mar-

gin, labor supply and operational requirements.”

According to Technomic, mostly younger males shop the grab-and-go section regularly, which provides an opportunity for supermarkets to drive new consumers to the deli section.

Once there, consumers will find the sections are not just geared around sandwiches, salads and other cold items. More stores are increasing the number of offerings to include hot meals beyond the typical fried and rotisserie chicken, as well as nutritious meals and snacks for health-conscious consumers.

“There are many more items than there used to be, and these sections are becoming more diverse,” says Chad Vendette, director of marketing for The Broaster Co., based in Beloit, WI. “The key component of a hot grab-and-go program includes ease of access, which ensures the impulse-buy can be quickly accomplished.” The company’s hot-chicken program is designed to fit into delis’ existing grab-and-go lineup.

Downsizing portion sizes is another way for delis to get a jump on foodservice grab-and-go competitors.

“Brands and items that have consumer



brand recognition and loyalty from conventional-size items will do fantastic in the grab-and-go section with an individual-size offering,” says Jessica Brown, sales and marketing coordinator at Yucatan Foods, Los Angeles, CA. The company offers guacamole in a 2-ounce, 100-calorie, single serving, as well as in larger sizes.

### Overcoming Roadblocks

Lack of commitment is one of the issues with retail grab-and-go sections. For consumers to consider the sections a shopping destination, delis need to prove the department is a reliable solution that can fulfill their needs. Not only is it important to provide a complete and varied selection of portable,

## POTATOES HELP DELIS SCORE

By BOB JOHNSON



Nothing seems to entice consumers more than the lure of an appetizing potato dish beautifully packaged and ready to take home, so producers are striving to offer more interesting variations of this popular side dish.

With so many self-serve rotisserie items making their way into shopping carts nationwide, potatoes have become a logical extension in the grab-n-go category.

“Consumers are seeking new flavors, like specialty potato items such as seasoned wedges with a chicken flavor,” says Susan Hannah, vice president for marketing and product development at Pacific Valley Foods, Bellevue, WA.

Also, the ‘natural’ trend is important across all categories, so items such as a skin on wedge or skin on French fries appeals to the ‘natural’ buyer. As a convenience factor, consumers are also looking for mini meals while on the run, such as twice baked potatoes that include vegetable and/or meat ingredients.”

It is important that potatoes, like the entrée, be as convenient as possible. A customer should not have to wait to pick up a side dish of potatoes when the entrée is available packaged for easy pickup.

“Consumers want something easy to pick up in the deli that they can either eat there or take home and simply heat,” says Hannah. “They don’t want to have to oven bake or deep fry at home. But they still want the ‘home cooked’ appeal, so they want their potatoes to taste fresh and delicious.”

For the adventurous deli operator looking to try something unique, the Idaho Potato Commission also offers a long list of recipes on its website, [www.recipes.idahopotato.com](http://www.recipes.idahopotato.com).

“There are a couple things that are easy for delis to put together,” says Don Odiorne, vice president for foodservice at the Idaho Potato Commission in Eagle, ID. “One is twice-baked potato. Of course, there is also potato salad.”

In addition, skewers can be used for a heart-healthy variant on the shish kebab theme, combining potatoes and chicken, seasoned with olive oil and garlic on a 12-inch wooden skewer.

“Innovative potato products, such as the flavored Twice Baked Potato, offer interesting, quick-to-prepare potato meals that can put potatoes back on dinner plates for all seasons for one- and two-person households ... and bring profits back to the industry,” says Patty Amato, director of sales at Farm Ridge Foods in Islandia, NY, which also produces a line of upscale olives, pickles, salad and center-of-the-plate products. **DB**



fresh products, delis must make the foods available for all dayparts.

Supermarkets can create unique selections for shoppers "by tailoring the grab-and-go selections with regional flavors, trendy ingredients and store-specific specialty items," says Killingsworth, of Reser's Fine Foods. "Many retailers are able to call out the use of local ingredients, which appeals to consumers. Also, the offerings in supermarket delis are seen as fresher, a departure from processed, cookie-cutter fast-food selections."

In addition, the diversity of this section allows for more experimenting with food combinations, ingredients and ethnic fare, as well as cross-merchandising opportunities.

"Because of these factors, the supermarket grab-and-go trend is carving into the foodservice piece of the pie, pulling consumers into a pattern of grabbing lunch there instead of at fast-food outlets and perhaps purchasing other items while in the store," says Killingsworth.

Whether items are made on-site or supplied by vendors — or a mix of both — the emphasis needs to be on quality and convenient meal solutions. Shoppers are looking to save time, not stand in line. If a product has to be weighed and priced at the full-service deli counter, the convenience factor is compromised.

"Products should look good enough to eat, have a culinary sophistication just a notch above the consumer's ability to make the item at home and represent a value, especially in terms of convenience," says Hamer.

Many stores also have much room for improvement with hot grab-and-go programs. Stores focusing solely on rotisserie programs may be missing out on other profit opportunities.

Regionality is a differentiating factor with grab-and-go programs. The food selection with the widest appeal will depend on what part of the country a store is located in and the demographics of the area.

It's important to identify the shoppers prior to selecting the grab-and-go products, says Lifestyle Foods' Deardorff.

A focus on freshness as opposed to shelf life is a must with grab-and-go products and portability also is a consideration. New developments in grab-and-go food containers have made it easier to expand deli selections in this category.

"Consumers need to be able to hold the product in their hand and eat it in the car," asserts Lisa Cohen, owner of San Diego, CA-based Home Chef Kitchen, which produces Slim Soul by Jillian Michaels. "That's the goal with our product line, which can fit

in car cup holders."

Slim Soul's salad container provides clarity, which allows customers to see the product inside the packaging.

Kalamazoo, MI-based Fabri-Kal offers cup insert combinations for food pairings and to-go boxes with various compartment configurations.

### Marketing To Move

Positioning grab-and-go items in a high-traffic area of the deli is important, along with keeping complementary selections nearby. Displays should incorporate offerings for all dayparts. Mixing comfort foods and healthy options also will help widen the appeal of the section.

Looking at alternative merchandising options is key to increasing visibility for these items.

"Some stores have secondary grab-and-go displays by registers," says Tim Oliphant, director of sales and marketing at BD&K Foods, Columbus, GA. "Retailers who do this get a lift while consumers are standing in line."

The company's hot-sides program, which includes mashed potatoes, mac and cheese, collard greens, tomato and okra and green beans, is geared to round out hot entrée

offerings in the deli.

Successful merchandising makes all grab-and-go items clearly visible and appropriately placed, with complementary foods side by side.

"Retailers need to help consumers out by merchandising items that work well together next to each other," says Yucatan Foods' Brown. "This makes it easier to create meals and pairings quickly."

Properly positioning these products will assure shoppers the store is serious and competent in this segment.

"The strongest Italian food sales come from a combination of pizza programs flanked with Italian items, such as calzones and Stromboli," says Stefano Foods' Hamer.

In addition to food groupings, displays should be positioned properly to guide shoppers quickly to the foods they are seeking and to help them discern each selection.

"Key components to successful grab-and-go merchandising include variety, fresh-looking food offerings, transparent packaging for product visibility, flavor call-outs, easy-to-eat-from containers, cutlery and even tables and chairs nearby for consumers to have immediate consumption," says Killingsworth. **DB**



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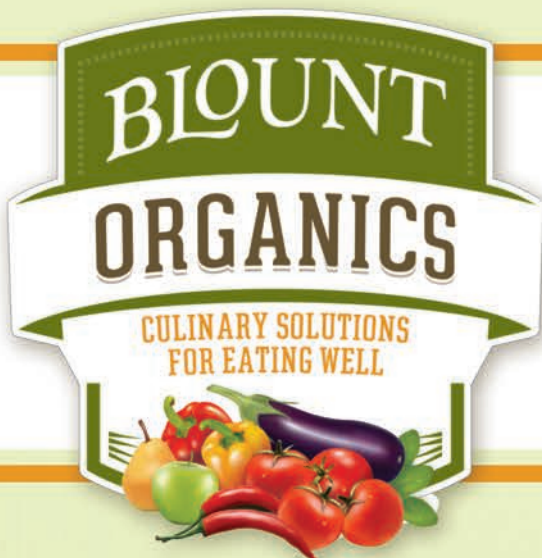
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## BLOUNT FINE FOODS

Blount Fine Foods, based in Fall River, Mass., is a family-owned and operated manufacturer of artisan soups, sauces and side dishes, producing more than 700 gourmet products for restaurants, institutions and club stores in all 50 states. At retail, Blount sells refrigerated soups under the Panera Bread, Legal Sea Foods and Blount brands. The company's portfolio includes over 500 proprietary soup recipes, including a new, full line of organic and gluten-free soups.

### CERTIFIED ORGANIC AND OTHER SPECIALTY PRODUCTS

Consumer preferences and behavior over the last few years have made it clear that organic products are no longer just a niche trend — “organics” have made it to the mainstream, and are a rapidly expanding consideration for consumers, especially those who demand quality and are willing to pay for it.

Viewing this as a permanent shift in consumer behavior, in mid-2014, Blount launched the Blount Organics lines of foodservice and retail organic soups, including Vegetable Chili, Minestrone Soup, Tomato Bisque and Lentil & Chick Pea Soup. In January of 2015, Blount expanded its organics lineup with the addition of Tuscan-style Vegetable & Bean, and Carrot Broccoli soups.

The rollout, which came on the heels of Blount's earlier launch of gluten-free and vegetarian soup lines, was not only an expansion of the Blount brand, but a retail channel expansion as well; as Blount-branded soups have traditionally only been sold at grocery stores in the Northeast.

Reinterpreting the most popular soups as organic recipes was the approach to launching the Blount Organics line. Both of the new flavors represent the culinary team at Blount pushing past “traditional” recipes with the organics product line. Going forward, Blount's chefs are eager to introduce more unique and specialized recipes.

### GROWING SALES WHILE ELEVATING THE CATEGORY

Blount's executive vice president for sales & marketing, Bob Sewall, believes retailers should make no mistake about the two factors that drive sales: a quality product made with wholesome ingredients; and advances in soup production that allow brands like Blount, Panera and Legal Sea Foods to offer a product with a restaurant-quality flavor and texture profile that also has better ingredients and ever-cleaner ingredient labels.

The result has been a line of refrigerated, certified organic soups with a 50- to 70-day shelf life; and gluten-free products that are delicious, and that the whole family enjoys.

Blount is succeeding in elevating the soup category out of a “can sold in the center of the store,” to a value-added, premium product sought by consumers seeking a restaurant-quality experience at home.

### CONTINUED GROWTH AHEAD

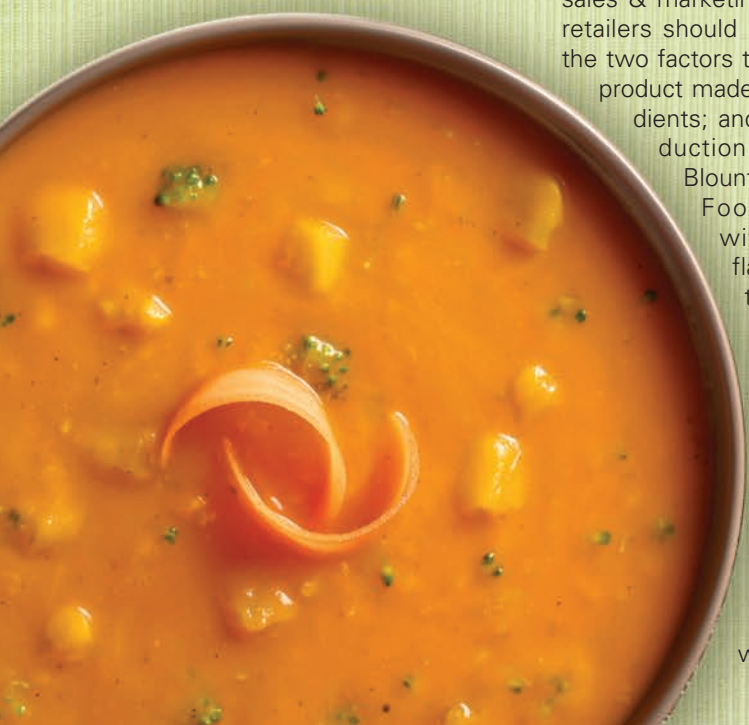
Blount will continue to innovate and to meet the demands of customers, which in turn raises the bar on the entire soup category. There are several new products in the pipeline that will launch in Q3, and the company is also working on plans to once again expand production and logistics capacity.

### A FAST-GROWING COMPANY WITH THE RIGHT PRIORITIES

Blount is not just a fast growing company that makes great soups and sides. It is a family run business with a long-standing commitment to socially responsible practices and sustainability of the environment. Blount employs the “Three R's” (reduce, reuse, and recycle) at every level of the company.

Whether it is installing a solar energy system on its factory roof, investing in high-efficiency refrigeration, or designing new products to minimize waste and utilize recyclable packaging materials, Blount does what it can to be good stewards of the environment. Blount also maintains a policy of sharing proven successes with customers, vendors and other food industry partners to maximize the collective benefit to the world.

For more information, visit [www.BlountFineFoods.com](http://www.BlountFineFoods.com).





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# Bring in the Dough

Industry experts offer advice on ways retailers can merchandise and sell more pizzas

BY KEITH LORIA

**I**t's difficult to find someone who doesn't like pizza, which is why retailers offering fresh deli pizza production have an opportunity to raise total prepared food sales substantially.

"Starting with quality frozen dough balls, delis can make pizza that is as good as the best pizzeria in town," says Alan Hamer, vice president of Stefano Foods, headquartered in Charlotte, NC. "The key to consumer acceptance is consistency — having a set variety available each day during prime lunch and dinner hours for both slice and whole pie sales."

Alan Hiebert, senior education coordinator for the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association, based in Madison, WI, says when it comes to pizza, it's important to keep a good balance between the new and exciting, and the traditional.

"Consumers are searching among the ubiquity for exoticism beyond sausage and pepperoni, and the supermarket deli has an opportunity to shine as the frozen category declines," he says.

For the first quarter of 2014, ended March 29, 2014, pizza represented 5.3 percent of the U.S. deli prepared foods category in share of dollars, according to the IDDBA. That number is slightly ahead of sushi at 4.9 percent and snacks at 3.9 percent, but trails dips/spreads by almost 3 percentage points.





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It represents a 2.1 percent increase over the same period in 2013, so the category is on the rise. However, pizza is not rising as fast as some others, with sushi up 8.6 percent and dips/spreads climbing a whopping 15.4 percent.

Mark Snyder, president of Italcrust Frozen Pizza, operating in Belmont, MA, notes that more families are bonding over pizza at dinner, matching their own toppings to crusts and dough balls. That trend has helped the company find success with its frozen “fresh baked pizza,” as more people are looking for fresher and tastier crusts.

“The target demographic that retailers need to hit is someone who wants really good and authentic pizza outside of a pizzeria,” he says. “There’s nothing better than someone closing their eyes and admitting that they cannot tell the difference. That being said, our customers are typically looking for quality and taste and simple ingredients, and have a little more disposable income.”

Kyle Cash, national director of marketing for Drayton Foods, LLC, based in Fargo, ND, says a combination of “fresh and value” is always at the top of the list of pizza talk in the deli. “The consumer is looking for a value to feed the family that evening with no cooking work involved,” he says.

Deb Crisan, senior vice president, sales and marketing for Rao’s Specialty Foods, Inc., based in New York, NY, says there is no

better marketing tool than having a built-in pizzeria with a brick oven to offer fully baked hand-tossed pies to take home or sell by the slice or pound to eat onsite or at home.

“Watching pizza being handmade, along with the wonderful toppings and aromas while in the oven, heightens your appetite and increases the customer’s impulse to purchase a pizza, which is one of the most craved foods in the world,” she says. “I think demographics will vary based on actual store concepts — natural, gourmet or a combination of the two — and the clientele they cater to. But trendy up-and-coming neighborhoods are perfect venues for this.”

### Top It Off

With the growth of food and cooking blogs and other online media, much more information exists for the consumer to digest in terms of creative recipes and pizza topping ideas.

“We see those trends in at-home cooking and entertaining, and pizza continues to be a staple in homes across the country,” says Perry Abbenante, general manager for Stonefire Authentic Flatbreads, based in Concord, Ontario. “People still stick with their favorite basic cheese, veggie and meat options, but they are getting more adventurous as well when it comes to recipes and pizza toppings.”

There is even a higher demand for different flavor toppings in the foodservice market

now. For example, Pizza Hut, is offering numerous different types of crust flavors and creative topping ideas.

### A Healthy Option

In 2014, the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board reported two-fifths of pizza consumers would like healthier options, such as whole-wheat and organic crusts and organic, all-natural, or locally sourced ingredients. As a result, delis that are offering these options are enjoying a surge at the cash register.

In Abbenante’s opinion, the quality and taste of the crust is most important, but he sees many of Stonefire’s consumers discovering creative and healthy combinations, often with seasonal ingredients, to top its flatbreads and pizza crust.

“We see trends spurring health-focused products. Consumers are more aware of ingredients and dietary issues today,” he says. “All of our products, including our pizza crusts, are made without artificial preservatives, additives, artificial colors, trans fats or hydrogenated oils. Our whole-grain and multigrain offerings provide added fiber content.”

Rao’s recently launched a traditional Italian Pizza Sauce made in Italy, which combines sweet Italian cherry tomatoes and Italian plum tomatoes without the addition of sugar, tomato paste or water.

“The flavor of the cherry tomatoes are unique and complement a wide range of food,” says Crisan. “Our premium pizza sauce is rich in taste and naturally sweet. Consumers that observe a healthy eating lifestyle still enjoy pizza but look for options such as a gluten-free or whole-wheat crust, grilled or roasted vegetables, arugula or chopped salad as toppings.”

### Improving Sales

Convincing families to bypass their favorite local pizza joint and frozen food options has long been the challenge of grocery delis when selling pizzas. But with some creative marketing and smart merchandising, a savvy retailer can see more dollars coming in.

Drayton’s Cash says there are a number of ways for a deli retailer to improve sales, including restructuring the deli counter location.

“A retailer should create focus around this along with a quality deli pizza product to keep the customers coming back,” he says. “If it were me, I would have my deli pizza program centrally located between the check-out counters and product aisles so the pizza would be their last stop before exiting to the check-out counter.”

Cash says deli operators should create a



program that allows customers to customize their pizza or offer an individual “slice” program in which consumers can pick from numerous toppings.

“The slice program would start with a blank slice of cheese pizza, then toppings would be added, and the slice reheated,” he says. “This does already exist, but if deli operators create buzz around ‘fresh pizza,’ it will only attract more returning customers.”

The best way to sell more, says Snyder, is to make things visually appealing and keep only the best-looking pizzas on display.

“Too many deli pizzas are soggy and old looking,” he says. “From our perspective, retailers need to seek out and stock a better pizza. After all, pizza is an item that is very easy to splurge on.”

Of course, the taste will always play a factor in selling pizza.

“You have to have a great tasting crust to build your program around,” says Abbenante. “The toppings, sauce and other factors are pretty basic in comparison. It all starts with the crust, and you don’t have to make it fresh in-store and eat up a lot of labor doing it. There are ready-to-bake crusts that perform very well.”

Crisan says sampling is a great way to entice customers during peak shopping hours and during the lunch and dinner rushes, and that stores should promote a special “Pizza of the Day.”

“Pizza is universal. With the many creative prepared artisan pizzas or build-your-

own pizzas, it’s the first ‘go-to destination’ when thinking of something quick, easy and loved by all,” says Crisan. “Outside of the traditional thin or thick crusts [or] whole-wheat or gluten-free crusts, I have seen pesto, sourdough, rosemary, sea salt, cheese-stuffed, and sweet potato crust filled with sweet potato mousse. Delis should have a menu to select from with a section to create your own signature pie.”

Crisan also would merchandise the countertop with beautifully prepared pizzas ready-to-serve whole or by the slice together with such related items as Italian cheeses, olive oils, truffle oils, fresh basil, pizza stones and cutters, and Italian wines and beers, if the state permits. All of these invite customer awareness and add incremental sales for the department, she says.

### Remember The Little Ones

According to the IDDBA’s “What’s in Store 2015,” the latest edition of its annual supermarket trends report, pizza is clearly on the rise when it comes to appealing to kids.

The report shows that more than one-fifth, or 22 percent, of children and adolescents between the ages of six and 19 eat pizza on a daily basis, with race or ethnicity not a factor. Overall, about one in eight people over the age of two grab a slice on any given day.

### Foodservice Trends

IDDBA’s “What’s in Store 2015” report

also found pizza appears as a leading dish on 40 percent of all restaurant menus — something that delis should be paying attention to, says Hiebert.

“Delis could easily adopt customizable fresh pizzas, which are trending in restaurants,” he says. “If not offering prepared pizzas ready for the oven, delis could merchandise crusts, frozen or ready-to-use; artisan cheeses; sauces, and spices among other toppings.”

Two-thirds of menus that include pizza mention sauce, and a wide variety of sauce alternatives are making their way on to pizzas, including pesto, salad dressing, and even chocolate hazelnut spread for dessert pizza options.

“Gorgonzola and goat cheese are also interesting ways to add variety,” says Hiebert. “Also worth noting is that 3 percent of pizza menus offer a gluten-free option, while 38 percent of gluten-free menus offer pizza.”

According to Italcru’s Snyder, pizza in the foodservice industry has been morphing into Asian or Latin recipes of late, and savvy retailers following these trends will find success.

“While pizza used to be an Italian entrée, or perhaps Greek, in some regions, it is not a truly American food and necessarily is as diverse as our people are,” he says.

Stefano Foods is keenly focused on the personal made-to-order trend that’s impacting sales in the foodservice sector.

“One idea is to add pizza to existing sandwich/sub programs,” says Hamer. “The existing meat and vegetable toppings can be used to top a pre-sauced and cheese-d par-baked personal pizza. And speed ovens such as those made by TurboChef and Merrychef can deliver fresh, hot pizza in under two minutes.”

### The Final Say

While health concerns form a part of the equation, today many consumer pizza purchases in the deli are prompted by sight, smell and hunger. Consequently, it’s important to showcase pizza in its best light and have in-store samples so consumers are drawn in by taste and aroma.

“Pizza has lots of carbs and gluten, so you would think that would affect sales because so much is being said about both in the news these days,” says Snyder. “However, the overall pizza category continues to grow because there are so many different options out there and so many different types that consumers eat regularly. It’s a category that will continue to grow.”

DB





# The Redoubtable English Cheddar

Still going strong after all these delicious years

BY MAX MCCALMAN

Cheddar ranks as the best-known cheese name in the world, although much of what is sold under that name has little to do with what real Cheddar can and should be.

If you ask an American to name a British cheese, the most likely reply would be Stilton, followed by Cheddar and then Cheshire. But that would be about it. Sadly, this is the situation in which many cheeses of England found themselves after World War II — either abandoned or with their cheesemaking methods so poorly preserved they might as well have been forgotten.

But despite the changes that have occurred in Cheddar-making over the years, true English Cheddar still has plenty of devotees. The late Patrick Rance, author of *The Great British Cheese Book*, said of Cheddar, "If you offered me a desert island with just

one kind of food, a farmhouse Cheddar would be my unhesitating choice: its mouth-watering texture and flavor could never bore, but only change for the better through all the months of aging."

The original Cheddars hailed from the Somerset region in southwest England where it is estimated that the harvesting of milk has been practiced for more than 5,000 years, first with sheep, prized for their wool and meat as much as for their milk. Before dairy cows arrived on the scene 2,000 years ago, most cheeses produced throughout the British Isles were soft-ripened, high-moisture varieties with limited durability.

In the 1st century A.D., though, Roman legionnaires introduced cheesemaking skills for the production of hard cheeses, types that were durable enough to be sent back to Italy or packed as a staple ration for the legionnaire's diet. Cheshire dates back to this

time, while Cheddar came along later. However, those styles of aged, hard cheeses were half-heartedly received at home. The deeper into the British Isles the Romans penetrated, the less successful they were in introducing those types, with the Welsh, Irish and Scots preferring to avoid them.

## The Rise Of Cow Milk Cheeses

As with many dairy lands that are hospitable to cows, the sheep dairies tended to shrink in number over time. Considering the economics among the species, the fact that sheep milk costs three times as much as cow milk is only one of a number of points the cow has in her favor, so cow milk production began to supplant sheep milk production.

Some 500 years ago, England's dairy industry began to grow, serving a healthy domestic demand as well as a growing foreign market. During Elizabethan times



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Cheddar was well known throughout the country and was even introduced in the British colonies. By the 16th and 17th centuries, it was considered to be a luxury cheese and traded at as much as three times the price of a comparable Cheshire.

The fat content of a Cheddar was very much dependent on the farmer's wealth. If the farmer was poor, he used all of his cream to make butter for sale in town. The whole-milk Cheddar, with its yellower color, was considered a luxury food, and to imitate this color, the skimmed-milk Cheddars would receive a touch of saffron. In the 17th century the saffron was replaced by annatto, a less expensive food-coloring additive that had been discovered recently in the West Indies.

The eponymous Somerset village stopped making its own Cheddar in the

1980s, and the relationship between the town and the cheese was little more than a reason for tourists to drop in to say they had been to the town bearing its great name. At that time, some of the townspeople had so little pride in the name that many opposed any cheesemaking there whatsoever, maintaining it created a disagreeable smell.

Their objection was overruled a few years later, and Cheddar-making in the village of Cheddar resumed. Legend has it that Cheddars were at one time aged in caves in the nearby gorges. But while the conditions for ripening Cheddar may have been suitable, there is scant evidence that this actually occurred.

### Rules Of Making Cheddar

Cheddar refers more to the method of

cheesemaking than to its birthplace. Farmhouse producers may use raw milk while factory producers must use pasteurized milk. The processes that best define Cheddar are distinctive in a number of ways beyond the selection of starter cultures. After the milk is soured and the rennet forms the coagulum, the curd is cut into small pieces. This method is employed in many cheese types and is one of the fundamental steps in the making of Cheddar. This fine curd cut allows for easier draining of the whey, helping to craft a firmer cheese.

The curd is scalded in the whey to about 100°F, depending on the types of cultures employed. Scalding is a defining step in Cheddar production but two other processes — stacking and milling — also help to describe Cheddar. After the whey is drained the curds go through a “texturing” phase during which they are piled into slabs and stacked upon one another. This is sometimes referred to as “Cheddaring.” The slabs of curd resemble pillows at this point, just before they are milled to finger-sized pieces.

At this point salt is added, and the curd is scooped into molds, round or block. The next step is the pressing. After a first pressing, the curd is placed in fresh cheese cloth and pressed for another 24 hours. That is the slower, traditional method.

For modern commercial operations this is too time-consuming. The ripening conditions and durations are specific, too, generally around 50°F and 85 percent relative humidity. Cheddar generally reaches maturity at nine to 12 months of age, although some take much longer. Rarely do Cheddars improve past two years, whereas a commercial block Cheddar can be sold at four- to six-months old.

### Decline Of Farmhouse Cheddars

The farmhouse Cheddar began its steady decline with the arrival of railroads, the first major setback for cheeses in England. Farmers could send milk to London and reap a quicker return than having to wait many months for the Cheddar to mature. Cheddar's survival at this time can be partly attributed to a newer cheese, Caerphilly, from across the Bristol Channel in Wales. Caerphilly became so popular in the 19th century that the farmers were unable to keep up with demand, so the Somerset producers filled in. This kept Cheddar makers in business and allowed them to get some of those faster returns by producing the Welsh cheese. Caerphilly could be sold in less than a month, compared to the several months required for Cheddar. Another advantage was that less milk was required to make the Caerphilly.



This fortunate turn of events also helped Cheddar makers continue to produce their Cheddars.

It was at this time the cheese mill was invented. Considered one of the most important advances in Cheddar production, the cheese mill reduced labor costs while assuring a more uniform curd breakdown and a better texture. Before the invention of the cheese mill, the curd was broken down by hand in a time-consuming and variable process.

Another important advance in Cheddar production came when the dairymen started taking better care of their animals. Before the 19th century the animals usually were left out of doors in inclement weather and their overall care was rather poor. Now it's well accepted that the happier the dairy animal, the greater and higher quality its yield.

Before World War I Cheddars were being made in different sizes and shapes. Some producers added the step of brine-soaking or external salting for rind development. These alterations to the basic Cheddar recipe were probably introduced by cheesemakers employing recipes from earlier times or from other regions. Up until that time most Cheddars were made from raw milk and were clothbound. Cheddar production suffered after the war, however, and was fortunate to survive in some of the excellent varieties available today.

### From Farm To Factory

The move from farm to factory Cheddar production marked a change from a slow process to a more rapid one, which helped reduce labor costs. The older, slower process evolved from Cheddars being produced in the kitchen by a busy housewife already burdened with many chores. The long stretches during which little manipulation was required would allow the housewife to tend to the children, cook the meals, wash clothes, keep the house and perform all of her other tasks. These short down times in Cheddar production were not tolerated in the commercial creameries, consequently production was sped up by using higher temperatures, which reduced the aging to two months.

There are several bright spots in Cheddar's more recent history. A handful of high quality traditional Cheddars continue to be produced in the west counties, and here and there around the country. The ones produced outside of the region usually do not claim the name, although they may be entered into Cheddar competitions, rules permitting.

The appetite for other goat and sheep milk has spawned the development for Cheddars made from the milk of those ani-

mals. Quikkes Traditional, maker of Vintage Cheddar, winner of Best Cheddar from among 150 entries this past May, produces excellent Cheddar from goats' milk and, in more limited quantities, from sheep's milk.

Cheddar owes much of its successes in foreign markets to the fact it travels well and keeps its excellent quality for a long time — it is virtually unrivaled in this. A not-too-distant cousin with which Cheddar is sometimes compared is Gruyère, largely for those qualities.

The United Kingdom imported about 138,000 tons of Cheddar in 2008, due to the steady decline in the total number of dairy cows over the previous three decades. Today, the United Kingdom imports nearly four times as much cheese as it exports. Cheddar represents 50 percent of cheese sales, rising roughly 5 percent year-to-year. Meanwhile, farmhouse sales have declined.

Another reason for the British Cheddars' popularity is their remarkable ability to pair with wines and beers. The magnificent Cheddars have a depth that can turn a weak contender into water, yet a fine Cheddar can be forgiving and graceful, too. The best of them are noted for their balance, which allows for successful pairings. Burgundy is often recommended and one might assume it refers to the red versions, made from the Pinot Noir grape. But a white Burgundy can meld well too, so long as it has its own depth.

Cheese expert Patrick Rance, who died in 1999, enjoyed the occasional ale, but he also was a Francophile and an oenophile. His wine of choice to pair with Cheddar was Burgundy, presumably the red version made from Pinot Noir.

A longtime lover of Cheddar, Rance called it "...our most generous gift to humanity." **DB**



## Blast From The Past

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escendants of a family of pastai (pasta makers) from Abruzzo, the little Southern Italian region on the Adriatic Sea, the De Cecco brothers have created a multi-national pasta empire by respecting tradition and fostering innovation.

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Much of De Cecco's fortune came about as the result of a business challenge. While pasta was dried in the sun in the South of Italy, De Cecco's factory was in Fara San Martino, a town on the slopes of the Majella Mountain that did not offer favorable climes. In 1889, Filippo De Cecco built a large barn, the first industrial low-temperature drying plant. This method would later spread throughout the world.

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