

DELI BUSINESS

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PRESIDENT & EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

JAMES E. PREVOR
jprevor@phoenixmedianet.com

PUBLISHING DIRECTOR

KENNETH L. WHITACRE
kwhitacre@phoenixmedianet.com

PUBLISHER/EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

LEE SMITH
lsmith@phoenixmedianet.com

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

ELLEN KOTEFF
ekoteff@phoenixmedianet.com

NATIONAL SALES MANAGER

MARK GOLD
mgold@phoenixmedianet.com

SALES MANAGER

JANE JOHNSON
jjohnson@phoenixmedianet.com

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

DIANA LEVINE
dlevine@phoenixmedianet.com

ART DIRECTOR

SUNSHINE GORMAN
sgorman@phoenixmedianet.com

PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT

FREDDY PULIDO
JACKIE TUCKER

RESEARCH DIRECTOR

SHARON OLSON

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

CAROL BAREUTHER LINDA BROCKMAN HANNAH HOWARD
BOB JOHNSON KEITH LORIA SHARON OLSON
BARRY SPARKS LISA WHITE

SEND INSERTION ORDERS, PAYMENTS, PRESS RELEASES,
PHOTOS, LETTERS TO THE EDITOR, ETC., TO:
DELI BUSINESS

P.O. BOX 810217, BOCA RATON, FL 33481-0217
PHONE: 561-994-1118 FAX: 561-994-1610
EMAIL: DELIBUSINESS@PHOENIXMEDIANET.COM

PHOENIX MEDIA NETWORK, INC.

CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD
JAMES E. PREVOR

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT
KENNETH L. WHITACRE

SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT
LEE SMITH

VICE PRESIDENT EDITORIAL
ELLEN KOTEFF

GENERAL COUNSEL
DEBRA PREVOR

TRADE SHOW COORDINATOR
JACKIE LOMONTE

DELI BUSINESS IS PUBLISHED BY
PHOENIX MEDIA NETWORK, INC.
P.O. BOX 810425,
BOCA RATON, FL 33481-0425
PHONE: 561-994-1118 FAX: 561-994-1610
www.delibusiness.com
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PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

PUBLICATION AGREEMENT NO. 40047928

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FOODMATCH AND BOBBYSUE'S ARE NUTS FOR OLIVES



FOODMatch, New York, NY, a producer of Mediterranean foods, announces a new partnership with BobbySue's Nuts, Chappaqua, NY. The two companies collaborated on a new product: Nuts Over Olives, that features FOODMatch's Divina brand oven-roasted Greek olives with an herb-and-spice-glazed mixture of cashews, almonds and pecans. FOODMatch specializes in bulk and retail olives and antipasti.

In addition to Nuts Over Olives, FOODMatch and BobbySue's Nuts will offer three other flavors: Original, which combines cashews, almonds and pecans in a slightly sweet glaze; Some Like it Hot, a spicy version of the Original; and It's Raining Chocolate, which drizzles white, milk and dark fair trade chocolate on the original recipe.

www.foodmatch.com

COMING NEXT IN JUNE/JULY ISSUE

COVER STORY

12th Annual People's Awards

FEATURE STORIES

Food Safety Update
Appetizers
Packaging

MERCHANDISING REVIEWS

Crackers
Deli Breads
Olives
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PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES

Mediterranean Foods

PREPARED FOODS

Salads & Sides

DELI MEATS

Chicken
Annual Deli Meat Guide

CHEESES

French Goat Cheeses
Feta Cheese

COMING IN AUG/SEPT

DELI BUSINESS will be taking a look at Back To School.

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COMING NEXT

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Announcements



SABERT TO ACQUIRE KALMAN PACKAGING

Sabert Corp., Sayreville, NJ, enters into a definitive agreement to acquire Kalman Packaging Inc., a North Carolina-based manufacturer of thermoformed plastic hinged food containers for the bakery/supermarket segments. The transaction provides a meaningful addition to Sabert's portfolio, while creating opportunities to further broaden Sabert's reach across multiple channels and better serve customers.

www.sabert.com



ASI TAKES TOP HONORS

Arthur Schuman Inc., Fairfield, NJ, earns four Best of Class awards at the World Championship Cheese Contest held in Birmingham, UK. ASI took best-in-class medals for Parmesan, Gorgonzola and Asiago. Cello Artisan Parmesan features a nutty, caramel flavor in every wheel. Gorgonzola, hand-crafted in an artisanal plant outside of Madison, WI, has a robust, creamy and piquant flavor and crumbly texture. Asiago, an everyday snacking cheese, has a sharp, bold flavor with sweet notes.

www.arthurschuman.com



BIGGI NAMED TO HALL OF FAME

Beaverton Foods, Inc., Beaverton, OR, announces that chairman Gene Biggi has been inducted into the Specialty Food Association 2016 class of the Specialty Food Hall of Fame. The Hall of Fame honors individuals whose accomplishments, impact, contributions and successes deserve praise and recognition. Biggi developed horseradish, mustards and sauces that no other companies in the world were manufacturing and was the first to produce horseradish, specialty mustards and sauces in squeeze jars.

www.beavertonfoods.com



CUP DESIGN DEBUTS

The Ambriola Co., West Caldwell, NJ — a subsidiary of Auricchio S.p.A. of Cremona, Italy — introduces a new cup design for its Locatelli Pecorino Romano cheese. The graphic on the outer coating of the cheese wheel has been applied to the company's grated cheese cups. The cheese is handcrafted from 100 percent pure sheep's milk.

www.ambriola.com

New Products



A SWEET ADDITION

Sugar Bowl Bakery, Hayward, CA, launches the newest additions to its growing line of flavored Madeleines. The cookies are now available in lemon, orange, pumpkin spice and tuxedo flavors. The line is made with real butter and naturally flavored with ingredients such as Meyer lemon, Valencia orange zests and oils, real pumpkin puree and high-quality cocoa. Each serving is 90 calories. The cookies contain no artificial flavors or colors and are free of trans fat and preservatives.

www.sugarbowlbakery.com



SAVORY SAUSAGES DEBUT

Land O'Frost, Munster, IN, introduces Simply Savory, a smoked sausage line made with lean cuts of chicken and pork, along with chopped pieces of roasted red peppers, bacon, Mozzarella and Cheddar. Each link is 150 calories or less, offering at least 9 grams of protein and 35 percent less fat. Four flavors are available: Bacon and Cheddar, Italian Style, Polish Kielbasa and Chipotle & Roasted Red Pepper. Each is naturally smoked and contains no fillers, artificial colors or flavors or MSG.

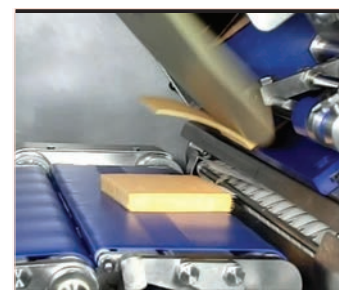
www.landofrost.com



HOTTER THAN HOT

Beaverton Foods Inc., Beaverton, OR, announces two new 'hot' products — Ghost Pepper Mustard and Creamy Sriracha Horseradish. The Inglehoffer Ghost Pepper Mustard and Inglehoffer Creamy Sriracha Horseradish are sold in 10.25- and 9.25-ounce shelf-stable squeeze bottles. The new flavors also are available under the Beaver Brand in 12- and 13-ounce sizes.

www.beavertonfoods.com



HIGH SPEED SLICING

Thurne High Speed Slicing Systems, Norwich, UK, introduces a dedicated slicer for cheese applications. Based on the compact Polyslicer 1000 platform, the slicer has been optimized to provide efficient cheese slicing. It features a range of cheese specific components and blades that reduce friction and product build up. The machine is available with both orbital and involute head, enabling slicing of stacked and shingled retail and food service packs at high speeds up to 1500 rpm.

www.thurne.com

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

New Products



FRESH PAD ABSORBS

Novipax, Oak Brook, IL, launches Pad-Loc Fresh, which generates carbon dioxide inside packages to deter microbial growth on fresh and processed meats, poultry, seafood and other food products. Used as a tool in an effective modified atmosphere packaging (MAP) strategy, Pad-Loc Fresh enables fresh and minimally processed packaged food products to maintain visual, textural and nutritional appeal, while also helping to extend the shelf life of fresh food products without the need to add chemical preservatives or stabilizers. www.novipax.com



A BOLD CHIP

Deep River Snacks, Deep River, CT, introduces Honchos Tortilla Chips. The line of organic chips is flavorful with non-GMO and certified gluten-free ingredients. The product also is free of artificial dyes, flavors and preservatives. Varieties include Nacho Cheese, Ranch, and Peach Habanero. Peach Habanero and Ranch flavors are 100 percent organic and bear the USDA organic seal; Nacho Cheese is 90 percent organic. All flavors are offered in 1.5- and 5-ounce sizes.

www.deepriversnacks.com



SMALL & THIN

A thinly-sliced bun is ideal for toppings and spreads and can be grilled for hot or cold sandwiches. Also, small artisan burger buns now come in a smaller new size. Both products are sliced, with less crumb, lighter and more versatile. The buns are low in fat, with no sugar, additives or preservatives, and provide a good source of iron. These products are free of trans fats and vegetarian/vegan.

www.boulart.com



A HEALTHIER OPTION

Saputo Specialty Cheese, Richfield, WI, has introduced Organic Creamery Organic Light String Cheese with less fat and fewer calories. The single-serve sticks are packaged as six 1-ounce individual portions in a single 6-ounce bag. The product is hand-crafted by Wisconsin cheesemakers with organic milk from Wisconsin family farms that practice humane management and pasture grazing. The product has a mild and buttery flavor with a pull-apart texture.

www.saputo.com



The most popular deli item isn't sliced...it's twisted!

While your customers might think about what cold cuts and cheeses to buy, there's no question that they'll grab a box or two of John Wm. Macy's CheeseSticks to go with them. The crunchy, cheesy, unique flavor in every bite of a CheeseStick is perfect alongside antipastos, deli platters, or right out of the box.

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by Jim Prevor, Editor-in-Chief

Tearing Down Departmental Walls... With Produce

The advent of increased produce usage in the deli is a simple phenomenon. As culinary trends have moved to incorporate a broader range of fresh fruits and vegetables, and as retailing trends have led to expanded prepared foods and restaurant-like dining options in supermarkets, delis are simply using more fresh produce. These new realities include the use of larger volumes of produce and specialized products that are not typically sold at retail — such as single-leaf Romaine lettuce perfect for sandwiches — and so dictate changes in procurement practices.

It wasn't all that long ago when supermarket delis, which mostly used a little bell pepper for garnish, had a very sophisticated "procurement system" for produce: The deli manager would wait until the night crew came on and send the deli clerk to go steal it from the produce cooler. The free produce boosted the deli budget and avoided the difficulties involved in interdepartmental transfers. Now most delis purchase major items directly and, indeed, it is foodservice suppliers, such as Sysco and US Foods, that are increasingly supplying supermarket delis.

Supermarket executives still struggle to find a business model that conforms to the way people shop and eat today. We've known for a long time the silo-like structure supermarkets are built around, with separate profit centers for different departments, is not really in line with consumer habits. It was 20 years ago the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) held its first Meal Solutions event in Phoenix. The event was dedicated to the notion that supermarkets could best serve their customers by focusing on offering "meal solutions," regardless of departmental structure.

It was one of those ideas that was absolutely true, made perfect sense, but flopped because meal solution buyers are few and far between, while produce buyers, deli buyers, meat buyers, bakery buyers are abundant. When you read the article, *Powerful Opportunities For Fresh Produce In The Deli*, on page 22, you will read of heroes of cross merchandising — people such as Paul Kneeland, who has a long history, first with Roche Bros in Boston, then King's in New Jersey and now with Ahold's Fresh Formats division.

Paul has always loved to cross merchandise cheese and proteins and beverages and bakery items in produce. But when he talks about simple things such as cross merchandising rotisserie chicken and bagged salads, it is good to remember that in almost all supermarkets in America, this seemingly tiny combination involves either deep interdepartmental negotiations or one department head voluntarily giving up space to sell

product for which another department will get credit.

This is hardly a process likely to lead to product displays optimal for consumer needs — or for maximum sales levels.

Many items that were formerly under the produce domain — such as salad bars — have made the migration to deli management. This is typically wise. Delis are more culturally attuned to food safety processes in store, and many a produce clerk is selected more for an ability to lug crates than finesse fresh-cuts on a salad bar. It is also true, however, that supermarket executives are increasingly looking for in-store prepared food operations as an outlet for what would otherwise be shrink from produce. Making things in store, such as guacamole from soft avocados, can combine the store's operational need to reduce shrink with the consumers' desire for product freshly made.

There are always complications though. It is one thing to use tomatoes that are getting soft to create salsa, but another entirely to use damaged product that might pose food safety issues. Indeed, even where the produce is perfect, in-store preparation never reaches the food safety standards of a professional fresh-cut operation. And even though cooking produce provides a "kill-step" in food safety, ensuring product is *properly* cooked — meaning to the right temperature for the right period of time — that is a challenge unto itself. So while the risks of selling salvaged product that has never been cooked are something supermarket executives may want to be cognizant of and, indeed, elect to avoid, if the product is properly cooked, shrink reduction is a goal compatible with food safety concerns.

The fact that more produce will be and must be sold in the ready-to-heat and ready-to-eat offerings of supermarkets is clear; likewise the fact that the expanded deli/foodservice operations of supermarkets are the likely place for much of this growth is also certain. But much of the potential depends on breaking down walls between departments and offering consumers the meals — rather than ingredients — they want. Deli directors can push hard in this direction, but it is supermarket chief executives who have the authority to break down these walls and put the focus solely on delighting consumers.

It is a big challenge, but if we are really going to align our retail operations with consumer habits, these departmental walls must come tumbling down. **DB**



James F. Prevor

2016



BEST OF CLASS

Wyngaard Kaas Chèvre Affiné Goat Gouda



Chèvre Affiné is a creamy goat's milk Gouda, ripened for 16 weeks in special caves in the Netherlands. This cheese has a full, lightly sweet flavor with hints of walnut and crème fraîche. Chèvre Affiné won BEST OF CLASS in its category at the 2016 World Championship Cheese Contest and is available exclusively from Gourmet Foods International.

www.gfifoods.com

by Lee Smith, Publisher

The Deli Is Not Just Another Department

After reading this issue, I was a little overwhelmed by the number of choices available to the modern deli department. Not only are there many products to choose from, there are also a multitude of formats ranging from self-service to full-service, vendor-supplied to made-in-store. Retailers must decide whether in-store restaurants, food bars, sushi counters, sandwich shops, etc., should be incorporated into the lineup.

So, the deli department becomes the anomaly of the supermarket world developmentally and operationally. For example, the typical employee progression starts with someone hired to be a bagger or cart collector, moving to cashier or grocery clerk. Most people start their careers at minimum wage, gradually winding their way through the system becoming more successful as they rise through the ranks.

Today, that kind of progression is much harder to accomplish, especially in the deli department. In many retailers there are cheese specialists with special education and certifications, trained culinary chefs, educators and department managers who work with a number of very diverse areas that require specialized skills.

Product selection is even harder. The mantra has always been, "if it doesn't sell, discontinue." There are reports, in-store data and slotting allowances to help mitigate risk but the bottom line is still to get rid of the products that are not selling. But, how does one decide if the mustard being used on sandwiches is the "best" mustard? There are no reports and/or guidelines. Should the buyer select the least expensive or choose a higher-end version?

Choosing a condiment is one of the simpler decisions. There are literally thousands of cheeses to choose from, huge selections of deli meats as well as every restaurant option found in America. Sandwich shop? BBQ? Chinese food bar? Sushi? Restaurant?

The new deli needs employees with specialized skills, and buyers need to make choices without the conventional tools to mitigate risk, but what about

equipment and build-out costs? In all other departments, change generally means a reset. Produce resets its departments throughout the year. Grocery resets its shelves less frequently, and there are labor costs but no capital expenditure. Deli? To put in a new program may require equipment, display cases, electrical outlets and plumbing. It's expensive and there is little chance of just discontinuing what doesn't sell.

A supermarket anomaly? Yes. The first step to a great supermarket deli is realizing that you can't be all things to all people. You need to narrow down the choices. In order to accomplish that you need extensive customer research into the unique marketplace and customer segment you wish to attract.

The second step is to take a careful look at capital expenditures, do a risk assessment and assess the R.O.I. After deciding what direction to take, a remodel is often necessary, equipment must be bought and employees trained.

To be great, focused decisions must be made. The decision-making process is more along the line of what a restaurant uses. Products, suppliers and equipment must be chosen before execution. Hiring and training must be decided before implementation. Do your stores have the demographics for a high-end cheese department? As a company, are you willing to hire and pay for educated associates? Or, should you subcontract the program to another supplier, maybe losing some profit margin but gain better execution?

While complicated, there is no doubt the deli department is a customer-driver. There is no question it is exciting, creative and futuristic. The deli, along with cheese, prepared foods and restaurant concepts, needs the brightest and most talented people in the business. For the right person, it is just a terrific place to be. **DB**



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

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DELI SANDWICHES: LARGER THAN LIFE AND HEALTHIER THAN EVER

**A new generation is redefining
one of America's favorites**

BY BOB JOHNSON

Even though the sale of deli sandwiches has grown more than 5 percent three years in a row, other deli categories like soup, dips, sauces and desserts still managed to outpace them in growth during that period.

However, deli operators who find creative ways to serve a new generation of consumers stand to reap even greater rewards by merchandising restaurant-quality sandwiches featuring a new and inventive variety of options.

"What once consisted of mostly pre-made sandwiches, rotisserie chicken, salad bars and prepared foods now includes complete meal solutions that are high quality and compete directly with restaurant offerings," says Mark Beierle, deli brand manager at Hormel Foods in Hormel, MN. "If retailers can offer these solutions to their shoppers at the right value and with an emphasis on quality, convenience, variety and freshness, they will be able to compete against restaurants."

For Millennials high-quality sandwiches feature ingredients that are more interesting than conventional fillings.

Larger Than Life

Today's deli sandwich customers are substituting spring mix, arugula, cabbage and spinach for lettuce, and also are looking for interesting cheese.

"Specialty Cheddars are growing quickly, as are Gruyère, Queso, Gouda, Fontina and Brie," according to the What's



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Jacob Powers
Assistant Sales Manager Service Deli
Safeway NorCal Division



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For recipes and more, visit: wildplanetfoodservice.com



PHOTO COURTESY OF BOULART

In Store 2016 report from the International Dairy Deli Bakery Association (IDDBA). “The fastest-growing specialty cheeses on sandwiches are Queso Fresco and Ricotta, followed by Colby, Gouda, Havarti and Pepper Jack.”

The wide variety of ingredients already behind the glass, including very high-quality options, give the deli a way to produce sandwiches that are clearly different in a good way from the competition.

“When it comes to sandwiches, quality and customization are key trends,” says Beierle. “Made-to-order sandwich stations continue to appeal to consumers in their ability to see the product being made with fresh ingredients and to their preferences.”

According to the What’s In Store 2016 report, bolder flavors are ascendant. For example, sriracha’s use in deli sandwiches has increased 2,389 percent since 2010, while Giardiniera use has increased 117 percent.

“Traditionally, the deli has always been a place customers purchase ingredients to take home and make the sandwich there,” says Kevin Rider, senior marketing manager at Dietz & Watson in Philadelphia. “Millennials are not just making bologna and cheese sandwiches. They are making unique, larger-than-life sandwiches. Sriracha chicken, for example, is an item they can take home.”

Dietz & Watson responded to the challenge recently by adding organic meats and rBST-free cheeses to its full line of deli meats and artisan cheeses.

The flavor craving also is revealing itself in the demand for bolder beef options.

“Deli beef has always been challenged to offer many creative flavor profiles, but Cajun, mesquite and Italian roast beefs are regional favorites,” says Bruce Belack, executive vice president for sales and marketing at Vincent Giordano meats in Philadelphia. “I do notice Cuban sand-

wiches are being offered more nationally, not just in Florida where they are quite popular.”

Clean-label meats produced with fewer additives are at the top of the list of high-end sandwich ingredients.

“The newest trend in sandwiches is to use the artisan deli products,” says Michael Cowherd, office manager for McKenzie Country Classics in Burlington, VT. “Our line is all-natural, antibiotic-free meat. All-natural meat is a premium product at any upscale deli.”

John and Nellie McKenzie began slow-curing ham on their Vermont farm at the end of the 19th century, and the company they founded still specializes in artisan meats and cheeses.

“The demand for all natural is growing every year,” says Cowherd. “We started our all-natural line seven or eight years ago with turkey, and since have added flavored lines. We have ham, roast beef and turkey, and we have different flavors in the ham. Our most popular are the maple syrup ham, with real Vermont maple syrup, and the Black Forest ham.”

There is a growing trend among the new wave of sandwich consumers to opt for meat that offers the promise of more nutritious eating.

“Overall, natural and organic products continue to experience double-digit growth in the grocery channel — and meat is no exception,” says Neil Leinwand, senior vice president of marketing at Applegate Farms in Bridgewater, NJ. “In fact, natural and organic meat sales are seeing accelerated growth, far outpacing conventional meat sales. New data from the Food Marketing Institute and North American Meat



PHOTO COURTESY OF BOULART

Institute show that conventionally raised and processed meat sales rose 3.8 percent, but natural and organic sales spiked by 23.5 percent and 31.5 percent, respectively.”

Clean-label meats continue to gain popularity as the key ingredient of upscale sandwiches.

When it comes to meat products an increasing number of consumers are looking for them to be antibiotic-free, free of artificial ingredients and preservatives, and GMO-ingredient free, says Leinwand. “Applegate pioneered the antibiotic-free deli meat category, and it continues to grow,” he says. “We are moving the bar forward on meeting consumer demand for clean-label products, and in July 2015 Applegate converted all products to be GMO-ingredient-free.”

You Say Bread, I Say Brioche

With a bakery just down the aisle, the deli is uniquely positioned to distinguish itself by offering more interesting and fresher bread for its sandwiches.

“Improving the bread used in sandwiches is a key to improving a grab-and-go sandwich program,” says Belack. “Many retailers are trying to improve their hot/cold salad bars to become a destination for lunch and dinner.”

Artisan and pretzel bread use are up more than 150 percent in the last five years as are brioche bread and rolls, while flatbread is up 46 percent, according to the What’s In Store 2016 report.

“Use fresh ingredients and in-store baked bread,” advises Michel Saillant, president of Boulart in Quebec, Canada. “Eighty-seven percent of consumers feel that fresh foods are healthier and 80 percent believe they’re tastier. Seventy-eight percent of consumers are making a stronger effort to eat more fresh versus processed foods.” He recommends offering foods that are clean, organic, and contain no GMOs, preservatives and additives.

Sandwiches can even be built around pairings of breads with unique companion ingredients.

“Offer classics with a twist,” says Saillant. “Logistically, retailers need to keep it simple but that doesn’t mean boring.” Current trends that operators can tap into include fermentation-pickled vegetables, flatbreads, garden tartines as well as a variety of sandwiches including Mediterranean, British brisket, Cuban, croque monsieur and sweet and savory.

Some bread makers have found particularly popular sandwich marriages between their products and turkey or chicken.

“What has worked well for sandwiches in general is poultry items — chicken and turkey — which is great with our multigrain cranberry panini bread or our original cranberry panini bread,” says Ann Rowe, vice president for sales USA at Backerhaus Veit in Mississauga, Ontario. “Latest trends in the deli are different types

of meats smoked over alder wood, applewood and mesquite, which go well on our multigrain, rye, and wheat and rye with herbs deli breads. Other trends are bold/spicy and different ethnicities, which are all great on our potato scallion bread or brioche vegan panini.”

Many unique sandwiches are built around ethnic or regional pairings of breads and proteins.

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Vietnamese bahn mi, Japanese teriyaki flavors and Caribbean Jerk are trending,” says Rowe. “I see Cuban and Latin varieties and Moroccan flavors being next. Seasoned breads and brioche are trending. Our multigrain ciabatta, black olive ciabatta bun, bold/spicy condiments, sweet jams and chutneys and pickled vegetables also are trending ingredients.”

In addition, BV’s jalapeño cornbread, brioche vegan and Bavarian pretzels are gaining in popularity, says Rowe. “Retailers need to keep up with trends and change with the times. They need to offer a variety of breads, rolls and pretzel sandwich products.”

Bread textures can be even more important than the flavor in attracting different consumers.

“The main regional difference is not only in the bread flavors but in the bread types and texture,” says Saillant. “Loaves are popular in the United States. French Canadians eat more baguettes. Some regions like their bread crusty, others like it soft. Our bread is 100-percent baked and blast frozen. The bread is re-baked from frozen and, depending on the preferences, can be baked longer for a crispier crust.”

Proximity to the bakery also gives the deli an opportunity to use sandwiches to help merchandise the breads next door.

“Providing a great experience and promoting each individual ingredient is important,” says Saillant.



Healthful Combinations

Young consumers in particular are drawn to convenient combinations that add up to a meal.

“A lot of sandwiches are merchandised pre-made and showcased behind the deli glass,” says Rowe. “When a customer picks a sandwich, it is heated either in a turbo chef [oven] or on a panini machine. They are often cross-merchandised with a beverage and a snack as a ‘combo’ package.”

Another area where the deli can distinguish itself is by combining sandwiches with snacks or drinks that are interesting

more healthful or both.

“We’ve noticed a trend toward health and wellness, toward clean label and all natural,” says Carl Cappelli, senior vice president of sales and business development at Don’s Food Products in Schwenksville, PA. “For the deli we have 20 clean-label grain salads. Three years ago we didn’t have any clean-label items.”

Don’s Food Products makes a line of grain, seafood and protein salads and sides, with a recently acquired emphasis on clean labels.

“When you go to a convenience store

► A PICKLE TO MATCH BOLD SANDWICHES

As in other areas of the sandwich program, bold is the byword when it comes to pickles.

“Strong flavors are the newest trends,” says Eric Girard, vice president of sales and marketing at Van Holten’s Inc., in Waterloo, WI. “We have seen several years of continued growth for Van Holten’s Pickle-In-A-Pouch. While all our pickle sales are growing, our Hot Pickles and Sour Pickles are growing the fastest. People are seeking bold, unique flavors.”

There are opportunities to use pickles and sandwiches to draw attention to each other through cross-merchandising.

“Bundling pickles with sandwiches or main dishes is the best way to sell more,” says Girard. “We’ve provided funds to help offer a free pickle with a sandwich. The promotional mention helps call attention to important sandwich-to-go programs that keep retailers competitive.”

The Van Holten product is shelf stable and comes in a package that can be prominently displayed near the sandwiches.

“Pickle-In-A-Pouch products come in a gusseted package that allows them to stand upright on the shelves,” says Girard. “Since they don’t require refrigeration, setting them on a deli counter

can be a great way to create impulse purchases.”

There also is growing interest in pickles that are not shelf stable and must be refrigerated.

“Farm Ridge Foods has taken a dominant position in the refrigerated pickle category,” says Patty Amato — aka Pickle Patty — director of sales at Farm Ridge Foods in Islandia, NY. “We are passionate about our pickles and are showing over 50-percent year-to-date growth. These figures do not include all of the new business we have brought in or our private label business.”

Farm Ridge promotes a product that is hydro-cooled to give crispness and vibrant color. It’s also GMO free, fat free, gluten free, low calorie and lower sodium compared to competitors.

Some retailers offer pickles made in-store. And while they compete with other pickle products, these artisan options nevertheless bring positive attention to the entire category.

“House-made pickles may take away from us from time-to-time, but it calls overall attention to the category,” says Girard. “I think a rising tide lifts all boats. Pickles are great, refreshing snacks when it’s hot outside, so we see a small bump in the summer. That said, we have pretty strong sales all year long.”

DB

and buy a sandwich you can get sides,” says Cappelli. “Retailers can offer different sides. They can offer healthier side options. Instead of a soda and a bag of chips, you can get a bottle of water and a grain salad. Consumers want convenient, flavorful grab-and-go items. Retailers are doing more and more clean-label prepared foods.”

Parents in particular are looking for more healthful ingredients in the sandwiches they make for their kids.

“When making sandwiches at home for their kids, 80 percent of parents say freshness is most important,” according to What’s In Store 2016. “Healthy options and lean proteins also are important. Menu developers are encouraged to add veggies to sandwich programs like tomatoes and carrots. Inherent health is important too, like using whole-grain bread instead of white bread.”

Millennials, however, are leading the consumer movement toward more healthful ingredients in their larger-than-life sandwiches.

“Healthy eating options are important to these shoppers, triggering upgraded offerings such as fresh sandwiches, wraps,



PHOTO COURTESY OF HORMEL

salads and cold-pressed juices at large convenience chains,” according to What’s In Store 2016.

I’m Late, I’m Late, For A Very Important...

Today’s customers are in a terrible hurry, and the deli can offer convenience by selecting a few popular sandwiches that are interesting and high end, and can be made in advance so the customer does not have to wait.

“The next big trend is on-the-go sandwich purchases,” says Rider. “Millennials are time starved. They buy made-to-order behind the glass where you pick your meat, cheese and bread as you go. They are making their shopping trip and want something quick and convenient but high end. The key is to get behind the lifestyle approach.”

These pre-made sandwiches fit the popular profile of meals already prepared and ready to eat.

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"In recent market research, 64 percent of those individuals polled said they had purchased a prepared meal from a grocery store within the last month," says Saillant.

Although they are prepared, and ready to grab, these sandwiches must still be fresh.

"Balance convenience without compromising the freshness of products," says Rowe. "What I mean by that is to have sandwiches ready to serve or made quickly, but not sitting around in a refrigerator for four or five days."

Part of the time-starved lifestyle worth noting is the desire for protein-rich breakfast options on-the-go, as evidenced by Starbuck's 29-percent increase in sales of breakfast sandwiches in its first quarter.

There are frequently under-explored opportunities for sandwiches for consumers looking for convenient protein on their way to work.

"High protein and convenience have overtaken traditional breakfast items, as sales of fresh breakfast items like deli breakfast sandwiches, deli omelets, donuts and muffins are increasing," according to What's In Store 2016. "Thirty-eight percent of consumers eat breakfast away

from home at least once a week, and the most preferred items are the most labor-intensive. Forty-eight percent select breakfast sandwiches; 47 percent choose potatoes; and 35 percent purchase pancakes. Less than 15 percent prefer more quickly prepared foods, such as yogurt, fruit or cereal."

Delis developing a breakfast sandwich program find nutritious options are the most popular, including eggs or egg whites, flatbreads, thin bagels or wraps, as well as vegetables and flavorful sauces beyond mayonnaise.

Show Your Stuff

When the deli offers new, more interesting and healthful sandwich options, it is worth investing the time to devise ways of letting consumers know what is available.

"Marketing cannot be overlooked in the deli. It needs to be made clear to the consumer that retailers offer a viable alternative to fast-casual foodservice," says Beierle. "Promoting sandwich offerings — leveraging seasonality, global cuisine and local ingredients — are all good ways to attract shoppers in the deli."

Striking graphics can open the door to the array of innovative, more nutritious sandwich options.

"In-store signage really seems to be the way to alert shoppers that you have something new and they should take a look," says Mike Seeger, vice president of sales at Tribe Mediterranean Foods, Taunton, MA.

The display visuals — like floor graphics or shelf talkers — should draw attention to the uniquely high-quality ingredients available in a deli sandwich.

"You need to create a visually interesting display but what also counts is the quality of the product and the storytelling behind it," says Saillant. "A great Italian mortadella with a nice local cheese and organic sweet tomatoes on a freshly baked non-GMO bread is sexy without being complicated. New doesn't always have to be challenging or funky."

The sandwiches and exciting deli and bakery ingredients available just a few feet away can help merchandise each other.

"Use cross-merchandising tools," suggests Saillant. "Create a synergy between your prepared foods section and your bakery department. Millennials already buy prepared foods and meals at the supermarket but crave a more enticing, upbeat, healthier, fresher, engaging experience in-store."

This synergy has substantial potential to increase total sales in and around the deli.

"Cross-merchandising with other categories or offering bundling opportunities for consumers to create a full meal is an opportunity for retailers to capture higher basket ring," says Beierle.

Some suppliers get actively involved in helping their retailer customers at the store level as they develop programs.

"We do in-store training with the retailers on how to slice the product, and how to put signage in place," says Rider.

Other producers also offer programs to help deli retailers optimize the merchandising and cross-merchandising opportunities.

"At Boulart we believe that making great bread is only half the story," says Saillant. "We offer services to help retailers create a better customer experience. We understand the space, the need and the consumer. We pride ourselves on staying ahead of trends and knowing what your customers will be asking for next. We have a foodservice and prepared foods program designed to elevate their offerings and better their bottomline."

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► CONDIMENTS AS CLEAN AND INTERESTING AS THE SANDWICH

Condiments can be one more area the deli can demonstrate a commitment to clean labels.

According to Innova, 91 percent of consumers think a cleaner label means ingredients that they can recognize, says Margi Gunter, brand manager at Litehouse in Sandpoint, ID. "Products don't necessarily need to be organic or non-GMO. Sandwiches are still the largest-selling item for delis, and consumers like traditional with a twist.

"At Litehouse we've begun developing flavored mayonnaise in individual packets," she says. "More and more retailers are putting sandwich bars in their stores, and now consumers can have a delicious, savory new flavor, yet 'traditional' condiment."

Sometimes the new flavor and texture come from using familiar foods as new ingredients for sandwiches.

"There are condiments consumers are not necessarily seeing for the first time but are seeing differently," says Mike Seeger, vice president of sales at Tribe Mediterranean Foods in Taunton, MA. "Hummus is a prime example. Where people would put ketchup on a burger, you'll now find them using our Fiery Sriracha Hummus. Condiments aren't just coming out of bottles anymore; they're coming out of bowls."

"Consumers have been looking for dual-purpose products," Seeger says. "Take Tribe, for example. In addition to dipping, consumers have been using our hummus as a condiment on everything from sandwiches to salads. And our latest offering, Tribe Ranch Hummus, really straddles that line of being both a dip and a condiment."

As sriracha goes mainstream and Giardiniera emerges, many consumers are more willing ever than before to experiment in their use of ingredients.

"Condiments are getting more popular as consumers are seemingly willing to experiment with foods they already like," says Seeger. "It's the same with hummus. They know they like the original, so they want to experiment with other flavors, and everyone is making them healthier and hotter, and nothing is off limits."

Condiments are yet another opportunity for the sandwich program to anchor cross-merchandising opportunities.

"The grab-and-go trend is still continuing to build," says Litehouse's Gunter. "Retailers that provide complementary options grouped together are going to get the higher ring at checkout. Give consumers the ideas on how to use the products you're selling, and they'll grab both."

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POWERFUL OPPORTUNITIES FOR FRESH PRODUCE IN THE DELI



Hybrid offerings, popularity of convenience shopping are key drivers

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER

The power of produce is huge. It's far-reaching too. Beyond the beautifully displayed array of fruits and vegetables that pull shoppers into the supermarket produce department first, these fresh foods have the dynamic ability to increase sales in other departments too. This is especially true of the deli.

"Consumers are looking to add more nutrient dense foods into their diet," says Janis Paoli, vice president of business development for Tracy, CA-headquartered Taylor Farm's deli division. "By adjusting the product mix in the service deli from all mayonnaise-based salads such as potato and macaroni to include more vegetable-based options, not only is the operator offering more healthful choices and helping shoppers to increase their con-

sumption, but they can improve the visual appeal of their case with more natural color. Fresh fruits and vegetables have a 'health halo,' which can improve the image of the entire deli department."

Freshness is the No. 1 driver of satisfaction in the deli, according to research, *Engaging the Evolving Shopper: Serving the New American Appetite*, by the Madison, WI-based International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association. More specifically, 37 percent of Millennials (ages 18 to 35) and 49 percent of Boomers (ages 50 to 74) gave excellent ratings to the freshness of the deli offerings in their preferred store. Factors such as environment, menu, nutrition information, unique items, wide variety, value and healthy foods ranked after freshness in descending order.

"Use fresh herbs in a pasta salad and you instantly communicate freshness without even having to verbalize it," says Adolph Zarovinsky, president of Tiffany Gate Foods, Inc., a Toronto-headquartered designer and manufacturer of fresh gourmet salad solutions for supermarkets in Canada and the U.S. "Fresh produce grabs the customer's attention. In addition to more than just sales, fresh produce enhances the image of the deli too."

Deli categories that incorporate produce chiefly fall into prepared foods, including deli salads, sides, entrees and platters. This sector accounted for 11.8 percent of deli dollar sales during the 52-weeks ending January 30, 2016, according to data supplied by the Chicago-based Nielsen Perishables Group. Add to this the deli salad bar's 1.6 percent contribution to deli sales and it means fresh



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produce has the potential to impact the sales of products that represent nearly one-sixth of all deli dollars.

There are three main opportunities for produce retailers and suppliers alike to increase the ring of fresh fruits and vegetables and deli products too.

Cross-Merchandising Works

Produce shoppers look for meal-making ingredients while deli customers want something ready-to-eat.

"This is why we'll cross merchandise bagged salads next to the rotisserie chicken. It's an easy meal solution," explains Paul Kneeland, vice president of fresh merchandising at Fresh Formats, an Ahold company established in 2014 to explore and develop new format opportunities.

Fresh-cut fruits are ideal to incorporate into a self-serve deli cold case. "We offer customers the convenience of grabbing fresh-cut fruit, parfaits and other treats in our deli as an accompaniment to their sub sandwich or hot case selection," explains Maria Brous, director of media and community relations at Public Super Markets, Inc., an 1,100-plus store chain headquartered in Lakeland, FL.

Single-serve fresh-cut vegetables are another easy fit in the deli. "Offer baby carrots from the produce department in place of a bag of chips in a deli sandwich program," recommends Bob Borda, vice president of organic sales for Grimmway Farms, in Bakersfield, CA. "Operators can choose our 1.6-ounce, 2-ounce or 3-ounce bags in order to achieve the price point they desire."

Carrots and other fresh-cut vegetables can be positioned with dips, hummus, salsa

and guacamole in the deli for snacking.

"We do all our value-added produce in-house now," says Jeff Fairchild, produce merchandising director at New Seasons Market, a 16-store chain headquartered in Portland, OR. "So in the morning, we put items such as cut pineapple and berry cups in the deli. In the afternoon, our house-made guacamole and salsa. The deli gives us space in its grab-and-go case."

Punch Up The Produce

The produce needs of the deli can be very advantageous for retail and foodservice suppliers alike.

"We have good communication with our produce department, especially in terms of the distribution channels already established for locally-grown and specialty produce," explains John Stueland, deli category manager for Lund Food Holdings, Inc., parent company of Lunds & Byerlys, a 27-store chain based in Edina, MN. "For example, there were local microgreens in the produce department, because we brought them into deli to use on our salad bar. The same with heirloom tomatoes. We feature a 'wow' item of the month on the salad bar, and recently we featured kallettes."

The deli can help prevent shrink or returns in produce. "There may be red bell peppers that come in that aren't cosmetically perfect and won't sell well in produce. The deli doesn't care. The chefs over there are just going to chop them up," explains New Season's Fairchild.

Supermarket chains, such as Publix, once sourced fresh ingredients such as lettuce and tomatoes from its produce departments. "Today, our delis source

directly from suppliers to aid in quality specifications and reduced labor impacts," says Brous.

High-volume produce used by the deli has traditionally targeted sandwich making and salad bars. "The big five are tomatoes, lettuce, onions, kale and green leaf lettuce," says Kelly Jacob, vice president of retail and emerging channels for Pro*Act, LLC, a fresh produce distributor based in Monterey, CA.

Produce suppliers, such as Mann Packing, have found a home in the retail deli for its Simply Singles, a line of washed ready-to-eat single leaves of lettuce in romaine, green leaf, red leaf and iceberg varieties.

"These leaves come in 5- or 10-pound bulk," says Gina Nucci, director of healthy culinary innovation at Mann Packing Co. Inc., in Salinas, CA. "We sell to the deli in retailers that have a kitchen or prep area, to a commissary if the store has a pre-made sandwich program, or to foodservice distributors that cater to the deli if a deli wants to consolidate their orders. It all depends on the needs of the retailer," she says.

Delis can upsell sandwiches by offering more unique produce. "Shoppers at the sandwich counter should be able to custom order their condiments like they do their meats and cheeses. For example, charge extra by offering add-ons like arugula," suggests Tiffany Gate's Zarovinsky.

Innovative foodservice companies offer delis a way to expand their palette of produce. For example, Mann Packing offers bulk packs of sugar snap peas, which are washed and ready to put on the salad bar. In addition, the company has introduced a new line of washed, peeled and ready-to-roast vegetables such as golden beets.

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Once roasted, they can be added to salads or risottos or used as a pizza topping.

There are two advantages of sourcing deli produce from foodservice distributors, according to Lund's Stueland. "First, we have such a high volume that we often need 20 and 40 pounds of produce. Trying to source this from the produce department, where products are packaged in household sizes, means extra packaging, which we don't want to have to pay for plus throwing out all the packaging isn't good for the environment. Secondly, there are some items that don't have a retail counterpart. For example, matchstick cut beets. This is only a foodservice item."

Beets, hard squash, mushrooms, baby potatoes, corn and fennel are some of the selections on Lunds' salad bars in the fall and winter while summer garden veggies like zucchini and summer squash are predominant in the summer. In this way, the deli like the produce department reflects seasonality. Additionally, Lund's chefs will take fresh produce and create inspired salads. These include a 'power greens' slaw, roasted Brussels sprouts with pancetta and a Vietnamese salad made with all the veggies found in spring rolls cut fine and tossed

together with an Asian dressing.

Use Kits To Compete

Deli operators who don't have the services of an in-store chef look to produce suppliers to provide component kits for salad and/or food bars and upscale behind-the-glass offerings.

"We have hundreds of behind-the-glass kits developed and in production with many that are regionally focused to meet retailers' needs. Broccoli Crunch has been a favorite for years and in most retailers started out as a store-made recipe. This was a labor-intensive process and was often inconsistent between batches and between stores. Our Broccoli Crunch kit offers fresh broccoli crowns, shredded broccoli, dressing, precooked bacon, diced red onions and sunflower seeds all with an easy mix bag. What once took employees an hour to make can easily be mixed in minutes and with no dishes. Our product list includes many varieties of coleslaw, chicken salad as well as kits with vegetables and grains, beans, cooked pasta, to name a few," explains Taylor Farms' Paoli.

Manufacturers, such as Taylor Farms and Tiffany Gate, see a greater use of

grains such as quinoa and spelt, beans and pasta combined with vegetables like butternut squash, beets, kale and edamame; greater requests for organic fruit and vegetable ingredients; and interest in vegetable replacements for carb conscious customers such as the use of cauliflower in deli staples like mashed potatoes and macaroni and cheese.

Beyond salads, roasted vegetables are an emerging trend in the deli. "We offer both pre roasted vegetables or kits that include ready-to-roast vegetables with various seasoned oils — with options such as Brussels sprouts, tri colored carrots and cauliflower to name a few. Rotisserie chickens are usually one of the top selling items in the service deli and being able to quickly complete a meal with a healthy vegetable option meets the needs of time pressed consumers," says Taylor Farm's Paoli.

The real benefit of incorporating more fresh fruits and vegetables into deli offerings isn't just about increasing one department's ring, says Tiffany Gate's Zarovinsky. "Fresh produce makes the deli even more of an eye candy department that drives shoppers in store." **DB**

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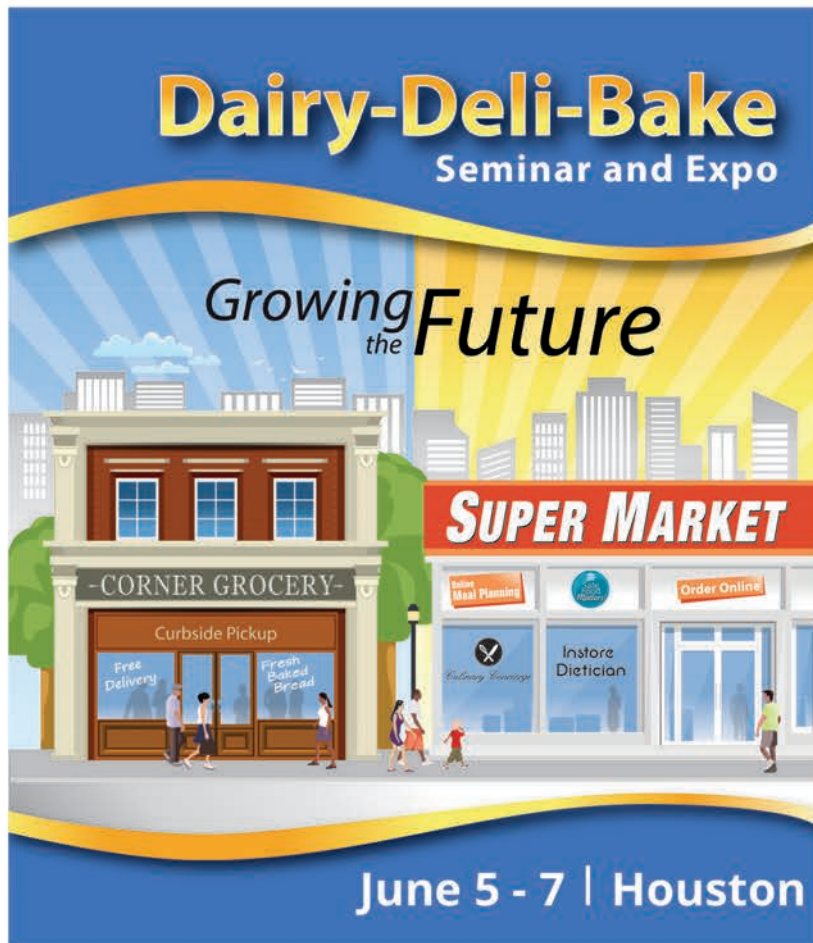
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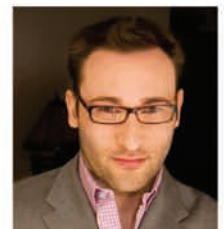
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RIBS AND WINGS ARE SUPER POPULAR



Eating them is as much about the experience as the food itself

BY BARRY SPARKS

Chicken wings and pork ribs are two of the most popular foods in the United States. If you doubt it, consider these facts: During Super Bowl week, Americans consumed 1.3 billion chicken wings and 10 million pounds of ribs.

"Chicken wings have been the fastest-growing item in the deli," says Eric LeBlanc, vice president, marketing-deli, for Tyson Foods, Inc., based in Springdale, AK. "We were seeing 15-percent growth year after year until a couple years ago when sales leveled off because of the limited supply."

"Pork ribs have never been more popular," says Doug Renfro, president of Renfro Foods, a Fort Worth, TX-based food producer of barbecue sauces, salsa and relishes. "You know ribs are popular when Prince Harry eats at Rendezvous in Memphis and Jimmy Fallon talks about them on the 'Tonight Show.'"

Besides popularity, wings and ribs share other characteristics. They are seasonal and eating them is as much about the experience as the food itself.

A Sports Connection

Most wings are consumed from October through April. Or, from a sports

point-of-view, from football season through the NCAA Final Four. "Wings are the food product most associated with football, the most popular sport in America," says LeBlanc.

Ribs are most popular from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Phil Burger, vice president, Burgers' Smokehouse in California, MO, says tailgating season and the Super Bowl provide spikes during the off-season. According to Renfro, 70 percent of his company's barbecue sauce sales occur between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

Wings and ribs are typically associated with special get-togethers. They are seldom consumed alone.

"Chicken wings are a fun food," says LeBlanc. "They are associated with parties, tailgating, sports and getting together with friends. Eating them is part of a total experience."

Burger believes ribs are an indulgence for most people. And they select special times to consume them.

While wings and ribs share some characteristics, their demographics differ. Millennials and Generation X males, ages 18 to 45, are driving the consumption of wings. And because of the younger age group, LeBlanc expects the demand

to remain strong for years to come. The major demographic for ribs is the 35- to 50-year-old age group, which has more money and is willing and able to indulge more frequently.

Part of the appeal of wings and ribs comes from the moist, juicy meat that has extra flavor from being cooked on the bone. The availability of multiple flavored sauces enhances the appeal.

Whether it is wings or ribs, consumers are looking for flavors that push the limits. Fourteen months ago Renfro Foods added two flavors, chipotle and ghost pepper, to its classic hickory-flavored barbecue sauce. Now chipotle is the company's best-selling sauce.

"A percentage of consumers are looking for flavors not in the marketplace," says Renfro. "They prefer a kick [chipotle] or something really hot [ghost pepper]."

Growing Demand For More Heat

Renfro Foods has paid close attention to the changing tastes of consumers, including their growing demand for more heat. Several years ago it added chipotle and ghost pepper flavors to its cheese sauces and sales quadrupled. A logical next step was to add those flavors to its barbecue sauces.



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There are almost an endless variety of wing sauce flavors, including Asian-style, Mediterranean-inspired, sweet and sticky, as well as hot and spicy. Despite the variety LeBlanc says Buffalo and barbecue wings equally make up 90 percent of the market, while all the other flavors account for the remaining 10 percent. While other flavors exist LeBlanc says expanding the selection can lead to increased loss or shrinkage.

Although neither wings nor ribs are typically the choice of the health-conscious eater, moderation tends to be the key.

"Many people who enjoy ribs are not worried about their health," says Burger. "But they are not eating them every day, either. I liken ribs to bacon; they are wonderful treats."

While health may not be high on the list for rib consumers, it's not completely off the radar. Renfro Foods recently reworked its classic hickory barbecue sauce, which was formulated in the 1970s. It originally contained gluten, high-fructose corn syrup and artificial coloring. The newest version has eliminated those ingredients and sales have increased.

Burger says ribs are an excellent product for delis and grocery stores because few home cooks are willing to take the time, or risk, required to slow cook ribs.

They also have a long shelf life, due in part to the high-pressure pasteurization, or HPP, process. HPP is a nonthermal, cold-processing technique in which food in its final flexible packaging is subjected to high levels of hydrostatic pressure, inactivating microorganisms, extending the shelf life and guaranteeing the food safety of the

product, according to Hiperbaric, the leading manufacturer of HPP equipment.

Multiple Options For Retailers

Ribs and wings also present multiple options for retailers. Ribs can be sold dry or wet, and they are a heat-and-serve item. Ribs are delivered to stores dry. Store staff members or customers can apply barbecue sauce, which Burger says is like putting dressing on a salad.

Wings can be marketed cold or hot. Many delis start by marketing them cold for several days and within a day of their shelf life, heat them up and sell them hot. This tends to minimize shrinkage.

LeBlanc says there's an advantage in offering wings, both cold and hot. Cold wings in the deli are more visible, while hot wings on a bar are a high-impulse purchase. Impulse sales increase significantly when wings are hot and ready to consume. A hot wings bar offers an ideal grab-and-go, self-serve food. To increase exposure LeBlanc suggests taking wings out of the deli and moving them to a refrigerated end cap.

"It's simple," he says. "The more visible wings are, the greater the sales. You have to see them to buy them."

LeBlanc says many delis can do a better job of marketing and promoting wings. Stores often decorate with a football theme, promot-

ing food products. Too often, however, the promotion doesn't extend to the deli or include prepared foods, such as wings.

He suggests connecting with Millennials, a major demographic, outside of the store by using digital media, particularly during non-peak times. While many grocery stores use digital media to promote products, prepared foods are sometimes ignored.

Increasing wing purchases has a trickle-down effect, according to LeBlanc. The intent to purchase other deli products skyrockets for 30 days after a purchase. Customers may think about purchasing rotisserie chicken following a wing purchase.

Delis can easily offer restaurant-quality wings and ribs. Because delis batch cook wings and hold them as opposed to restaurants cooking and serving them, chicken wings require more moisture when held, according to LeBlanc. Since delis are concerned about undercooking wings, he says the tendency is to overcook them. He emphasizes the need to cook wings at the correct temperature and follow directions to optimize flavor and taste.

Burger says because a smokehouse seasons the ribs and uses a consistent cooking process, it can ensure the flavor, consistency and quality.

DB



Redefining Weeknight Dinner



Culinary Visions Panel's new research takes deep dive into consumer habits

BY SHARON OLSON

Sometimes the greatest opportunities to enhance customer value are in providing desirable and affordable options to make everyday experiences exceptional. Weeknight dinner is the classic experience ready for reinvention. This year's consumer study explored what's on the weeknight menu at home and away from home for modern deli consumers.

Culinary Visions Panel surveyed more than 2,000 consumers to explore their

evolving definition of cooking and the factors that influence their choices for dinner during the week. The focus of the study was to measure consumer reaction to innovative offerings from the deli that could potentially reinvigorate dinner at home.

Consumer resources for weeknight dinner have typically been cooking, heating up prepared food, eating out or ordering in from a restaurant. The typical consumer's hectic lifestyle often leads him or her

to work from a limited number of habitual choices for weeknight dinner to feed themselves and their families. When searching for weeknight dinner ideas, recipes from a variety of sources fill the initial pages of an Internet search. Most recipes provide dinners that are quick, easy, delicious and healthful. This study set out to explore consumer habits, challenges and expectations for weeknight dinner that could point toward opportunities for delis to capture a larger share of this meal occasion.

What's Cooking?

Consumers who participated in this study were representative of the population and distributed across the country, 54 percent were female, 46 percent male. The majority (52 percent) of those surveyed said they were cooking at home about the same amount as the previous year; 40 percent said they were cooking at home more often. Younger consumers under age 39 were more likely to say they were cooking more often at home than older consumers.

The definition of “cooking” has been a moving target over the years as more speed-scratch or chef-ready types of ingredients have given consumers with limited time or cooking skills the satisfaction of cooking a meal. In this study, consumers were presented with a number of phrases and asked to check all they believed to be accurate definitions of cooking. “Cooking from a recipe with raw ingredients” was noted by 77 percent of those surveyed. Other definitions of cooking also gained sizable responses including:

- 61 percent—Assembling ingredients that include a convenient item like a fully prepared sauce or seasoning mix
- 45 percent—Using leftovers to create a new meal
- 37 percent—Warming up or plating prepared food

With these broad definitions of cooking, it was not surprising that 65 percent of the consumers surveyed said they enjoyed cooking, and less than 5 percent said they hated to cook. Among those who enjoy cooking, 10 percent expressed emotional satisfaction describing cooking as therapy. There was little difference between men and women on their enjoyment of cooking.

Weeknight Dining Habits

Weeknight dinner is dominated by meals prepared and enjoyed at home. Whether it is prepared in haste or made with leftovers, it is rarely skipped. Eighty-five percent of consumers said they almost never skipped dinner on weeknights. Consumers under 39 years old were more likely than the overall survey audience to skip dinner, and consumers age 52 or older were least likely to skip dinner.

Eating dinner at home four to five times per week was the choice for 41 percent of the consumers surveyed. When dining at home, 37 percent said they ordered delivery at least once during the week, and 42 percent said they warmed up leftovers or



threw something together from ingredients on hand once a week. Younger consumers, ages 22-39, were more likely than the total audience in the survey to go out for dinner or to order delivery. Frozen meals are not a favorite for dinner during the week either. Seventy-three percent of consumers said they almost never heat up a frozen meal for dinner.

Weeknights are not often a night for dining experiences away from home. Seventy-six percent of consumers said they almost never go out for dinner on weeknights, and 85 percent said they almost never eat at a friend or family member's home. When they do dine out, their favorite places are chain restaurants and those offering specialty ethnic foods like Mexican, Chinese and Italian. Most consumers offered up specific names of restaurants they enjoyed for dinner during the week; bar and grill concepts and quick service restaurants were mentioned most often.

When cooking at home, 37 percent of consumers said they sometimes like to try new dishes, but most of the time they like to stick with their favorites. Yet 48 percent expressed a sense of culinary adventure by noting they always or usually like to try new dishes and flavors. Although consumers generally express interest in healthy options, only 3 percent say that what they eat is determined primarily by their concern for health and wellness.

Favorite dishes to cook at home for din-

ner include chicken more often than any other protein. A wide variety of favorite chicken preparations were shared. Variations included healthy, flavorful and fried. Pasta was favored as an entrée or a side dish, with macaroni and cheese and spaghetti and meatballs as the most popular variations. Among ethnic foods, Mexican and Italian dishes received the most mentions. For one-item meals, pizza was favored much more than casserole dishes.

Weeknight Dining Challenges

The study also delved into some of the obstacles that prevented consumers from cooking at home. Time was much more of a concern than money for consumers; 38 percent said their primary challenge was the length of preparation time, while only 17 percent said it was the expense. Even though relatively few consumers said they ate out at a restaurant regularly during the week, 36 percent felt it was easier to eat out.

This was a question that created much discussion with more than 500 consumers who were eager to share their challenges. Among the obstacles to cooking at home is deciding what to cook. Even those who knew what they wanted to make complained that forgetting an ingredient threw a wrench in their dinner plans. Some committed home cooks expressed frustration at having to go to several stores to get all of the ingredients they needed for a recipe.



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Cooking for special dietary needs, either for themselves or family members, tested the imagination and motivation of many home cooks who wanted easy and delicious meals at home. The continual need to find interesting dinner choices without all of the ingredients on hand, dampened the motivation of many otherwise enthusiastic home cooks.

Weeknight Dining Solutions

When consumers were asked for ideas on what supermarkets could do to encourage them to cook more often at home, there was a wide range of answers, most of which related to making the shopping experience more convenient, including online ordering for pick up and home delivery.

Only 37 percent of consumers said they were likely to stop by their local grocery store to get something from the prepared food section. For the majority of those surveyed, this is not part of their consideration set when looking for a convenient solution for dinner.

Consumer expectations for prepared foods from the deli include traditional favorites like rotisserie chicken as well as

items one might more often associate with a restaurant dining experience, like pizza. Consumers expect fresh food from the deli and consider the deli a destination for healthy choices. Variety and the ability to customize the components of a complete meal are also important aspects of prepared food offerings.

Although many consumers look to the deli prepared foods section for a wide variety of side dishes, many others expressed an interest in having all of the components of a complete meal available, to allow the consumer to customize a meal of their choice with a fully cooked entrée, side, salad and dessert option.

When purchasing prepared foods in the deli, clear descriptions of ingredients and cooking or heating instructions are a must. Fresh ingredients and cleanliness added to the appeal of prepared foods.

Forty percent of consumers said meal kits that included a collection of fresh ingredients — in exactly the right proportions to make a meal at home with step-by-step instructions — would encourage them to cook more during the week. When asked how interested they would be in purchasing a meal kit of this type at their local

supermarket, 77 percent said they would be interested. Less than one percent of those surveyed had already tried making dinner with a meal kit, yet the idea was captivating.

What appealed most about the meal kit was that it would be a hassle-free way to save time in preparing a satisfying weeknight dinner. The notion that it would help the consumer cook like a chef appealed to 35 percent of those surveyed, and 29 percent liked the idea of getting restaurant quality at home. Without being given a price, 32 percent said a meal kit would be a great value to them.

The meal kit appealed to both seasoned cooks and those who liked it as a learning opportunity. Some described the concept as “a problem solver.” Since the meal creation would be a hands-on experience it was felt the food would be healthier, more delicious and easy to customize for the tastes of their family.

When presented with various options for meal kits available from their local grocery store, the following were among the top scoring non-price attributes: customization, single person or family size options and healthy choices. Easy pick up at the store would make more than half of those surveyed more likely to purchase the meal kit; 39 percent said home delivery would make them more likely to make the purchase.

Positioning The Deli For Dinner

The deli is the perfect place to serve up dinner solutions for modern consumers who like to eat at home during the week and enjoy a fresh, restaurant quality experience. Convenience and quality drive the dinner occasion, yet consumers are more than willing to be hands-on when preparing their meal.

The competition for weeknights is less from restaurants than it is from innovative start up ventures like meals kits that enable consumers to create their own dining experience at home. Delis that give their customers variety and flexible solutions will win a place in the weeknight dining decision process.

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Sharon Olson is executive director of Culinary Visions Panel, a division of Olson Communications based in Chicago. 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.





MEXICAN MAKES INROADS IN DELIS

Potential is huge as demographics for these items continues to grow

BY LISA WHITE

Supermarkets that are not incorporating Mexican dishes into prepared food offerings are missing out on a big opportunity.

The demographic for these products is quickly expanding, as Mexican foods become part of the American mainstream. According to a recent survey by Statista, a New York, NY-based research firm, more than 71 percent of American households use Mexican foods and ingredients.

“The Hispanic shoppers’ buying power will hit \$1.7 trillion by 2019,” says Daniel Alire, director of national sales at Denver-based Colorado Ranchers, Inc., maker of Queso Campesino products. “The Hispanic shoppers who buy fresh and traditional are not impressed by national brands and are loyal to the brands and tastes they grew up with.”

Deli department prepared food programs appear to be the next major frontier for growth in the Mexican food segment.

“Ethnic food trends are on the rise, and Mexican is a favorite cuisine behind American and Italian,” says Rachel P. Cullen, president and chief executive of

Denison, TX-based Ruiz Food Products Inc. “However, Mexican entrées are underpenetrated in typical delis.”

Deli fresh prepared is the fastest-growing perimeter department, growing nearly 10 percent in the 52 weeks ending Nov. 9, 2015, according to Chicago-based IRI’s FMI Top Trends–IRI POS data report. Freshly prepared food from the deli will continue to be a growth driver for retailers.

In addition, the same report found Mexican performed strongly as a subcategory in deli entrées, up 10 percent in the last year.

To capitalize on the potential of these products, it’s important to be aware of the evolving trends in flavors and ingredients as well as the emerging product lines from manufacturers.

The Trends

With Mexican foods becoming a staple among American meals, consumers are increasingly looking for high-end items in supermarkets versus restaurants.

“Consumers are also interchanging Mexican foods with traditional American

staples, like adding guacamole to mac and cheese for a unique twist on an old favorite,” says Jessica Brown, sales and marketing coordinator at Los Angeles-based Yucatan Foods. “Increasing the offerings of quality Mexican foods will keep consumers from cross-shopping in-store departments and thus drive dollar sales in the deli department.”

As Americans become more familiar with authentic Mexican foods, they also have become more aware of what traditional ingredients are used to make them.

In many cases, this is paralleling food trends in general. For example, with the growing trend in healthful eating and the focus on clean labels, companies producing these items also are emphasizing authenticity.

And just as high-quality regional Mexican fare has been making big inroads in foodservice, it also has been accomplishing this in the deli department.

“As more and more consumers enjoy the restaurant experience with exciting, upscale high-quality Mexican food, their expectation is that those same experiences

should be replicated in the grocery store deli,” says Ricardo Baez, president of Don Pancho Authentic Mexican Foods, headquartered in Salem, OR. “This presents an opportunity for deli departments to capitalize on this new and exciting trend.

This product category has expanded in recent years to include more than refried beans and enchiladas. Different components have come into play, which provide added opportunities for retailers.

“[Many are not aware that] guacamole is one of the fastest-growing dips in the deli department,” says Brown.

As manufacturers of Mexican foods pay closer attention to consumer trends, today’s products are more apt to be on the cutting edge of clean labels and healthful foods.

For example, Don Pancho organic non-GMO tortillas provide a healthy wrap for nutritious ingredients like vegetables and proteins.

Flavor profiles also have become more unique and traditional.

“The robust flavors in Mexican foods are rooted in the vibrant spices, like chili, which develop a deeper, more complex flavor experience,” says Baez.

More retailers are now looking for traditional rather than cheap Mexican items. Like with other food items, the focus is on value, not price.

Bronx, NY-based Cibao Meat Products Inc. offers chorizo, authentic Mexican sausage made with high-quality ingredients.

“Right now more people are seeking gluten-free and organic Mexican products,” says Edgar Soto, Cibao’s vice president of sales and marketing. “Also, Americans are looking for spicy items that are more flavorful.”

With the big increase in traditional Mexican flavors at restaurants, customers are trying to duplicate those traditional flavors in their homes.

“The deli departments are focused on meeting the needs of these customers with high-quality regional quesos and cremas,” says Alire. “Most first-generation Hispanics are used to buying in bulk or by the quantity they will use for that particular meal.”

Best Sellers

When looking at what is selling well at the store level, the newest Mexican selections in the deli department are traditional items that are becoming more



mainstream due to the increase in demand for authentic foods.

This is also one category where brand loyalty is evident, as retailers seek quality and product consistency.

“Consumers are seeking out brands that specialize in Mexican foods because they view these brands as masters of their trade and have confidence in the brands’ true flavors,” says Brown.

There have been a number of product launches in this segment geared specifically for supermarket delis. For example, Cibao Meat Products unveiled a sausage foodservice pack size for deli foodservice.

The company also offers chorizo with yellow rice, a Mexican dish with widespread appeal.

More recent Mexican food offerings in the deli department include organic enchiladas, burritos and casseroles. Many items, like pork carnitas, chicken mole and chicken adobado, feature authentic ingredients and spices, and provide an additional opportunity for delis to increase sales in this category.

“Consumers crave food that has great taste, dynamic flavors and healthful ingredients,” says Baez. “They want prepared foods that are made with high-quality



ingredients at an affordable price.”

Ruiz Food Products’ El Monterey brand offers a number of single-serve options for grab-and-go sections in the deli, including 4.5- and 5-ounce burritos; 5-ounce chimichangas; 8-ounce burritos; and 10-ounce burritos and chimichangas.

“In addition, we offer bulk foodservice solutions to help broaden a deli’s freshly finished or hot-to-go program,” says Cullen.

This includes tornados; bulk burritos, tamales, enchiladas, flautas and chile rellenos.

Many of the latest food trends, such as clean labels, healthful ingredients and more robust flavors, have played a big role in expanding the Mexican food segment in the deli.

“Most people are attracted to non-national brand packaging,” says Alire. “The clean-look labeling gives the consumer the feeling that they are buying regional or local — it’s like they’re buying something that was made fresh out of the kitchen.”

Not only are consumers becoming more savvy when seeking foods with clean ingredient labels as well as organic options from the deli, but they’re also looking for more unique ethnic flavors.

“This trend has supported the introduction and acceptance of foods made with bold flavors and spices,” says Cullen.

Like other food categories, deli departments need to cater to the clientele. This means that some Mexican items may not fare as well as others, depending on the store and its location.

“Still, Mexican foods are profitable in supermarket delis because non-Mexicans are buying these products,” says Soto.

This includes the sought-after Millennial demographic, which is seeking new and innovative products, and baby boomers looking for more familiar items.

Today’s youth in particular are exposed to Mexican food at an early age due to the many quick-service restaurants that feature this fare as well as increased in-home consumption. Also, Millennials are more adventurous and are willing to try new and unfamiliar dishes.

This is a tremendous opportunity for grocery store delis to capitalize on these frequent deli shoppers.

The shopper profile also has expanded to include younger families with kids and value shoppers seeking Mexican entrées in the supermarket deli.

“The deli is a source for fresh prepared single- or multi-serve meals shoppers can

buy and heat at home or serve to their families while on the go,” says Cullen.

As retailers expand the assortment and variety of foods in this category, Mexican entrées will grow in appeal to deli baby-boom shoppers. There also is a growing opportunity to serve hot-to-go Mexican foods in the deli.

Merchandising Methods

Retailers are increasingly marketing Mexican food, but it’s still a corporate misconception that these items should only be offered in ethnic or Mexican stores with a heavy Hispanic demographic profile.

“This growing category presents a wonderful opportunity to expand the culinary offerings across the board and to cross merchandise so the consumer can experiment with new recipes at home,” says Baez.

There are a wide range of merchandising options that allows these versatile foods to be marketed in various ways. For example, some of these foods can be served hot or can be easily prepared ahead of time and kept frozen or refrigerated for use later.

Cold Mexican choices include cocktail de frutas, a Mexican fruit cocktail made

with cubes of jicama, pineapple, mango, cucumber and watermelon, sprinkled with chili powder and a twist of lime. Also, fresh ceviche and Mexican coleslaw are other cold options that can add to a deli’s innovative ethnic lineup.

An increasing number of retailers are holding promotions around key Hispanic holidays, such as Cinco de Mayo and Mexican Independence Day.

“Retailers also are focusing on seasonal items, such as tamale season and Lent,” says Alire.

Pairing various Mexican food items also is an effective way of increasing sales.

For example, Cibao Meat’s sausages can be cross merchandised with Spanish cheeses.

The company provides recipe books during in-store demos, information on the different types of Mexican sausages as well as tips on the various usages of these meats.

“Delis have an opportunity to expand the selection of Mexican entrées by understanding and catering to the right consumers, while expanding the assortment with a variety of Mexican foods to reach new households,” says Cullen. **DB**

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FOR THE LOVE OF ENGLISH CHEESE



With plenty of varieties – there's something for everyone

BY HANNAH HOWARD

The English food globe turns on an axis of afternoon tea, Sunday roasts ... and incredible cheese. As British food sheds its former dubious reputation, cheese-lovers all over the world are lining up for a taste of Somerset Cheddar, Colston Bassett Stilton, Double Gloucester and beyond. And for good reason: There has never been a better time for English cheese than right now.

England's cheese bounty is totally unique and remarkably delicious. "There's a stalwart elegance to English cheeses," says Tia Keenan, New York City chef, fromager and culinary consultant. The respected and diverse cheeses of the UK are "reserved, they don't go for cheap thrills, they're rooted in tradition. They're

like the old money of cheese: so secure in their place, so refined they don't need to be flashy. They're confident."

A Storied And Delicious History

The making of cheese — a food derived from the coagulation of milk protein casein — began about 4,000 years ago in the Middle East. The Romans brought the innovation to England, where cheesemaking continued to flourish long after the fall of the Roman Empire, into the Middle Ages and beyond. The Pilgrims stocked the Mayflower with copious wheels when they made their voyage across the Atlantic to America in 1620.

Ian Luxton is the general manager at Belton Cheese Limited, a farmstead cheesemaker who has been doing its thing since

the 1800s in Shropshire. Luxton has deep respect for the tradition of English cheesemaking. It's an art which "has been honed in England over centuries with knowledge and skills being handed down over many generations."

The first English cheese was probably crafted in Cheshire by the Romans in the garrison town of Chester. "Cheshire Cheese is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086, a great survey of settlements in England and Wales, commissioned by William the Conqueror," notes Luxton. Belton Cheese still makes Cheshire in its original geographical area today.

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Handmade English Cheddar

grass, which provides optimal conditions for exceptional milk quality. The result is “milk that has ideal fat content and high protein levels that produce high-standard, quality

cheese,” according to Caron Staddon, who works with Coombe Castle International to export British dairy around the globe.

This cheese-friendly setting has nur-

tured the development, over centuries, of great English regional cheeses: Cheddar, Red Leicester, Double Gloucester, Lancashire, Cheshire and Stilton, among others. “The consumer is buying into this history,” says Luxton, “and the tradition and the flavor profiles don’t disappoint.”

But it hasn’t always been smooth sailing for English cheesemakers. Nigel White, head of trade body for the British Cheese Board, told *The Guardian* last year: “The UK has had a checkered past with cheesemaking.” The nation faced a major milk shortage during and after the World Wars. Strict government regulation starting in the 1930s meant dairy farmers had limited options — they were required to sell their milk to the Milk Marketing Board. The result: a lull in cheese innovation and opportunity. Before the First World War, there were upwards of 3,500 cheese producers in Britain. After World War II, less than 100 remained.

Max McCalman, cheese expert and author of *Mastering Cheese* (Clarkson Potter), credits Patrick Rance, a crusader for traditional British farmhouse cheeses and the author of *The Great British Cheese Book*, (Pan Macmillan) with bringing many of England’s greatest cheeses back from extinction, or its brink. And McCalman acknowledges Randolph Hodgson, founder of Neal’s Yard Dairy, “for helping revi-



Stilton cheese aging on racks

talize the industry in what was once one of the world's greatest cheese producing countries."

These days, it is truly great once again. In England, a cheese renaissance — the coupling of renewed interest in tried-and-true tradition with brand new recipes and technology — is in full swing. There is more English cheese momentum than perhaps ever before. Small producers, for whom competing with industrial megaliths is near impossible, are finding that markets abroad are hungry for their products.

And as Americans become increasingly interested in, and spend more dollars on, traditional, artisan foods, they fall more deeply in love with English cheese — beautiful stories and magnificent flavor make it easy. It's a love affair with staying power.

The Birthplace Of Cheddar

The luxuriously green fields of England's West Country are home to King Arthur, Camelot and centuries of Cheddar-making legacy. "English Cheddar is the true original Cheddar," notes Luxton. The first recipe was developed in the village of Cheddar in the County of Somerset in the 12th Century, and spread to other areas of



Stilton, the "King of English Cheeses"

England as its popularity grew. The wheels took their name "from the Gorge or caves in the town of Cheddar that were used to store the cheese," says Staddon. A lovely depth of tangy, sweet and nutty flavors makes Cheddar easy to crave.

"Cheddar has become somewhat of a global phenomenon with production now beyond our shores," says Luxton. New Zealand, Australia, the U.S. and Ireland all boast their own (beautiful) Cheddars. "But there is still a charm and authenticity

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around Cheddar made in England.” Plus, English Cheddar rarely disappoints. Keenan says she will “always adore English cloth-bound Cheddars, such as Montgomery’s and Quicks. So complex.”

Sensational Stilton

Rightfully known as the “King of English Cheeses,” Stilton has earned its place as a “Royal Blue.” Stilton has name-protected status and devoted groupies. Steven Jenkins, author of *Cheese Primer* (Workman) and Fairway’s cheese guru for more than 20 years, is among them. He waxes poetic: “Stilton offers a depth of flavor without the usual blue cheese palate assault, as well as that unctuous liquor that arises after the initial crumbliness. Stilton is simply a marvelous experience, with the added karmic effect brought on by its quaintness and its pedigree.”

Cream cheese being made around the village of Stilton in the late 17th century was known as Stilton cheese. With the development of railways, the village became a hub for trade between London and Edinburgh. Soon, Stilton was being bought and sold in London, and garnered a loyal following. Frances Pawlett, a renowned cheesemaker from Wyomondham in Leicestershire, gets credit for adding the characteristic blue veining to the cheese, circa 1743. “The skills of the cheesemakers in this area built the reputation of Stilton, which has endured to this day,” says Luxton. Stilton retains plenty of allure. It’s a truly stunning cheese, especially savored with some ripe pears and heady port.

A Cornucopia Of Cheese

There are now more than 900 different kinds of cheese being crafted in the UK. Only a handful is available in the United States, but the numbers are growing. England’s cheesemakers are perfecting old recipes and inventing new, often gorgeous, cheeses.

If Luxton had to pick one favorite cheese, “it would be the modern cheese, Red Fox, made by Belton Cheese, which I would say is the culmination of centuries of cheesemaking experience and continual development. Red Fox is a modern British classic based on a Red Leicester recipe. One day we will be talking about its history too.”

Keenan loves Berkswell, made by the Fletcher family’s Ram Hall Dairy in the West Midlands of England and shaped like a flying saucer. She can’t get enough of the “sweet/savory flavors of well-crafted aged sheep cheese from excellent, clean milk.”

Another winner is Stinking Bishop, made since 1972 at Laurel Farm in Dymock. Open it up and everyone will notice — the name is a warning. Its bark is bigger than its bite, though, and the creamy paste is pudding smooth and decadently addictive.

A Growing Hunger

English cheese is poised to find its way into more and more American shopping carts and hearts. The U.S. consumer “appreciates the history, skill and passion associated with making cheese and the theatre around the story and presentation of cheeses,” says Luxton.

That theater is ready for opening night.

“Most Americans may not have been exposed to the greatest [English cheeses],” says McCalman. The popularity of English cheese is “not as much as is deserved.”

“I think more than anything they just have a lack of awareness,” posits Keenan. “It’s not represented here the way France or Italy is. Americans know English Cheddar and Stilton. But I think they’d be open to more British artisan cheeses. Buyers have to take a chance. I think consumers will follow them, even given the higher price-point.”

“Millennials will continue to seek out cheese which delivers on expectation of flavor and history, which English cheese certainly delivers,” says Luxton. Although customers of all ages are drawn to English cheeses, they appeal especially to those who care about where their food comes from, who want to spend the time looking deeper.

Merchandise English Cheddar with crunchy apples, or provide recipes — and samples — of grilled cheese, stuffed with the oozy best.

For retailers selling English cheese, painting these colorful narratives is a must. Authenticity matters. Showcasing the quality and realness of the products will win hearts, minds and stomachs. “The story and people behind the cheese is important to our customers,” says Luxton. It is one of the reasons Belton Cheese is seeing an increase in sales in America.

Our English cheese affair may very well blossom into a bona fide marriage. For better or worse, richer or poorer, let us feast upon England’s fantastic cheeses. **DB**



A Red Leicester cheese with a Melton Mowbray pork pie and artisan boule bread

Slicing Through Salami Sales

A look at how artisanal products are changing the charcuterie category

BY KEITH LORIA

There seems to be some debate over what's driving salami sales in a 2016 economy. While some manufacturers are touting the rise of food connoisseurs and the need for more artisan flavors, others believe the old-school customers don't want anything too fancy.

Some feel sliced and small pieces are the way to go, appealing to families as the new "bologna" in the sandwich, while others stick to their guns that whole pieces are best.

One constant that most in the business can attest to is that sales of salami are trending up — even with the large influx of new salami manufacturers — from small homemade shops to line extensions from the larger companies.

In the 2015 "What's Hot" Culinary Forecast from the National Restaurant Association, "house-cured meats/charcuterie" was the No. 2 trend for appetizers. This is the result of the rise of "craft" salami and charcuterie.

"As restaurants experiment with charcuterie more and more on their menus we are seeing an increased demand and interest in more unique varieties of salami in traditional grocery," says Michael Fox, senior vice president of marketing and innovation for Columbus Foods, headquartered in San Francisco. "While demand is still

high for the classic varieties like our traditional San Francisco Italian Dry Salami, we are seeing that the more artisanal types of salami — Finocchiona, Sopressata, etc. — are growing even faster."

Tim Urban, chief operating officer of Volpi Foods, based in St. Louis, shares a major trend in salami is the emphasis on transparency, authenticity and understanding craftsmanship.

"Consumers really want to understand on a much more intimate level how products are made," he says. "As a company, we are aggressively investing in digital media in order to communicate these visuals. We have seen an explosion in our Millennial engagement through these touch points."

Volpi Foods has seen a shift to a large subset of female, urbanite, a little bit more educated and wealthier than they were anticipating, purchasing salami for the household and herself.

In Vogue

Ever since about 2012, artisan salami has been a big focus for retailers, as customers have demanded a more upscale product.

To accomplish this, delis are bringing in more artisan, gourmet products with old world flavors and highlighting its numerous virtues. They have also increased marketing and are offering better selections.

Columbus Foods is responding to this trend by making its artisan-style products more accessible to consumers by pre-slicing them so they don't have to worry about slicing the casings themselves.

"We are launching this new line of pre-sliced artisan in March leading with our award-winning Finocchiona, Hot Sopressata and Crespone," says Fox. We are also introducing a charcuterie sampler with four different varieties of salami — an easy entertaining solution."

Antonio Corsano, chief executive of Veroni USA Inc., based in Greenwich, CT, says 8-ounce chubs are growing in popularity because it's part of a trend that started with specialty cheeses and olives.

"Salami is easy to eat, and the consumers love the flavor," he says. "The craft salami is big with Millennials and in this environment, matching it with cheeses and wines is important."

Boutique and small packaged salami chubs combined with old world style and flavor are the trends that Diane Slome, marketing consultant at Pocino Foods Co., based in City of Industry, CA, sees in the category.

"Our products have always been upscale. We have moved to natural, uncured, traditional Italian dry salami and soppressata — distributed to sandwich shops and manufacturers," she says.

"Sriracha is a flavor that is really gaining traction."

Another trend is the increase of "multi-meat" in sandwiches, so instead of just turkey or ham, you are seeing Italian deli products like salami make their way into traditional sandwiches to add a jolt of flavor.

"Sandwiches are obviously the largest occasion for deli meat so this is a nice trend for grocery retail as they look to drive higher rings in their delis," Fox says. "There is also lots of innovation using different types of meat for salami and also ingredients like truffles and porcini mushrooms."

Jennifer Johnson, director of marketing for Olli Salumeria, headquartered in Mechanicsville, VA, says that while grab-and-go options are increasing at the deli, the company still continues to make its salami with the same respect to tradition and time.

"To respond to the growing demand, we have increased our footprint," she said. Olli recently opened a new facility in Oceanside CA. "With our increased capacity, we can answer the increase in product demand as well as explore product line expansion into the grab-and-go and the deli."

Playing Up To Ethnic Groups

Edgar Soto, vice president, sales and marketing for Cibao Meat Products, based in Bronx, NY, notes his company caters primarily to the Hispanic demographic.

"In my market, artisanal isn't a big thing yet," he says. "We still have a lot of Hispanics struggling in this economy and it continues to affect the market, so they are looking for value in their product purchases. That's just reality."

One factor affecting sales to this demographic is a desire for healthier options, so the company is responding with gluten-free and turkey salamis.

To increase sales, Soto says retailers at the deli need to promote salami more around the holidays and take advantage of the more traditional Hispanic events.

"Also, they should cross-market with Hispanic cheeses," he says. "They need to be smart about how they display the products and make sure they are paying attention to what their customer base wants."

Turning to a different demographic, Cibao Meat Products has recently started reaching out to the Asian community.

"We did a big marketing push to this community. They like quality meat

products and they like products without starch and MSG, and we have found it to be very successful and our sales are going up," says Soto.

Merchandising Matters

Retailers that are creating dedicated charcuterie stations in more premium stores are seeing strong results. Merchandising products by hanging or displaying them beautifully in their cases is what's drawing shoppers in. Actively merchandising with other key charcuterie accompaniments is also helping drive rings up, from adding mustards or specialty cheeses, to wine and beer.

"The fundamental thing that retailers need to have is a four-pronged approach," says Urban. "You need to have a well-honed and designed deli counter space."

A great example of this, he says, is the new Winn-Dixie store in Jacksonville, FL, which has completely reimaged the deli counter to be more old-world, with products behind the glass that are more dynamic and exciting.

Urban also stresses it is necessary to have those behind the counter well trained and informed, knowing how to slice appropriately and to have items available in different formats, such as pre-sliced salami nearby. Retailers should also have some chubs displayed in a crate or basket, and introduce gift solution options. Merchandising within a wine department and specialty cheese can also boost sales.

According to Nielsen data for 2015, the Italian deli segment grew at almost two times the rate of the total deli category driven by salami sales.

"With the increased demand for Italian deli products, we have found retailers are looking for new ways to make salami more accessible," says Fox. "We are working with a couple of retailers now on 'fresh-sliced-to-go' programs on our bulk items,

which makes it easier for the shopper because they don't have to wait in long lines at the deli counter. And retailers can up their 'foodie' credentials by showing our fiore (molded) products in their cases."

Millennials Like Flavor

Salami manufacturers are seeing a heightened interest of artisan styles of salami that incorporate a variety of ingredients for different flavor profiles. For example, Columbus's Finocchiona incorporates fennel and sherry wine, and its Hot Sopressata adds spice with paprika and chile de arbol pepper.

"From a target market perspective, we are really seeing Millennials driving the food and flavor trends," says Fox. "They are very interested in trying and sharing new foods and also index high for entertaining at home, so you really see nice bumps on salami and other charcuterie during the key three-day weekend holidays throughout the year."

Cristiano Creminelli, founder of Creminelli Fine Meats, LLC, headquartered in Salt Lake City, says people pay attention to bold flavors, naming chili pepper, garlic and wine as popular tastes. He's also seen a rise in popularity of more unique offerings such as Tartufo and Whiskey.

Johnson notes Americans are having a love affair with fennel and Olli Salumeria's Toscano continues to grow in popularity.

"Also, while you do see more and more interesting flavor combinations out there, we are noticing the American palate still wants to taste the pork and they don't want it to be overpowered by external flavors," she says.

It's All About The Packaging

Salami manufacturers are taking more interest in their packaging, relying on cleaner packaging, plus peel and reseal.

At Pocino, Slome notes the company has gone back to an old-school brown paper making it appear "imported" looking, which attracts consumers to the product. Meanwhile, Columbus is seeing success with packaging designed to solve entertaining and snacking needs, including grab-and-go options.

From the Super Bowl, to March Madness to July 4th, charcuterie is about entertaining with friends at small and large gatherings. Retailers offering premium solutions like artisanal salami are gathering steam as they head into those key, high-traffic weekends. **DB**



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TRADITION MEETS TECHNOLOGY

The Veroni salami factory's history began in 1925 as a small grocery store in Correggio, in the heart of Italy's Emilia region. Brothers Fiorentino, Francesco, Paolo, Adolfo and Ugo Veroni decided to expand the family business, focusing on the production of delicatessen meat. During the 30s, the brothers specialized in mortadella and ham. In the latter part of the 40s, Veroni opened one of the first staff canteens that was also accessible to the children of the women working in the rice fields. Rapid growth was a hallmark of the 50s, with the upturn in the economy and boost in consumption. Francesco Veroni, the present chairman of the group, joined the firm in 1966, and was instrumental in expanding the Correggio plant two-fold in the early 70s.



The family's fourth generation is now at the helm of a company that has remained steeped in tradition, while adapting to changes in the market. This has included modified atmosphere technology, innovation in safety and product wholesomeness, and the continued improvement of products to reduce fat and salt content while maintaining the organoleptic qualities.

Today, Veroni is a business structured in four controlled companies, with seven production plants producing mortadella, cured ham and cooked ham, coppa, pancetta, salami and sausages, and pre-cooked meats.

The company is positioned to accept the challenges of the future, with cutting-edge production processes, quality certification, integrated logistics and a deep-rooted expertise in retailing formats, particularly in the pre-sliced segment.

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