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BUTTERBALL EARNS AMERICAN HUMANE CERTIFIED RECOGNITION FOR THIRD CONSECUTIVE YEAR

Butterball, LLC, Garner, NC, has been recognized for the third consecutive year as being verified as American Humane Certified (AHC). It is the only turkey manufacturer to earn this certification.

AHC is the nation's first independent, third-party humane certification program for farm animals. Through rigorous inspections and examinations, the association reviews a producer's care and handling of farm animals at hatcheries, farms and processing facilities to ensure all aspects of its operations meet or exceed the science-based animal welfare standards of the AHA.

HumaneHeartland.org

Butterball also relies on an independent Animal Care and Well-Being Advisory Council of leading specialists in animal husbandry and care, including Dr. Temple Grandin of Colorado State University. The council helps facilitate open and transparent dialogue about best practices and new developments in turkey well-being. Dr. Alice Johnson, DVM, senior vice president, Food Safety, Corporate Quality & Animal Care for Butterball, LLC, founded and leads this council while working alongside the AHC to ensure Butterball exceeds all standards.

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Back to School

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Packaging

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Grab'n Go
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CHEESE CORNER
Mozzarella
Rubbed Rinds

ANNUAL SUPPLEMENT
Company Profiles

COMING IN OCT/NOV
DELI BUSINESS will be taking a look at Going Green

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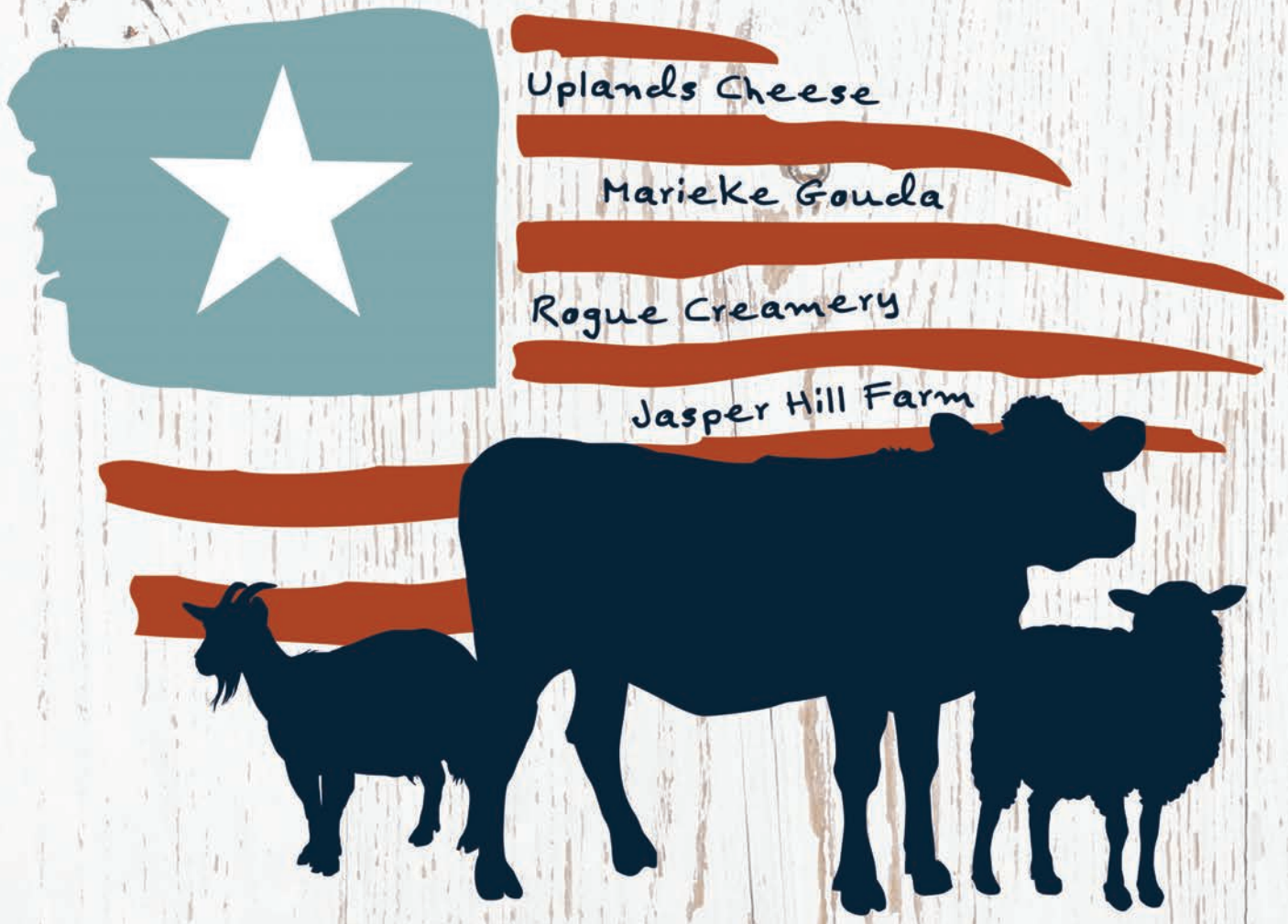

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

ATALANTA RECEIVES TWO FABI AWARDS

Atalanta Corp., Elizabeth, NJ, had two products recognized at the 2016 Food and Beverage Innovation (FABI) Awards at this year's National Restaurant Association Show in Chicago. Del Destino Peruvian Sauces and L'Estornell Smoked Oil were honored for their global flavors and unique attributes. The awards recognize new products for breakthrough achievement in taste, marketability, creativity and profitability potential in foodservice operations.

www.atalantacorp.com

CALABRO CHEESE LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE

Calabro Cheese, East Haven, CT, has announced the launch of its new website. The site includes information on the company, its product lines, recipes, awards, news and where to find its products. It also has an e-store for online purchasing. Featured recipes, products and customers are highlighted, as well.

www.calabrocheese.com

CYPRESS GROVE WINS FIVE AWARDS

Cypress Grove, Arcata, CA, won five awards at the 19th biennial U.S. Champion Cheese Contest, including two 'Best of Class' awards for Humboldt Fog and Chevre Log. These awards mark the first win for the newly-revamped Chevre Log. Other winning cheeses include Truffle Tremor, second place, Surface Ripened Goat's Milk Cheeses; Ms. Natural, second place, Soft Goat's Milk Cheeses; and Sgt. Pepper, third place, Flavored Soft Goat's Milk Cheeses.

www.cypressgrovecheese.com

MONTCHEVRE SPONSORS COLLEGE PROGRAM

Monchevre Goat Cheese, Belmont, WI, recently donated $100,000 to The Southwest Wisconsin Technical College Foundation to kick off the college's new Dairy Goat Herd Management Program. The program ensures future dairy goat producers are educated on providing high-quality milk for the goat cheese industry as well as farm sustainability. Montchevre's gift will support the instructional costs for the 11 online courses, five mentorship courses and the two-day Dairy Goat Academy as well as marketing and coordination costs.

www.montchevre.com

VERMONT CREAMERY RECEIVES FOUR SOFI AWARDS

Vermont Creamery, Websterville, VT, was recently honored for excellence in artisan cheesemaking with four Sofi Awards. St. Albans, the newest non-GMO certified aged cheese to join the Vermont Creamery lineup, won Best New Product in the cows' milk cheese category. Vanilla Crème Fraîche won gold in the dessert sauce category; Bonne Bouche took silver in the non-cows' milk cheese category; and Cultured Butter with Sea Salt took bronze in the dairy category.

www.vermontcreamery.com

CONCORD MERCHANT TO HEAD CHEESE GUILD

The Massachusetts Cheese Guild, Westport Point, MA, has elected Peter Lovis Pepperell, proprietor of The Cheese Shop of Concord in Concord, MA, as president of the Guild. The announcement was made at the Guild's annual meeting recently in Boston. In this role, Lovis will preside over the Guild's quarterly meetings and be responsible for keeping the Guild's board of directors and committee heads on task with regard to the Guild's yearly programming.

www.macheeseguild.org

HISSHO HONORED FOR GROWTH

Hissho Sushi, Charlotte, NC, was recently honored as a 2017 SmartCEO Charlotte Future 50 award winner. SmartCEO recognizes 50 of the region's fastest growing, mid-sized companies. These companies represent the future of the region's economy and embody the entrepreneurial spirit critical for leadership and success. The winners were chosen based on a three-year average of employee and revenue growth. Hissho will be recognized at an awards ceremony this summer in Charlotte, NC.

www.hisshosushi.com

BEST CHEESE HONORED AT LOS ANGELES COMPETITION

Best Cheese Corp., Westchester, NY, received two gold and two silver awards at this year's Los Angeles International Dairy Competition. Its Vintage Grand Ewe won gold in the Hard Sheep's Milk Cheeses category; Uniekaas Reserve won gold in the Gouda, Aged category; Melkbus237 Original won silver in the Gouda category; and Melkbus149 Truffle won silver in the Gouda, Flavored category. All award-wining cheeses will be featured at the Los Angeles County Fair.

www.bestcheeseusa.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

TRANSITION

BUTTERBALL APPOINTS TWO EXECUTIVES

Butterball, LLC, Garner, NC, has announced the promotion of two executives. Dean Lisenby, vice president of supply chain and continuous improvement, will continue to oversee supply chain management, in addition to directing the company's logistics group. Neal Walsh, vice president of strategic business initiatives and purchasing, will be responsible for collaborative efforts to identify the most profitable integrated value of the Butterball meat supply. Walsh will continue to oversee corporate purchasing.

www.butterball.com

NEW PRODUCTS

SPECIALTY CRACKERS UNVEILED

Alexian Paté and Specialty Meat, Neptune, NJ, has introduced new Specialty Crackers to pair with its all-natural line of pâtés and charcuterie. Now available in Olive Oil & Sea Salt, the crackers are made with three simple ingredients and nothing artificial. The new line is Non-GMO Project Verified, Vegan Certified and kosher. Crackers are packaged 4 ounces per sleeve. They are shipped 12 units per case. Visit Alexian at IDDBA booth #3657 and Fancy Food Show booth #4523.

Alexianpate.com

ANTIBIOTIC-FREE TURKEY

Perdue Foodservice, Salisbury, MD, offers antibiotic-free turkey that contains no animal by-products. Made with only all-natural turkey, the meat includes no added hormones or steroids. Turkeys used in the process are fed a vegetarian diet. Other lines include PERDUE, PERDUE HARVESTLAND, KINGS DELIGHT and CLUX DELUX brands.

www.perduefoodservice.com

GARDEN-FRESH LAUNCHES CLEAN LABEL SALADS

Garden-Fresh Foods, Milwaukee, WI, announced the launch of its Green Leaf Signature Salads featuring the clean label designation. This is the first time the company has offered salads that contain only natural, plant-based ingredients and are made without the addition of artificial preservatives, sweeteners, colors and flavors. The ready-to-eat salads also reflect the latest flavor trends, such as Korean-inspired flavors, tangy and sour seasonings and an overall greater focus on vegetables.

www.garden-freshfoods.com

BACON FROM PREMIUM BEEF

Schmaltz Products and Delicatessen, Wooster, OH, has introduced Schmacon brand Certified Angus Beef bacon. The line delivers smoky, sweet, beefy flavor, and crisps fast for a flavorful and satisfying fit. These hearty strips of beef start with carefully trimmed, whole-muscle Certified Angus Beef brand cuts. The product is gluten free, contains no fillers and has no added nitrites or nitrates, except those naturally occurring in sea salt and celery powder. The bacon is also certified Halal.

www.schmacon.com

NAAN IS ORGANIC

Toufayan Bakeries, Ridgefield, NJ, has launched organic naan, which is USDA-certified and available in Original and Garlic flavors. The company also has recently introduced Organic Sprouted Whole Wheat Pita, Wraps and Smart Pockets.

www.Toufayan.com

TASTE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

Almas Food, Canoga Park, CA, is the only Halal deli meat producer in the United States producing lines that are Halal, natural, antibiotic free, hormone free (except for poultries), gluten free, MSG free, and free from animal by-products. Its lines offer a real taste of Mediterranean.

www.almasfood.com

BALANCING FLAVORS

Sargento Food, Plymouth, WI, has introduced Sweet Balanced Breaks, which combines the savory flavors of creamy, natural cheese with sweet ingredients like dried fruits and dark chocolate. The line's products each have 5-7 grams of protein and fewer than 200 calories per serving.

www.sargento.com

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Selling Deli To A Disappearing Middle Class: Lessons From Subway

By
Jim Prevor
Editor-in-Chief

In 2016, for the first time ever, Subway Restaurants had fewer locations open at the end of the year than it had at the beginning of the year – at least in the United States. Subway is ubiquitous… although McDonalds is the No. 1 chain measured in sales, Subway is Number One in terms of units. Still, in 2016, Subway's domestic unit count went down 359 units, or 1.3 percent.

Understanding why this is so may hold important lessons for supermarket deli executives when strategizing a successful path for the years to come.

One possibility explaining this retrenchment is the reaction to a problem common of many retailers – with the move toward increased online buying, there is just no need for as many stores. Subway has a whole digital initiative, is working with many companies to enhance delivery options and, just recently, announced a "bot" to allow people to order and pay via Facebook Messenger. It is a two-pronged effort: enhance delivery options and make going to a restaurant more convenient and less time-consuming with the use of digital tools.

Success in the future will depend on differentiation as well as focusing on target markets.

Sandwiches are typically ordered for immediate consumption, and anyone who has teenagers or is familiar with young Millennials knows they are versatile at ordering everything off their phones. This means that many of the supermarket online ordering systems are too complex to serve the purpose. Yet, few supermarket delis have aligned with delivery services.

Down near *Deli Business'* headquarters in Boca Raton, FL, my 15-year-old son frequently orders from Delivery Dudes, but, at least in our area, ordering a sub to be delivered from Publix, Wal-Mart or Subway is not an option. Still, there are plenty of other options that do delivery — from independents such as D'Best Sandwiches to chains like Firehouse Subs – and they get the business.

There may, though, be even more to it. For a moment in time, Subway positioned itself, with its ill-fated Jared campaign, as the healthy fast food. There is something to this as, of course, looking over the glass at all the veggies and condiments, one can, in fact, select low calorie, low fat or low carb options. Of course, how many people actually do so is unknown. A friend who works for Seasons 52 once told me that when the chain started offering desserts in small test tube-like containers in order to let people have just a low calorie taste, the chain executives were shocked at how many people ordered the whole rack!

A bigger problem may be the whole fast food scene has moved upscale. It is Five Guys and Shake Shack that are the new competitors, not McDonalds. In fact, the same son who uses Delivery Dudes so earnestly and is perfectly happy from time to time to eat Chicken McNuggets from McDonalds recently asked me, unprompted, "Isn't McDonalds really mostly for poor people?"

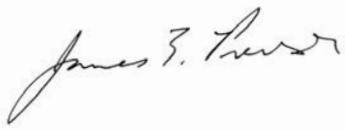
I thought about that for a moment. McDonalds is so large that I would tend to say it is for the great middle class. But then one realizes the middle class is shrinking and not just in a monetary sense. A teaching assistant at Harvard may have a low income but probably an upper-class mindset, focusing on a foodie culture, valuing things such as local, organic and GMO-free, but also just generally sensitive to food quality and taste as opposed to getting adequate calories.

Subway is trying to deal with this issue — eliminating antibiotics from its chicken and moving to cage-free eggs. But the task is daunting. The soft bread and the no-name meats all suggest something more low-scale and, of course, fundamentally, the chain is very promotionally driven — you can sign up online and get a weekly coupon and other special offers, and, in the end, Subway still sells the foot long sub of the week for $6.

The problem for most supermarkets is that, although they could compete aggressively by offering unique sandwiches and salads, with upscale breads, meats, cheeses, veggies and condiments in stores, most do not. Most are focused on price and serving the disappearing middle class.

Yet success in the future will depend on differentiation as well as focusing on target markets and offering the right product for the consumer demographics the store wishes to serve. Combine this focus with appropriate technology and a path to victory emerges.

Ignore these things and very soon a 15-year-old in your town might be saying, "Aren't supermarket subs mostly for poor people?" **DB**



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DELI DEPARTMENTS IN FLUX

By
Lee Smith
Publisher

The deli department is evolving in ways that are difficult to predict. This year's Annual People's Awards features nine retailers who are leaders that work in the trenches every day. While no one has ever proven to be a perfect predictor of the future, it is easy to see that the deli is evolving to a new and more important entity.

Virtually all of our award winners stress the need for flexibility and an attitude that welcomes change. Not only are they willing to pioneer new concepts, they appreciate people from all levels challenging what has "always been done."

Today's leaders are going out of their way to educate themselves about new developments. They are out-of-the-box thinkers who relish the opportunity to challenge their own beliefs. Providing solutions to consumers' problems is how they view their role, and they will often look at traditional and contemporary foodservice concepts to find solutions. They do not see the distinctions between retail and foodservice that were once so prevalent in senior management thinking.

Product knowledge is becoming more important, and the deli department is evolving into a group of categories.

The deli director is now often seen as the supermarket Rockstar and deli as the department that can combat foodservice competition. It is no longer unusual to see senior deli management far more foodservice oriented and focused on food quality and authenticity. Often, they had their initial training as chefs and their job description is viewed as that of a highly-trained, creative culinarian, who works in a collaborative environment with suppliers.

In fact, prepared food used to be about 20 percent of sales and deli meat 60 percent. Today, sliced deli meats are 30 to 40 percent, while prepared foods are over 50 percent of sales. The gap is predicted to widen even farther, as consumers become more concerned about quality and have less time to cook and prepare meals at home.

To pull all the various elements together and function at a high level, technology is playing a large role. All our honorees believe in technology and seem comfortable working in environments where tech is welcomed. Not all are social media junkies; in fact, most are not. However, they all see the value. Up and comers are far more comfortable with social media than their predecessors.

One of the biggest changes in department leadership is a leader's affinity or love of the products they supervise. In the past, being a foodie was considered a little odd. Combining your personal hobbies and your job, even more unusual. It was not, and maybe still not, uncommon to be the deli buyer today and the candy buyer tomorrow. Knowledge of product was not as important as transportation and inventory turns.

Product knowledge is becoming more important, and the deli department is evolving into a group of categories. Specialty cheese can be a sub-department and require people with different knowledge and skills. Prepared foods may require trained culinarians and chefs. Even basic sliced meat requires someone who understands cured meat production, authenticity, pasture grazing and animal management. Hence, the need for foodies who have an appreciation for what they are selling and can empathize with consumers' need for better quality food and more transparency. These are the people who will seek out a new restaurant because they want to or take a European vacation to visit cheesemakers. They will ask to take a course about food safety or want to study to become a Certified Cheese Professional. Smart companies will support them or they will lose them because these are not the folks who will become tomorrow's candy buyers.

Regardless of age or time served, our nine leaders demonstrate and embody the new retail environment. For newcomers to the industry or individuals looking to move up, they will need to be part of a new world. They need to be enthusiastic about change and social media and also tech savvy. They will need to be foodies and enjoy being a part of the industry, and they must be servant leaders who look for solutions to problems and are not satisfied with the status quo. **DB**

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Jeff Foster
John Boyle
Elise Minassian
Tony Dominioni
Peter Osojnik

Deli Business honors individuals who have made a significant contribution to the industry, their company and their community. Nominations for 2018 may be submitted to: Executive Editor Ellen Koteff (ekoteff@phoenixmedianet.com).

Daniel HAMMER

Vice President of Deli, Bakery and Culinary Development
Kroger, headquartered in Cincinnati
Hometown: Basel, Switzerland

How has your career evolved over the years?

I started in the restaurant and hotel business in Switzerland. I had an opportunity to come to the United States and work for an import company in California. During that time, I helped create and design a couple of restaurant concepts. Through my work I was connected to the grocery retail industry in 1990. Grocery retail and culinary work at that time were two worlds apart. Entering the grocery retail environment gave me the opportunity to work with food in a new and meaningful way. This was an opportunity to connect culinary with retail customers. Through the years, I have worked on several new retail food concepts, such as taking current industry trends and converting them into the retail environment.

I have worked on several new retail food concepts, such as taking current industry trends and converting them into the retail environment.

What is your leadership philosophy?

Let me start by saying I like to help people live their best lives. I apply the same principles in my leadership role as I do in my personal life, which are what are the things that matter most and how can we make the most out of any given situation or opportunity. I also feel strongly about a transformational philosophy — how I can lead with a vision by transforming and redirecting our thinking. I like to lead each journey by challenging and inspiring change with open, candid and supportive communication.

What is the best advice you ever received and why?

Take people on the journey of what you want to accomplish. This is, and has been, part of my leadership style ever since.

How do you balance your work and personal life?

I love to be involved in anything food-related; it's in my DNA. I'm lucky to have a job that allows me to be involved with what I love.

What deli retail trends have impacted the industry the most over the last year?

I think it is about solutions and what we can do that will help our customers to enhance their shopping experience with the right items at the right time and speed.

How involved are you with social media, and what are the benefits?

I understand how important social media is to our customers and how we can use the platforms as a tool to connect with them. While I'm not personally very active on social media, Kroger has a thoughtful strategy to engage our customers.

What have been the biggest changes in the deli industry over the course of your career?

Deli is like the rest of the store in that our customers continue to change and evolve. It is our job to be there with solutions for both where they are now, and more importantly, where they are going.

What is the biggest challenge you've had to overcome on the job?

In the shifting retail environment, we're faced with new challenges every day. I love those challenges — whether it is ever-increasing competition or our customers' changing definition of "convenience" — because they drive me to new ideas and help focus my work.

Are you married? If so, how long?

I have been married since 1986.

What hobbies do you enjoy outside of work?

I love to cook and travel. Travel is a cultural and social activity, and since I am in the food business, food destinations are top of the list. I also love to paint. There is not much time for that, but whenever I have some time, I love to put my thoughts on canvas. I know this sounds dangerous, but it's fun.

Grown to impress, naturally.

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Will WHITLOW

Deli/Cheese Business Development Manager
Central Market, headquartered in Dallas
Hometown: Refugio, TX

How did you get started in the industry?

In 1998, I was cooking in a hotel kitchen while taking college courses at night. I realized I had a passion for the food business, as well as a love for food; but cooking was not where I belonged. Central Market was a wonderland for a guy like me. When the company announced it was opening a store in South Austin, TX, and was looking for a team to train as product experts, I jumped at the opportunity. My first interview was with the executive chef and luckily my second was with Barbara Hoover, the deli/cheese manager and product expert, and one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the category. I joined her team as an hourly partner.

How has your career evolved over the years?

As an hourly partner, I was trained and groomed to be the product expert. Within a few short years, I was visiting producers in Europe and across the United States. I was also training for the management side of the business and taking on more responsibility, including becoming a shift leader.

In 2012, Central Market was ready to grow and open more stores, and I took the position of deli/cheese manager at the first store in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

Before this, in 2003, I moved back to my original South Austin store to continue to grow my skills outside of the deli and cheese departments, but soon realized deli and cheese is where my passions lie and the clear path to further growth within those areas was not at Central Market. At that time, there were many opportunities for deli and cheese professionals across the country. I considered many offers and decided Murray's Cheese in New York City was the best fit for me.

Rob Kaufelt, who owned Murray's at the time, had a background in supermarkets, so he knew where I was coming from. I brought the mind for systems and processes that the growing business was ready for and in need of. Murray's was poised to open its second location in New York City, and I took the helm of that shop as if it were my own.

I worked in many capacities at both locations and opened another location that was solely cooked and cured meats. The business grew by multiples during my time there. We began to work with Kroger to create kiosks in its stores, and I participated in the creation of the operations handbook and trainings.

After nine years with Murray's Cheese, I found myself looking to grow my career in a different direction and was excited to return to Central Market to join the procurement team as business development manager for deli and cheese. I wear many hats in my role. In addition to the numbers side of my departments, I can spread my focus to include sourcing new and exclusive items, developing new products and innovative programs, training store partners and continuously pushing the quality, freshness and safety of what we're selling.

What is the best advice you ever received and why?

During my time at Murray's, I had the pleasure of working with a psychologist that showed me how daily work planning and setting measurable standards for many aspects of the retail environment can make for happier employees, faster and more efficient work, and a more consistent experience for the customer. It was one of the most valuable lessons I've learned in retail.

What deli retail trends have impacted the industry most in the past year?

In deli, we are seeing the first of the imported cured meats from Italy beyond prosciutto crudo. I have been working with the Levoni family in Mantova, Italy for several years now and am happy to be one of the first to offer their salami, which is made in Italy with only Italian pork. It adds more authenticity to our selection of cooked products like prosciutto cotto, porchetta and mortadella. I saw other producers rushing to market with items that were not typical of Italy, but made for the American consumer. At Central Market, we know that customers are not going to be clamoring for all the items we bring in for them. We must educate and show they can't go on without them.

What have been the biggest changes in the deli industry over the course of your career?

The most drastic change has been customer education and awareness of what's in the food their buying — nitrates, gluten, sugar, grass-fed, pasteurized, etc. There is a lot of information and misinformation out there. We are duty-bound to educate and provide all the options to meet customers wherever they are.

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Steve HICKS

Senior Buyer, Deli
Wal-Mart, headquartered in Bentonville, AR
Hometown: Rogers, AR

How did you get started in the industry?

While in high school in 1976, I worked part-time at a Tom Thumb deli and bakery. When I started, I did not know the difference between lox and locks. I enjoyed serving customers and the fast-paced environment.

How has your career evolved over the years?

After college, I completed a management training program with Tom Thumb and became a foodservice manager.

In 1988, Tom Thumb and Wal-Mart opened a Hypermart USA in Garland, TX. I was interested in this new concept and became a Wal-Mart associate. Eventually, Wal-Mart took full ownership of the Hypermarts, which evolved into today's Wal-Mart Supercenter.

In 1991, Wal-Mart asked me to be a deli merchandiser. The position allowed me to travel between stores and open several new Supercenters. I moved to Bentonville, AR, in 1997 to join the deli buying team at the home office.

What positions have you held in industry associations?

Through organizations like the International Dairy Deli Bakery Association (IDDBA), I remain engaged with what is happening in the deli industry.

What is your leadership philosophy?

Since starting with Wal-Mart, the idea of servant leadership has struck a deep chord with me. I'm always ready to help those on my team and within our company. Stores and associates are at the heart of what we do.

What is the best advice you ever received and why?

There are two quotes that really resonate with me: Benjamin Franklin's, "When you're finished changing, you're finished," and "Swim Upstream. Go the other way. Ignore conventional wisdom," by Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart.

Embracing change and challenging the status quo are so important if you are going to survive in the retail jungle.

How do you balance your work and personal life?

I have a passion for both, and I am committed to giving all that I can to my job and my family. Sometimes this is a bit of a challenge, but by prioritizing family time, I'm able to recharge and start a new workweek. I dedicate Sunday to my family.

What deli retail trends have impacted the industry most in the past year?

Ramped-up investment in omni-channel strategies will change retail.

Ramped-up investment in omni-channel strategies will change retail.

What technology or technical tools are indispensable to you in the workplace and why?

While technology has continued to evolve, I rely on my phone and computer to keep me connected to the world.

How involved are you with social media and what are the benefits?

Although I am not a frequent user of social media, I use Facebook to stay connected to my friend and relatives.

What have been the biggest changes in the deli industry over the course of your career?

The importance of quality and customer service has not changed in the past 40 years, but the customers and the way they shop are changing at a rapid pace.

What is the biggest challenge you've had to overcome on the job?

I believe that challenges are why you get out of bed each morning.

Are you married? If so, how long? How many children?

I have been married for 18 ½ years and have a 16-year-old son.

What hobbies do you enjoy outside of work?

My son and I are huge Dallas Cowboy and Arkansas Razorback football fans. We try to attend and watch as many games as we possibly can.

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Regina McCARTNEY-MACKEY

Senior Buyer, Prepared Foods
Sam's Club, headquartered in Bentonville, AR
Hometown: Fredonia, NY

How did you get started in the industry?

I have always had a love for cooking. As a young girl, I helped my grandmother make pierogis from scratch and learned good food is built by layering flavors to create overall deliciousness in every bite. The first meal I made on my own was pancakes, and I remember that just plain pancakes were not my goal; I added lemon juice to add a signature touch that was my own. My first official job in the industry was in fast food. Although the food was not gourmet, I learned training procedures that I have always referred to in every step of my career. Training is a huge piece of execution, explaining the reason for why a process needs to occur is crucial in gaining acceptance and adoption.

How has your career evolved over the years?

From flipping burgers in fast food to creating gourmet meals at a luxurious resort, I'm grateful for the experiences I've gained in the food industry. After graduating culinary school, I joined the world of retail, first working as a bakery manager before moving over to the deli side of the business. In deli, I had various roles, including recipe development and execution, overall merchandise strategy and category management. I'm now a buyer and am responsible for identifying items that our members want to take home and feed their families. It's a privilege to know that somehow what I'm doing is helping a busy mom or dad spend more time with their kids around the dinner table. If I can enhance someone's eating experience at some point in the meal, I feel I have achieved a goal.

What is your leadership philosophy?

I believe in servant leadership and leading by example. A true leader doesn't hide behind a title, but rather takes an active role in connecting and communicating with the team. By knowing who does what best, you can successfully identify the strengths and weaknesses of the overall team structure and look for ways to better leverage your resources.

What is the best advice you ever received and why?

If your boss or co-worker invests in you, take full advantage of the opportunity to learn. When someone tries to assist you in your career, remember they enjoy helping others to be successful. Always pay it forward. If someone gave you a chance, always invest in others. Never be afraid that you will train someone that may someday be promoted above you, as you will always be part of their success.

What deli retail trends have impacted the industry most in the last year?

The overall trend in deli is still the rise of prepared foods. Customers are looking for high-quality meal solutions. New, emerging trends in flavor are very intriguing, and it's interesting to see how today's consumers are becoming much more adventurous. The desire to know where food comes from has led to a much cleaner label and more transparency in the products we purchase. Meal kits overall have had a huge impact, as they are not only available delivered to homes, we also now see them offered as grab-and-go or pickup options in many retailers.

How involved are you with social media and what are the benefits?

I'm active on Facebook, Snapchat, LinkedIn and Instagram. I would never base an entire buy-off on a single tweet; however, the posts of peers, other retailers and chefs sometimes inspire ideas that could result in an item creation. We live in a world where everyone is connected in many ways, and I do think it is important to keep up with everything that is happening.

What have been the biggest changes in the deli industry over the course of your career?

The biggest change I have seen is in technology. As a member at Sam's Club, customers can use our Scan & Go app, which allows them to scan an item right off the shelf with their phone, pay for it and skip the checkout lane. Customers simply head to the door and show their digital receipt on their way out of the club. Ordering online and delivery are also changing the way we shop.

What is the biggest challenge you've had to overcome on the job?

I think the biggest challenge for me is that I can't control every situation around the items I buy. Getting an item on the shelf really is only part of the equation. It takes a lot of moving parts to deliver an item from farm to fork. Communicating clear guidance and expectations to every associate is crucial to delivering the type of member service we want to be known for at Sam's Club.

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Jacob Powers
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Jeff FOSTER

Sales Manager, Deli
Shaw's & Star Market, headquartered in West Bridgewater, MA
Hometown: Scotch Plains, NJ

How did you get started in the industry?

I started working in the foodservice industry while I was in high school. In 1987, I entered the management training program for Star Market.

How has your career evolved over the years?

I began working at Star Market in 1987 and continued to work in the stores for eight years. My merchandising career began in the mid-1990s; I became the seafood and deli buyer-merchandiser.

Near the end of the dot-com boom, I joined the internet grocery delivery sector by leading fresh merchandising for HomeRuns.com in Boston and Washington, D.C.

In 1999, Shaw's Supermarkets acquired Star Market. It was during that time I came to work for Shaw's and Star Market on the general merchandise side of the business. Afterward, I went to work for Staples and led the operations aspect of a new venture.

I rejoined Shaw's in 2005 as a category manager for beverages, alcohol and tobacco; eventually I migrated back to the fresh side of the business.

What is your leadership philosophy?

My leadership philosophy includes:

- Gain trust and belief in your ideas through positive relationships with others.
- Build your team to complement your strengths and lead by example.
- Don't be afraid to make mistakes, but utilize history and data to make informed decisions.
- Look to see what others are doing around you, but build your own framework to stay on trend.

How do you balance your work and personal life?

First and foremost, you must love what you do, both professionally and personally. The food retailing business runs 24/7; it can be challenging to balance both. But I try to work when I'm at work and concentrate on my personal life and family when not at work.

What deli retail trends have impacted the industry most in the past year?

Customization of food is a fun trend that we've already rolled out in our stores. From self-service noodle bars to our newest offering of a customized sushi bar, customers are more interested than ever in creating their own menus.

Also, menu labeling has been a big focus for the past few months. The demand for nutritional statements on menus and products is a major change for our industry. Our production and compliance must be flawless to achieve the standards this new regulation requires.

What technology or technical tools are indispensable to you in the workplace and why?

Data from our in-house systems is invaluable. It allows us to see consumer behavior through the sales of a product or segment of products. It helps define trends and allows us to see what changes are on the horizon.

How involved are you with social media and what are the benefits?

I love the real-time aspects of social media. Use it properly and information is power. Use it carelessly, and you get bogged down. Within our deli and fresh foods department, we regularly promote products and programs through FaceTime Live and utilize email blasts to connect with customers.

What have been the biggest changes in the deli industry over the course of your career?

I remember when rotisserie chickens and take-and-bake pizzas were the hot trends for take-home meals. Our chicken business has certainly evolved and is still the most important piece of our prepared foods offering. However, now our offering has expanded so significantly that we are as much of a foodservice department as we are a deli. From self-service hot food bars to hand-breading chicken and frying it up to a perfect golden brown.

What is the biggest challenge you've had to overcome on the job?

The most amazing challenge we faced was in March 2013, when we worked to create a turnaround for our company. We all worked tirelessly to make Shaw's and Star Market better places to shop for our customers and better places to work for our employees. Our new culture and attitude enabled us to focus on driving sales and market share.

Are you married? If so, how long? How many children?

I have been married for 23 years, and I have two children.

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John BOYLE

Category Manager, Deli and Prepared Foods
Ahold, headquartered in Carlisle, PA
Hometown: Quincy, MA

How did you get started in the industry?

When I was first working my way through school, I worked in the restaurant industry. Upon graduating, I went into restaurant management, then became part owner of a chain before working at a high-end restaurant and then a hotel for five years. I loved my work and being around the food. As I was determining a different direction in life, the supermarket industry was a natural progression.

How has your career evolved over the years?

Like most folks who have been in the industry for several years, I began in operations management. I then was approached to move into merchandising in a corporate environment. I love what I do because I can nurture my entrepreneurial spirit, and I get to develop solutions for everyday meals. In merchandising, I began running a dairy for a chain of 160 stores. We were tcck to dairy and in 2011, I moved into deli.

What positions have you held in industry associations?

I'm a member of the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association and North Florida Frozen Refrigerated Association.

What is your leadership philosophy?

It's important to set clear expectations around a strategy and vision, and allow teams to own their products. It's also key to counsel and develop their talents, while also celebrating their successes. My role is to keep them on track and make sure they're evolving every day. People should not be afraid of change, since it's rapid and frequent in this industry. And I have yet to see change not turn out well.

What deli retail trends have impacted the industry most in the past year?

The fresh meal solution is where the focus is. There is a race within the industry to deliver healthy, cost-effective solutions — and we're delivering for ever-changing target metrics. Sometimes it's not about traditional sit-down dinners, with activities and family obligations. Smaller families and Millennials have different needs, and we should touch on all of those. Value-added and healthy also are significant trends.

What technology or technical tools are indispensible to you in the workplace and why?

Performance tools, such as Nielsen, IRI's Fresh Facts and EYC data provide impact and information in the trade areas and provide insight on how we perform against direct-channel competition and all channels. Also, internal ordering systems are critical. Technology allows rapid communication and review with partners all the way through the supply chain.

How involved are you with social media and what are the benefits?

At Ahold, we're fortunate to have an outstanding marketing team, which is embedded 20 feet away from me. They're so creative in delivering solutions in the social media environment. I will discuss things with them and they come back with solutions, a timeline and tremendous campaigns. We have a new project in development in the store called Deli Vision. This is the foundation for external advancements to reach out to customers to make their shopping experience enhanced and more efficient.

What have been the biggest changes in the deli industry over the course of your career?

Obviously, there is more demand for healthier meal solutions. I look back and the explosion of flavor profiles has driven enormous change across the deli department. We can thank the Food Network for what it's done for us. It's a cultural opportunity, with people trying recipes and cooking foods they wouldn't have tried in the past. Also, grab-and-go and meal solutions are prevalent across all channels. The deli is at the forefront of rapid changes providing these solutions.

What is the biggest challenge you've had to overcome on the job?

I look at challenges as opportunities to grow. The biggest was cultural change in how the business was centrally managed. The solution was to be as transparent as possible and listen to teams in all divisions to find out where they were and craft discussions the right way. Everyone involved in cultural change has the same journey, but people can look at it differently. I looked at it as a huge opportunity to keep everyone engaged and work more openly with divisional partners; bringing everyone along on that journey was critical.

Are you married? If so, how long? How many children?

I've been married for 31 years and have two sons, ages 29 and 27.

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Elise MINASSIAN

Senior Procurement Manager, Deli & Bakery
C&S Wholesale Grocers, headquartered in Keene, NH
Hometown: Cheshire, MA

How did you get started in the industry?

The first company that caught my eye was C&S Wholesale Grocers. I applied at C&S, interviewed for a bakery associate buyer position and started in Hatfield, MA, one week after college graduation.

How has your career evolved over the years?

For the past 14 years, I have been part of the bakery, dairy and deli departments within C&S. I feel very fortunate for the opportunity to gain a diverse understanding of the perishable wholesale business, grocery retail industry and manufacturing side of the business. I have gone from being an associate buyer to a senior procurement manager, and hope to continue to grow and learn more about the industry.

What positions have you held in industry associations?

I am an International Dairy Deli Bakery Association (IDDBA) scholarship recipient.

How do you balance your work and personal life?

My husband is also in the food industry, so I am very lucky that we are both on the same page when it comes to our careers. We both work hard all week and make ourselves available for emergencies. We always take time after work and on weekends to enjoy life and do the things we want to do. We only get one shot at life, so we better enjoy it while we are here.

What deli retail trends have impacted the industry most in the past year?

I believe the trend of natural and organic has impacted not only the deli business, but all grocery business. The push toward fresh, health-conscious eating and label reading has changed the way consumers shop. This shift away from center store shopping has resulted in a huge focus on the perishables departments.

What technology or technical tools are indispensable to you in the workplace and why?

With all the moving pieces within our industry, it is essential to be able to access real-time data quickly and efficiently. The computer analytics tools we utilize at C&S for forecasting, code dating, pricing and overall procurement functions are essential to our day-to-day needs and are indispensable for our business.

How involved are you with social media and what are the benefits?

In business, I believe social media is extremely important in being successful in today's world. Consumers' views on your business or product can make or break you on the internet. As far as social media, on a personal level, I try to limit my time spent, as I feel it can be unproductive. I would rather spend time with friends and family living new experiences.

What have been the biggest changes in the deli industry over the course of your career?

One of the biggest changes seems to be the transition to fresh and all-natural products with a reduction of products with long shelf lives and preservatives. This is challenging for procurement, with shelf life on some deli items being as few as five days, which creates a very tight window for the supply chain from production to transportation to warehouse receiving to outbound shipping to the stores and then to consumers. In some cases, we only have a few days to make this all happen.

What is the biggest challenge you've had to overcome on the job?

It was having to move when my department was relocated from western Massachusetts to Connecticut. I grew up in western Massachusetts, lived in a house my grandparents built and had extensive family and friends within a few minutes away my entire life. When C&S made the decision to relocate the deli and bakery departments to Windsor Locks, CT, I made the tough choice to make the move and sell my house. In the end, it has been a positive move.

Are you married? If so, how long? How many children?

Yes, I have been married for almost six years, and my husband and I are expecting our first child in August.

What hobbies do you enjoy outside of work?

I am an extreme foodie, and my husband and I travel all over in search of the "best of" everything and anything food. In the past few years, we have been lucky enough to visit the Caribbean and Europe, and have gained a great appreciation for the different cultures and cuisines of other countries. I have a passion for cooking and baking, and enjoy entertaining friends and family. My husband and I both also love bass fishing.

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Tony DOMINIONI

Deli & Prepared Foods Director
Best Market Supermarkets, headquartered in Bay Shore, NY
Hometown: Riverhead, NY

How did you get started in the industry?

I started as a dishwasher in the restaurant business and worked through being a busboy and waiter, to prep cook and bartender. Then I started working at a stand-alone deli and learned the sandwich and salad business. By this time, I had developed a passion for making these simple foods. These were family businesses, and they shared recipes, or passed them down, and encouraged you to do your own thing. From there, I started at a local supermarket deli, and met a friend who would wind up introducing me to Best Market.

How has your career evolved over the years?

I started at the beginning — washing dishes and taking out the trash. At each step along the way, I tried to master the key aspects and become as efficient at the job as could be. I've usually prepared my replacement as I moved on to something new — if I was moving on from something I was good at. I was not a good bartender.

I like to keep myself in a perpetual "learn, master, grow" cycle. Everything changes, so by the time we master something, it evolves anyway. Today, I work with a dynamic and progressive team of people. We constantly strive to keep up and to push the envelope — we all thrive on that.

While I started out learning the basics and expanding over time in more of a "me, too" kind of way, now I find myself and my team looking more for ways to keep ahead and even lead the charge with new ideas.

What positions have you held in industry associations?

I've been involved with International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association (IDDBA) committees in the past few years.

What is your leadership philosophy?

Start with an open mind and honesty, then follow with transparency, clear standards and high expectations. I don't like to generalize; however, people want to do well and will rise to the occasion, given the right support and tools.

What is the best advice you ever received and why?

To listen and understand you can't tell someone how they feel. It can be tempting to jump in too soon in a discussion or try to motivate someone past a frustration you don't understand. Doing these simple things make tough situations much easier to get through in any part of life.

How do you balance your work and personal life?

For me it's about planning and going the extra mile. Everything must get done at some point, right?

What technology or technical tools are indispensable to you in the workplace and why?

Keeping everything organized and making communication easier are my essentials — calendars, shared documents/reference materials, notes and the usual barrage of spreadsheets. The "access from anywhere" stuff is great, too. When things are clear, easy to use and manage, and accessible, life is good. When they're accessible on the smartphone, it can make problem-solving easy.

What have been the biggest changes in the deli industry over the course of your career?

Food safety and education is at the top of the list. The world is leaps and bounds ahead of where it was 25 years ago. The current return to simple, clean ingredients and focus on nutritional value is powerful and here to stay. Certainly, hummus and international, and now artisan cheese, are also big.

What is the biggest challenge you've had to overcome on the job?

As director, I face large-scale challenges all the time. Once they're solved —usually by breaking them down and teamwork — they don't seem that big anymore. The biggest challenge tends to be about growing as a person and to be able to get out of one's own way.

Are you married? If so, how long? How many children?

Yes, five years and one daughter.

What hobbies do you enjoy outside of work?

Music is my thing. These days, I just listen; but when I have enough time, I practice my guitar. My daughter loves music, too. It's always fun to play around a little bit and have her sing, dance or bang away with me. I love cooking, especially grilling and smoking meats. My wife also likes cooking, and together we enjoy entertaining friends and family. I also love gardening and taking care of my yard. I like to chop wood and hang out around the fire pit with friends and family.

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Peter OSOJNIK

Corporate Buying Director
Aldi, headquartered in Batavia, IL
Hometown: Kranj, Slovenia

How has your career evolved over the years?

My career has always focused on retail. I started as a financial analyst at a Slovenian retailer. I then transitioned to a district manager at Aldi, when the company expanded to Slovenia. After a couple of years of managing five stores as a district manager, I accepted a position as a buying director in Slovenia, overseeing several commodities ranging from dairy to fresh meat. After seven years, I accepted an opportunity to join the Aldi U.S. team representing the deli commodity.

What is your leadership philosophy?

Through my experience, I've learned the best results are achieved through cooperation at all levels. I work to foster this daily with my team, my suppliers and within the business organization.

How do you balance your work and personal life?

Aldi provides its full-time employees with a unique paid time-off system for sick and personal days, which makes juggling work and personal life easier. Personally, I've learned to be productive while at work, but still value my time with family and friends outside of work. I find prioritizing both work and personal life as equally important has allowed me to be focused and successful at work while still enjoying my time outside the office. This is also something I encourage within my teams.

What deli retail trends have impacted the industry most in the past year?

From what I've seen personally, the main trends continue to be convenience, clearly marked ingredient labels, flavor innovation and portion control. Within the last year, I have also seen a dramatic transition in the convenience area from shelf-stable to fresh, chilled and healthier options.

At Aldi, we focus on what groceries shoppers buy the most. We listen to feedback from our shoppers and offer groceries to fit anyone's lifestyle. For example, about a year ago, we introduced the new Never Any! line of meats, which are made from animals that were raised without the use of antibiotics, added hormones or animal by-products.

How involved are you with social media and what are the benefits?

I found success in promoting new products, strong retail and seasonal offerings across our social platforms. Working with our internal marketing team, our social channels have allowed us to be nimble, quick to market, targeted and aligned with consumer trends.

What have been the biggest changes in the deli industry over the course of your career?

As we've seen consumer perceptions shift from value for your dollar to functional, better-for-you, fresh and healthy features of the product, the industry has shifted as well. This has allowed for a multitude of new and innovative developments in the commodity and has diversified the supply base. Working at Aldi has allowed me to support this shift across our product range.

What is the biggest challenge you've had to overcome on the job?

The most challenging, yet the most rewarding part of my work is my collaboration with suppliers. Forging a long-lasting relationship with our suppliers can be challenging. However, our cooperative business model and expanding store footprint have allowed me to overcome these challenges.

Are you married? If so, how long? How many children?

I have been married for three years and have a daughter and a son.

What hobbies do you enjoy outside of work?

I enjoy traveling, and I share this interest with my family — we've visited 37 states in the past three years. I also enjoy running and have participated in a couple of marathons. **DB**

I've learned the best results are achieved through cooperation at all levels.

Aging Room, BelGioioso Pulaski Plant, WI *December 2016*

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Lucrative Pairings

Cross merchandising leads to larger rings in the deli

BY JEFFREY STEELE

Musical performers, art objects and business all are perfectly fine as standalones. But blending them in groups of two or more often creates magic none of them can offer singly. So it is with supermarket deli items, which sometimes just naturally go together.

So how can supermarket delis successfully sell their products in conjunction with other products? Simply put, by providing meal, snacking and entertaining solutions for time-stressed customers who are searching for such answers in today's supermarket delis.

So says Steve Lorenz, director of marketing at La Panzanella Artisanal Food Co., a long-established, family-owned Seattle crackers and cookies baker.

"When shoppers are in the deli, they're most likely looking for one of three things: some type of meal solution, a nice snacking assortment or something to serve their guests as an appetizer," he says. "By providing suggested pairings of items, either via sampling a cracker, cheese and topping together or by promoting these items with signage and a solid merchandising strategy, shoppers are more likely to respond by purchasing the items together. It's a win for the shopper because you have met a need they had, and it's also a big win for the deli that grew the size of the transaction and has a happy customer."

According to Mary T. Shepard, director of sales for Fortun's Finishing Touch

Sauces in Kirkland, WA, today's customers seek pairings that are "absolutely fresh" with no MSG or preservatives. They also are looking for bundling opportunities mixing items they can easily prepare at home. "It's not just your fried chicken and jojo potatoes anymore," she says.

Adding a third ingredient to a pairing can dress up the experience and create a unique and exciting flavor combination.

Dynamic Duos

"In our sauce category, it's true restaurant sauce. We do exactly what a chef would do, sautéing the onions and adding fresh mushrooms," Shepard says. "The supermarket delis are competing with the restaurant fare; it's higher quality to ensure that repeat customer."

Shepard adds, "So with a chicken breast and 2 ounces of sauce, you can go home and put it together and you're done. Another combination would be a lemon dill caper with white wine paired with a salmon or any seasonal fish."

Supermarket delis are also increasingly tempting customers with kettles of fresh, robust soups. "I'd definitely pair those with salads," says Shepard. "There are so many offerings, such as spinach, edamame and beans, maybe with a little breaded tuna. Pair them with, say, a tomato bisque, a smooth, roasted tomato soup; that's a real comfort food."

Bob Sewall, executive vice president of Blount Fine Foods in Fall River, MA, is also convinced delis can best compete with restaurants by combining time-honored favorites. "Retailers are competing with foodservice for share of stomach," he says. "So offer combo meals – soup with salad, soup with a sandwich. It could be either a hot-to-go soup area or prepackaged soup along with a deli sandwich or salad."

Pairings can offer popular items, like rotisserie chicken in meal deals with healthy side dishes, he adds. "We have a lot of organic sides for those looking to eat healthier, like organic sweet potatoes, organic spinach and kale and organic butternut squash."

Where deli managers can really add value is by helping customers understand two key considerations, says Lorenz.

First, adding a third ingredient to a pairing can dress up the experience and create a unique and exciting flavor combination.

Second, certain flavor characteristics of one ingredient or item might play particularly well with a certain type of cheese or meat. La Panzanella frequently recommends patrons serve a delicious salad in bite-size portions atop the company's Croccantini crackers. "This is an easy and elegant way to create an appetizer for your friends or guests," he points out.

The issue of pairings can encourage conversations with customers, he adds.

A conversation might start with the deli

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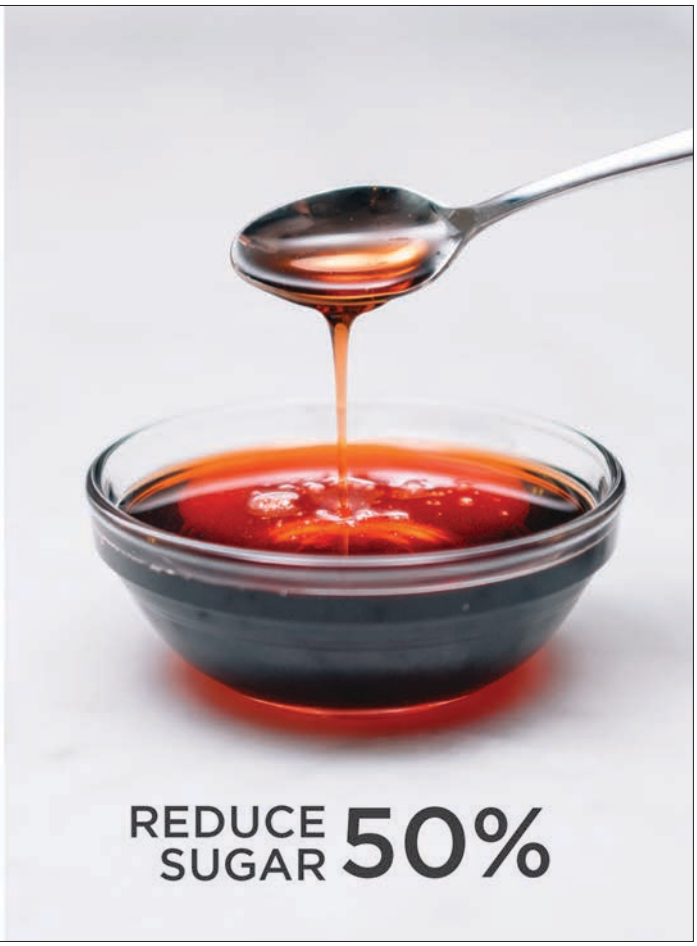

employee asking what type of cheese a customer enjoys and then suggesting pairings of complementary or similar cheeses.

Venus Wafers, a Hingham, MA-based cracker and flatbread maker, reports flatbreads with hummus go well together. "We have an organic flatbread and traditional flatbread that pairs well with red pepper, lemon, dill and a million other flavors," says James R. Anderko, the company's vice president of sales and marketing. "Organic flatbread pairs well with blue cheese. Our traditional crackers, like our stone wheat cracker, go well with a goat cheese or any type of Cheddar cheese."

Revenue-building Displays

Eye-catching, revenue-building displays can help supermarket deli customers grasp the synergies served up by successful pairings. "They need to pair their sauces right out in front," says Shepard. "It has to be very visual right in front of shoppers with the items paired. I'm a shopper, and when I go in the store at 4:30, I need ideas."

The language used in displays is also key, she says. "What they want to get across is these are 'restaurant-quality' items," she stresses. "They're elevating what delis used to be and they need to because they're competing against restaurants."

At the holidays, La Panzanella tries to cross merchandise with complementary items, such as a cheese and perhaps a Washington State wine like Domaine Ste. Michelle, to suggest creative holiday entertaining solutions.

"We create merchandising tools like neck hangers, coupons, case signage and more, so the story can be told in the wine area of the store as well as in the deli area," says Lorenz. "That way, we are moving customers across departments, which is good for the retailer and helping meet their holiday entertaining needs, which is good for the customer. When possible, we try to enhance the promotion with large displays in the wine area and maybe a secondary smaller display in the deli department that would feature both the wines and La Panzanella crackers."

In this era when more customers are buying groceries online, supermarkets need to make their stores experience-rich destinations where patrons not only shop, but also eat, socialize and perhaps grab a pint of liquid refreshment, asserts Lorenz.

Of course, each supermarket area, including the deli, should actively sample its products to create new, risk-free flavor experiences for customers. "Try before you buy works great in the deli and the prepared foods areas," says Lorenz.

Venus Wafers offers pre-packed shippers. "All you have to do is turn them over, fold in the bottom, and the products in the display carton can be laid in the base," says Anderko. "It's a self-contained shipping unit that doesn't have to be assembled to be a display case."

Getting Creative

Social media and other digital-age advancements offer plenty of opportunities for creativity in pairings. "Word of mouth is the best marketing ever," says Shepard. "Today, word of mouth is social media. For example, if we have a promotion at [Chicago-area supermarket] Mariano's, we'll target our social media efforts to Chicago-area ZIP codes and get the word out regionally. And we'll get a good buzz going there."

Lorenz suggests retailers create deli apps expressly designed to help customers with innovative pairings and recipes. "We utilize our social media and website to promote our Croccantini Creations recipes," he says. "These are straightforward and easy ways to create delicious appetizers or meal enhancements."

Eye-catching, revenue-building displays can help supermarket deli customers grasp the synergies served up by successful pairings.

Moving forward, he adds, deli and prepared foods departments must have unique apps and a social media presence going beyond the app of the retailer. "Shoppers are typically using the store app to see what is on special or where they can find something," says Lorenz. "The deli and prepared foods departments are about creating an experience, whether simple or elegant. That's what it is about and that is how their apps should be designed. Then, having customers share those created experiences on any social media platform is a big win for the retailer, the suppliers and, most importantly, the shoppers." **DB**

FOCUSING ON FLATBREAD

Delis can take advantage of many options with widespread appeal

BY LESLIE MANN

When Demetrios Haralambatos joined Paterson, NJ-based Kontos Foods Inc. as corporate executive chef 22 years ago, he'd promote the company's pita line by visiting restaurants just to deconstruct traditional bread sandwiches.

"The server would bring out three sandwiches, which were on white or wheat bread, sometimes a hoagie roll, and I switched this out with the pita bread," says Haralambatos. "When the boss came out and asked what I was doing, I explained how flatbread is an effective way to expand their offerings for roughly the same cost with bigger profit potential."

In other words, Haralambatos provided a flatbread education to restaurant operators. At that time, pita bread was mainly used for gyros, and wasn't considered for much else.

"Working as a hotel chef for more than 20 years, I believed utilizing something in more than once place on my menu meant I had less product than I needed to keep in storage," says Haralambatos. "Pita bread is an obvious choice for gyros, but also can be used for paninis and grab-and-go items. This one bread type can cover five or more different offerings in supermarket deli foodservice programs."

An Evolution

Flatbread suppliers are bringing added attention to the potential of this category by posting recipes on their websites. This provides more opportunities for retailers to sell these products in new ways, says Karen Toufayan, vice president of Toufayan Bakeries in Ridgefield, NJ. In April, she added 65 recipes from a contest the company held among nutritionists.

Packaged flatbread, including pita, has been a deli staple for more than 30 years.

"Pita bread as we think of it today has been around a really long time and has crossed many ethnic lines," says Haralambatos. "If we analyze recipes for pita bread, Indian naan or even pizza dough, it's basically all the same."

The difference is in how long the bread is kneaded, the temperature it's cooked at and the amount of time it's in the oven.

While pita bread has a very thin crust, the pocket pita is much harder because it's not kneaded as long. Also, pocketless pitas are baked for a much longer period of time. Pocket pitas have a lot less oil than Greek pocketless pitas, and naan is baked using even more oil.

Flatbreads appeal to different ages for different reasons.

"Flatbread in ancient times crossed many different ethnicities, and today there is fusion," says Haralambatos. "Early on, the focus was on eastern Mediterranean types like pita, but by the mid 90s, Kontos started coming out with a naan collection and expanding its market. Due to similarities of basic ingredients and minor alterations in products, our lines became multi-cultural."

Traditional products, like pita bread and tortillas, continue to experience steady growth in delis and are bolstered by newer offerings, such as the aforementioned naan and lahvosh.

With a healthier ingredient profile that typically is lower in carbs and higher in nutrients, it is no wonder delis are experiencing strong sales in this segment.

Flatbread sales grew steadily from 2012 to 2016 at an average of 4.2 percent a year, according to New York-based research firm Nielsen. Its Nielsen Fresh team, which tracks food trends, reported that, during the 52 weeks ending February 25, 2017, flatbread sales increased by 8.2 percent.

Why is flatbread one of the brightest stars in this year's food galaxy? It's a combination of factors, say experts.

Flatbread is usually a healthier food choice than traditional bread. Vegan? Check. Non-GMO? Check. Low-carb? Check. The list goes on.

"Millennials, especially, read labels," says Jenni Bonsignore, marketing manager of Fresno, CA-based Valley Lahvosh Baking Co. "But consumers in all age groups are more savvy about the foods they buy."

Today's consumer is more adventurous when it comes to food. They're watching cooking TV shows, taking cooking classes, joining foodie dinner clubs — all routes to ethnic foods like flatbreads.

Flatbreads appeal to different ages for different reasons. Baby Boomers wow their dinner-party guests in the dining room with appetizers made of small flatbreads, while they use larger flatbreads to make a pizza for the kids in the kitchen. The Boomers' older parents appreciate that they can use flatbread to make a light, easy meal for two.

Because there are greater numbers of packaged flatbread varieties in supermarket delis, this is an easy category for retailers to overlook; this would be a mistake, as there are a number of opportunities in full-service and foodservice to up the ante and cash in on the possibilities. The key is to bring in new products, which can strengthen the profile of these on-trend breads.

As flatbreads are venturing farther from their adopted American hometowns, manufacturers tell their immigration stories with pride. Many of the bakeries were founded in the early 20th century by Middle Eastern immigrants. Their recipes and ownership were passed down within their families.

What's Available

Toufayan Bakeries, for example, has been baking its bread since 1926. Still family-owned 90 years later, the company produces more than 100 varieties of baked

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California Lavash started in 1922 with the family's Assyrian recipe. Today, the founder's daughter, Lilea Eshoo, is at the helm. The company produces lavash, naan, noor (originating from Afghanistan and sprinkled with caraway and sesame seeds) and sangak (a rustic Iranian flatbread) with sesame seeds that has a smoky taste." Its newest product is a garlic naan.

Valley Lahvosh, also established in 1922, uses recipes that evolved from its Armenian founder, Gazair Saghatelian; his granddaughter Janet is now the company's president. Its foodservice products include lavash and wraps, while retail lines encompass lavash in a variety of sizes and shapes.

Brooklyn, NY-based Damascus Bakeries, opened in 1930, has deep Syrian roots. Its lines include pitas, lavash, wraps and rollups in a variety of flavors.

Although these companies are steeped in the history of flatbread, there are new product launches that offer supermarket delis additional profit opportunities

For example, Kontos recently launched pre-grilled flatbread and panini bread, which allows supermarket delis to produce these popular sandwiches without an added equipment investment.

"A supermarket chef's to-go section is already jam-packed real estate wise with equipment from 10 to 20 years ago," says Haralambatos. "Stores are typically not buying new equipment."

The company also has modified its recipes to keep up with current trends, such as creating a multi-grain flatbread with 11 different grains. Its most recent product is Greek Lifestyle flatbread, which offers benefits similar to those of Greek yogurt, with low carbs, high protein and a more nutritious ingredient profile.

Kontos also has recently introduced gluten-free wraps and offers markook bread, which is made on the outside of a wok. This is similar to the Indian roumali.

Within the past few years, the sandwich category growth has been fueled by wraps. Most recently in the past 12 months, flatbreads combined with more robust bread offerings have catapulted the category.

Salinas, CA-based Taylor Farms provides a full line of fresh, ready to eat meal solutions that include flatbread.

These include six green salads with a large flatbread, fresh salad component, protein, sliced fresh vegetables, crunchy topping and dressing all in one. Varieties include Greek with Kalamata dressing; Thai peanut with Sriracha dressing; Caesar with traditional dressing; Buffalo with wing sauce and blue cheese; Hummus and greens with a lemon wedge; and Carnitas with jalapeño dressing

"Flatbread is another vehicle that can be used to transcend across many platforms," says Ed St. Clair, who handles Taylor Farms deli sales. "Green Salads are a strong and maturing category within the deli departments, and we want to expand the green salad experience by leveraging a proven growth concept in one of the largest categories (sandwich) in all of deli/foodservice."

Good As Gold

At this stage, at least, flatbread's position in the grocer's deli case is gold in terms of marketing, because it provides built-in opportunities to cross market these items with other products.

"Few people just buy flatbread," says Bonsignore. "They buy spreads to make hors d'oeuvres, or meats and cheeses to make lunches or dinners."

"We've seen some stores make part of the deli a pizza station," says David Mafoud, co-owner of BrooklynBred, part of Damascus Bakeries. "They display the flatbread for the crust, cheese, vegetables, sauce — all in one place so it's a one-stop shop." Retailers should be sure to give the customer a recipe, he adds, and post a picture of the finished product.

Pizzas are a big slice of the flatbread market, says Mafoud. "Our biggest competitor is not another flatbread, but the frozen pizza, which is convenient, except you have no control over what's in the crust or in the sauce. Use our flatbread and you know the ingredients."

Haralambatos recommends utilizing flatbread to augment seasonal sales, such as corned beef sandwiches on multi-grain flatbread or German bratwurst on whole wheat flatbread instead of a bun.

Packaging differs little from one flatbread bakery to the next, save for some more sophisticated graphic and at least one with a tray-like insert so the product doesn't get damaged en route. Most have see-through wrappers with zipper-like tops. The challenge is to show off as much of the product as possible, while preventing it from breaking.

Yes, a customer can buy just a flatbread, but what's more likely is they'll add other foods to turn it into favorite appetizers, lunches and dinners. The results are multi-cultural recipes that combine foods from different parts of the world.

"One can take anything you're putting on a sandwich and with flatbread it will be healthier, have a better mouth feel and will enhance many sandwich varieties," says Haralambatos. "It's the same format as bread, but gives chefs in retail the chance to be much more creative." **DB**

Salads And Sides Getting Healthier

Filling the plate to increase the ring

BY BOB JOHNSON

A new generation of salads and sides is growing up before us that are healthier, more authentic and more interesting.

Rewards await retailers who can satisfy this craving for more grains and healthy oils, with less mayonnaise. Salads in the deli are approaching $1 billion and growing, according to the Madison, WI-based International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association's *What's in Store 2016*, which is easily more than either sandwiches or entreés.

"Customers are looking for fresh grab-and-go and deli salad options with clean ingredients that are visually appealing, healthy and portable," says Douglas Bond, chef at Freshway Foods, Sidney, OH. "They want to have a wide variety of on-trend and updated classic salad choices from which to choose from. Customers, especially Millennials, are looking to the salad category to satisfy their needs in different day parts, including breakfast and snack time."

Potato and macaroni salads are not about to disappear, but many consumers are feeling affection for options that are a little easier on the heart.

"Vinegar-based salads are doing well compared to mayonnaise-based," says Mark Miller, vice president of marketing at Simply Fresh Foods, Buena Park, CA. "We're seeing more vinegar-based Mediterranean salads and less mayonnaise-based. We're also seeing more yogurt, which has half the calories of mayonnaise."

Millennials, in particular, are looking for healthier alternatives to mayonnaise in their sides and salads.

"Younger consumers are not interested in mayo-based items, and older consumers are looking for additional healthful options in their side dish selections," says John Becker, senior director of marketing at Sandridge Foods, Medina, OH. "We have developed an eggless-based dressing to attract vegan audiences, and continue to utilize Greek yogurt as a dressing alternative. And vinaigrettes are better for introducing ethnic flavors."

Protein, especially healthier protein, has become a more important part of the new generation of salads.

Nine out of 10 consumers prefer cheese on their salads; cheese blends on salads are up 16 percent over the past year, according to *What's in Store 2016*. The most popular cheeses on salads are Feta and Parmesan, with Queso Fresco and Brie being the two fastest-growing specialty cheese toppings.

Many of the salads gaining favor with Millennials get their nutritional punch from grains or legumes, especially classical or ancient grains, and many of the sides are built around roasted vegetables.

"Anything with grains like quinoa or faro, or legumes like chickpeas or lentils, are in demand because of the health benefits of the ingredients," says Becker. "Roasting also is increasing in popularity, whether cauliflower, sweet potatoes or beets, all on-trend ingredients."

According to *What's in Store 2016*, grain and pasta salads already approach $150 million in the deli and are growing at better than 8 percent a year.

There is a market among discriminating consumers who are willing to pay a little more for these healthier options.

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"There's more healthy eating going on," says Miller. "There's a trend toward getting more protein from non-animal sources. Grains and legumes give you proteins. The Millennials are willing to spend a little more money for grain-based salads."

Some suppliers try to help the deli entice this additional purchase with signage that has the power of suggestion.

Show Them And They Will Eat

Few consumers come to the deli expecting to buy a salad or side, but once there, many customers are open to suggestion, which begins with placement.

"A lot of people will go to the deli to buy sliced ham or turkey, and then they'll buy a side or salad to go with it," says Miller.

Some suppliers try to help the deli entice this additional purchase with signage that has the power of suggestion.

"We recently introduced Green Leaf Signature Salads, a new product line featuring the clean label designation," says Jim Gawronski, director of sales and marketing at Garden-Fresh Foods, Milwaukee. "The line includes six premier salads that contain only natural, plant-based ingredients. This includes traditional favorites like potato salad and macaroni salad and also globally-inspired salads like Korean kimchi salad."

Garden-Fresh developed in-store materials to help retailers draw attention to these new clean label lines.

"We also developed new point of sale material, including bowl stakes and static cling signs, to help deli managers market and inform customers about the clean label salads, since we know many deli shoppers, especially Millennials, are looking for these options," says Gawronski.

Other producers, however, believe it makes sense to have salads and sides predictably in both the cold case and behind the counter, because each location draws purchases for different occasions.

"Many times, the actual product is identical, but the packaging and buying experience is different," says Nathan Roe, category manager at Reser's Fine Foods, Beaverton, OR. "We've seen that what may interest a consumer buying for a picnic or larger family gathering might not have the same appeal as a quick Tuesday night meal at home. It could still be the same cole slaw or pasta salad, but the convenience of packaging sometimes takes precedence over the interactions and decisions involved with a deli case purchase."

Regardless of how you draw attention to the sides and salads, there is consensus that the product that seals the deal should be interesting, fresh and, above all else, more nutritious.

"Health, wellness and convenience are new and popular," says Carl Cappelli,

Once they notice the salad options, many consumers are going to take a closer look at the ingredients.

senior vice president of sales and business development at Don's Food Products, Schwenksville, PA. "Grab-and-go clean salads also are on trend."

Once they notice the salad options, many consumers are going to take a closer look at the ingredients.

"Consumers increasingly want to know what's in a salad beyond just the main ingredient, like potato or macaroni," says Roe. "We are starting to see claims on packaging about no artificial flavors or colors, or high fructose corn syrup. There is a fine line to balance here; however, because I don't think consumers thought these were there to begin with, we took a more nuanced approach. It will be interesting to see if these claims make their way to the deli case, whether they're in the form of in-store signage or education programs for the managers and staff."

The bottom line is consumers expect to know and trust the ingredients listed on the item's label.

"It's mostly about mindful eating," says Becker. "Most consumers are unwilling to follow strict diets, so they are demanding manufacturers provide more nutritious options in the foods they already purchase. Consumers want to recognize the ingredients in their food."

Plant-based sides and salads are particularly well-suited to pass the test with consumers looking for better nutrition.

"Clean label is the current trend," says Bond. "This includes salads that are healthy or perceived as healthy; updated classic salads or classics with a twist; salads utilizing ancient grain and plant-based proteins; and colorful and vibrant Pinterest- and Snapchat-worthy salad presentations."

The Millennial consumers are particularly interested in authentic food with ingredients from known local farmers and area producers.

The new generation of shoppers looking for fresh, local, healthy and unique foods are equally influencing the salad category, according to *What's in Store*. Transparency and authenticity are important, especially if featuring local or 'farm-to-table' items.

To pass the final test, however, these clean, healthy and convenient salads must also deliver on taste.

"Consumers want healthy, grab-and-go, fresh, but do not want to sacrifice flavor," says Cappelli. "We will launch five clean, pre-packed grain salads by June 2017 – Seven Grain, Cranberry Grain, Fruit & Nut Quinoa, Island Grain with Beans and Mango Lime Quinoa."

Retailers can capitalize on the side and salad opportunities, remembering that visibility and cross merchandising are key. **DB**

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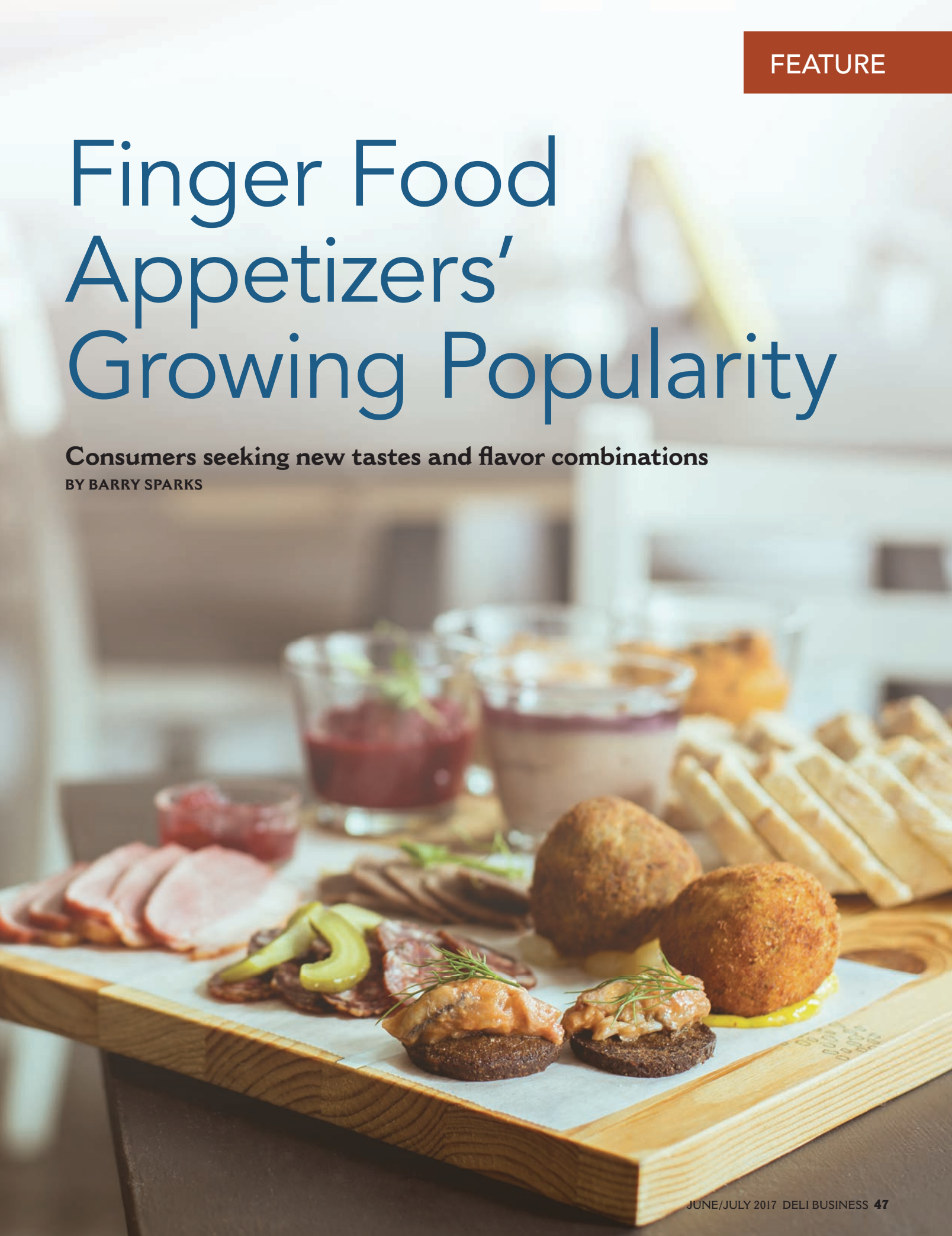
Finger Food Appetizers' Growing Popularity

Consumers seeking new tastes and flavor combinations

BY BARRY SPARKS



Finger food appetizers are becoming more popular items at a wide-range of social gatherings — casual get-togethers with friends, cocktail parties, outdoor garden parties, baby showers, wine and cheese parties, birthday celebrations and more.

But the bite-size appetizers aren't just limited to special occasion menus. Nearly 35 percent of consumers eat appetizers at home, according to the 2015 *Menu Trends Keynote Report*, produced by Chicago-based Datassential. This reflects a change in snacking habits, particularly among the Millennial demographic.

Finger food appetizers offer a multitude of appealing features. Most don't require the use of any utensils; they are easy to eat while standing and mingling with others; they are relatively inexpensive; and most don't need any crockery to serve.

"More people are entertaining in their homes," says Camille Collins, marketing director for Les Trois Petite Cochons Enterprises, located in Brooklyn, NY. "They want to impress their friends, and party appetizers are one way to do that."

Laurie Cummins, president of Alexian Patés and Specialty Meats, located in Neptune, NJ, concurs. "From a host or hostess perspective, social occasions are an opportunity to impress and entertain with exotic and interesting foods."

Adventurous Food Choices

Today's finger food appetizers have come a long way from traditional types, such as stuffed mushrooms, pigs in a blanket and deviled eggs.

"People are much more adventurous in their food choices, especially at parties," offers Cummins. "Social occasions provide a platform for trying something new, or that one wouldn't have tried before."

Sebastien Lehembre, senior brand manager, Alouette Cheese USA, headquartered in New Holland, PA, says change was inevitable. "The appetizers category has changed drastically in recent years thanks to Millennials, who are seeking new tastes and combinations of flavors. They are getting away from, or adding to, the traditional cheese board."

Lehembre says this is a foodie generation, one that relishes taking photos of their food and posting it on social media. It's a generation curious about other cultures and cuisines. As a result, finger food appetizers have no bounds when it comes to flavors and combinations.

Ethnic Party Appetizers

Party appetizers are more ethnic than ever. Sauerkraut ham balls, Japanese-style chilled tofu, deep fried tortellini, spinach fatayer or chicken molé tostadas, for example, provide an international flavor for innovative party menus.

An appetizer menu is the perfect opportunity to mix classic offerings with newer ingredient combinations. By providing a variety of flavors and choices, guests can either stick to what they are comfortable with or branch out.

The quest for new and different finger food appetizers is one supermarket delis can capitalize on.

"Delis should be making sure they are giving consumers the option to purchase products that are easy to use to create party appetizers, but also allow them to make a dish their own," says Jessica Brown, director of marketing at Yucatan Foods, located in Los Angeles.

Delis can easily expand their selections to appeal to the party appetizers crowd. Alexian Patés and Specialty Meats makes more than 21 different kinds of patés. These range from the standard country style, which are coarse in texture and bold in flavor, and chicken liver mousse to a more exotic duck and pheasant paté flavored with rosemary, pecans and port wine. The company also offers vegetable terrines,

such as mushrooms and artichokes as well as eggplant and goat cheese.

Cummins says patés, mousses and terrines are versatile and can be used to easily create appealing and delectable appetizers. She suggests filling puff pastry shells with a spreadable mousse-style paté, slicing a vegetable paté into cubes and placing them inside tortilla scoops, or shaping truffle mousse into teaspoon-size balls, rolling them in Panko bread crumbs seasoned with dried thyme and refrigerating them until ready to use.

Les Trois Petite Cochons also features a variety of patés, mousses, terrines, sausages and charcuterie. Collins says the introduction of three organic products has been the biggest launch in the company's history. The organic products include chicken paté with apples and cider, country pork paté and chicken liver, pork and wild

mushroom mousse.

"Organic products have been a huge success for us," she says. "They are helping to introduce the younger generation to our products. We are definitely planning on expanding our organic selections."

Turnkey Sushi Bars Grow

Andrea Lee, corporate communicators director at Hissho Sushi, headquartered in Charlotte, NC, says one of the hottest deli trends is turnkey sushi bars. Hissho Sushi has more than 1,000 locations in 42 states. Each location is operated by a franchisee who prepares sushi fresh daily on-site.

"We have doubled our business in the past three years," says Lee. "Last year, we passed $100 million in revenue. Every demographic is driving our growth."

"Our sushi bars are always located in the deli, and they complement each other nicely. A sushi bar makes your store a destination stop. And you are losing money if you don't have something to differentiate your deli from others," she says.

Hissho Sushi's fresh, healthy and high-quality products resonate with today's consumers. The company's variety of rolls and platters is ideal for party appetizers.

Lehembre of Alouette Cheese says consumers are looking for easy pairings while creating a wow factor. Putting together unexpected ingredients makes the pairing even more surprising. When delis carry a variety of cheese products, it makes it easier for consumers to come up with creative and unexpected pairings, according to Lehembre.

Alouette Cheese offers Brie, Crème de Brie, crumbled Feta cheese, crème fraiche, soft spreadable cheese and more. They can be star ingredients in party appetizers, such as Brie and almond canapé, crumble Feta boats, apple butter Brie, almonds fraiche and fraiche baguette.

Yucatan Foods features four kinds of guacamole — authentic, organic, mild and spicy. Guacamole is one of the fastest-growing dips, according to John Trang, associate marketing manager. It also can be used in a variety of party appetizers, such as guacamole goat cheese bruchetta, guacamole focaccia squares and shrimp and guacamole spring rolls.

Cross Merchandising Options

Delis have multiple opportunities to cross merchandise with party appetizer ingredients. Collins suggests teaming up with the bakery to feature different freshly-baked breads, such as French baguette, ciabatta and sourdough. She also recommends a display of mustard, figs, grapes, jellies and jams.

Lehembre suggests an idea-spurring display on a cutting board with a variety of cheese types, unique spices, honey, fruits and charcuterie.

"Every department has something that can enhance party appetizers," stresses Cummins. "Cornichons, fruit, pistachios, dry-cured or smoked sausage, fruit tarts and wine can easily increase sales."

Since creativity is such an essential part of today's party appetizers, and the combination of flavors can be completely unexpected, it's helpful if supermarket deli staff members can recommend some unique party appetizers. Nothing replaces the suggestive power of a well-informed and well-trained staff.

Food companies provide plenty of support to help educate staff members as well as consumers.

"Promotion Wednesdays are one of the most popular things we've done," says Lee of Hissho Sushi. "It gives consumers an opportunity to try something new at a great price point." The company also provides clings, sidewalk signs, banners and digital signs as marketing support.

Trang says Yucatan Foods supports retailers through promotions and product promos. The heaviest marketing efforts typically occur during the holidays and sport seasons, where large social gatherings occur. Yucatan Foods strives to raise brand awareness and drive retail traffic through social media and sport partnerships with major league baseball and major league soccer.

Les Trois Petite Cochons has a brochure geared toward consumers, wine pairings and loads of recipes.

Alexian Patés and Specialty Meats has an active presence on social media, where creative ideas are continually posted. It offers a variety of promotions through its distributors, including product demos.

Alouette Cheese has hundreds of recipes posted online for appetizers as well as entreés, salads and desserts.

Looking ahead, the future appears to be bright for finger food appetizers.

"We are in development of 15 finger foods that are absolutely gorgeous," says Lehembre of Alouette Cheese. "They range from St. Agur with bacon to mini Camembert burgers. I believe we will see more and more unexpected pairings."

Cummins expects the variety of options to continue expanding, especially with the trending of tapas-style eating.

"There will be a steady demand, as more people entertain friends and family in their homes," predicts Collins.

This is good news for delis, which can take advantage of the opportunities. **DB**

EXPLORING THE MEDITERRANEAN

The category is blooming with flavors, spices, grains and twists on classic recipes

BY KEITH LORIA

The evolution of the Mediterranean foods segment can be seen in the wealth of options available to shoppers. In addition to standalone fixtures like the olive and antipasti bar, pre-sliced charcuterie in a multi-deck and the specialty cheese counter, there now exists Mediterranean options in prepared foods — grain based salads, grilled/roasted fish, etc. — and grab-and-go items, such as nut butter fresh-chilled protein bars, to-go boxes of olives, hummus, pita and falafel.

"Walk into nearly any grocery store, and you will see how consumer demand for ethnic flavors and cuisines has impacted the evolution and expansion of offerings in almost every area of the store, says Colleen McDonald, marketing manager of Wixon, based in St. Francis, WI. "As American palates continue to evolve, ethnic cuisines continue grow in popularity. Many trending flavors from a few years back have become favorites today. Not long ago,

tahini, a key ingredient in the ever-present Mediterranean hummus, would require a trip to a specialty store; it now can be found at any local supermarket."

Brandon Gross, vice president of marketing for New York-based FoodMatch, the manufacturer of Divina specialty olives and antipasti, says the company is finding that Mediterranean condiments are becoming increasingly popular in prepared foods sections of the store.

"Adding sauces like Harissa, preserved lemon spread, fig or cherry spreads to classics such as chicken, shrimp, salmon or roasted Brussels sprouts and asparagus can bring new life to fan-favorites," he says.

Jenni Bonsignore, marketing manager for Valley Lahvosh Baking Co., based in Fresno, CA, notes Mediterranean foods have evolved from a specialized ethnic option to being very mainstream.

Hummus Is Trending

"People are more aware of the foods that are available and see a benefit in including Mediterranean cuisine in their day-to-day diets," she says. "Consumers still want flavorful, healthy choices, but now they also want to feel good about the food they are eating and/or the brands they are supporting. The plant-based food trend is big, which lends itself to many Mediterranean food items."

No longer just a perfect accompaniment to falafels or many Middle Eastern and

The Olive Appeal

Today, more and more olives are seen in various sections of the supermarket, and olives bars are becoming almost the norm in the deli department.

"When consumers visit supermarkets and specialty stores, they clearly see how olive bars have grown in popularity," says Jeffrey Shaw, director of Foods from Spain, headquartered in New York. "The deli's numerous opportunities include incorporating olives into prepared foods and merchandising packaged olives beside appropriate foods to encourage usage in fresh pastas, cheese, etc."

The International Olive Oil Council in Spain notes consumers are expressing a want of natural and healthy foods, which green and naturally-ripened olives fulfill. There is also a rising interest in fermented foods, according to the organization's research.

New varietals are gaining ground, and olives stuffed with chorizo, anchovies, almonds, cheese, salmon and tuna are all finding their way to the olive bar.

Patty Amato, senior vice president of Farm Ridge Foods, based in Islandia, NY, says in today's retail environment, the ubiquitous olives serve as both a cultural staple and a gourmet specialty.

"Kick starting new concepts is nothing new for The Olive Branch, a division of Farm Ridge Foods. Emerging varieties, such as Caribbean Black Olives, Tropical Blend and Classic Moroccan Citrus, are sure to kick up the senses at supermarket delis," she says. "The heat is on when it comes to the latest trends. As the name suggests, Hot Latin Medley is sure to stimulate the palate."

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Mediterranean dishes, hummus is gaining popularity in the United States, and usage ideas beyond the obligatory "healthy" veggie tray dip option are becoming big sellers.

"While it is a great item to pair with crunchy fresh vegetables, people are getting creative with how they include this creamy, nutritious and protein-packed topping in a variety of dishes and meals," says Lori Bigras, director of marketing and communications for Green Giant Fresh, headquartered in Salinas, CA. "From including it on sandwiches, flatbreads and burgers as a tasty spread, to putting it on grilled meats and chicken, consumers are finding new and unique ways to infuse hummus into American cuisine."

Green Giant currently offers four hummus varieties, including Classic, Roasted Garlic, Roasted Pine Nut and Roasted Red Bell Pepper. Its grab-and-go Hummus Snack Cups are also now available.

"While hummus should never be out of the cold chain — and should always be merchandised in refrigeration — there are several cross promotional opportunities that savvy retailers can take advantage of," says Bigras. "Place it near premium cheeses, and display crackers, pitas and chips nearby for quick appetizer platter ideas. Display signage to have on counters and cases in the meat and seafood department with recipes and imagery showing how hummus can be used in/on a variety of meat dishes."

Part of what makes hummus so versatile today is that it can be bought in a variety of flavors.

AnnMarie Kraszewski, Wixon's R&D lab manager, says the use of lentils and chickpeas has become more popular in recent years, either as part of a base formula or as a dish's main ingredient.

Kim Cornelius, the company's senior food scientist, notes hummus is quite popular with today's consumers, who find it versatile either consumed as is or used as an ingredient.

"Along with being a go-to dip for snacks, hummus is used in flavored sandwich spreads, salad dressings and cooking," she says. "Couscous, a Mediterranean food, is showing up more and more in side dishes, salads, appetizers and even in breakfast oatmeal and porridge."

Part of what makes hummus so versatile today is that it can be bought in a variety of flavors, or the consumer can start with a can of chickpeas or store-bought hummus and customize the flavor to their preference. Roni Eckert, Wixon's senior food scientist, says adding Siracha for a hot and spicy hummus, or chipotle peppers for a Mexican taste, are trending.

"A bit of sun-dried tomatoes and rosemary blended into hummus will give a nice Mediterranean cuisine flavor, or add

traditional pesto and some pine nuts for an Italian-based hummus," says Eckert. "Flavored vinegars are appearing on more store shelves, and dressings based on olive oils and flavored vinegars are showing up more in retail and on restaurant menus."

Advice For Retailers

The grocery landscape is so ultra-competitive now. Not only are retailers competing with other brick and mortar stores, but they're also getting a run for the money from e-commerce options, so it's important that delis highlight their Mediterranean sections.

"We've all got to partner up and ensure we're providing an in-store experience that brings the customer back. We can do that through pairings, demos, engaging displays and signage," says Gross. "A rising tide lifts all boats, and the specialty cheese customer is also a customer for olives, antipasti, charcuterie, hummus, crackers, etc. Providing displays that feature all items in a thoughtful way can provide the one-stop specialty shop that consumers crave."

Bonsignore says that with the company's Valley Lahvosh crackers, the best way to merchandise the product is for retailers to show consumers a variety of uses in the deli through tastings and cross merchandising opportunities.

"Our smaller Lahvosh crackers are a perfect carrier cracker, but we also have a 15-inch round cracker that makes a great pizza crust," she says. "The key is to show different recipes, which usually also provides an opportunity for cross merchandising with other companies. That will lead to more sales."

The biggest tip McDonald can offer is for retailers to stay in tune with new flavor trends that are developing across all categories and channels, and keep an eye on the generational preferences and drivers.

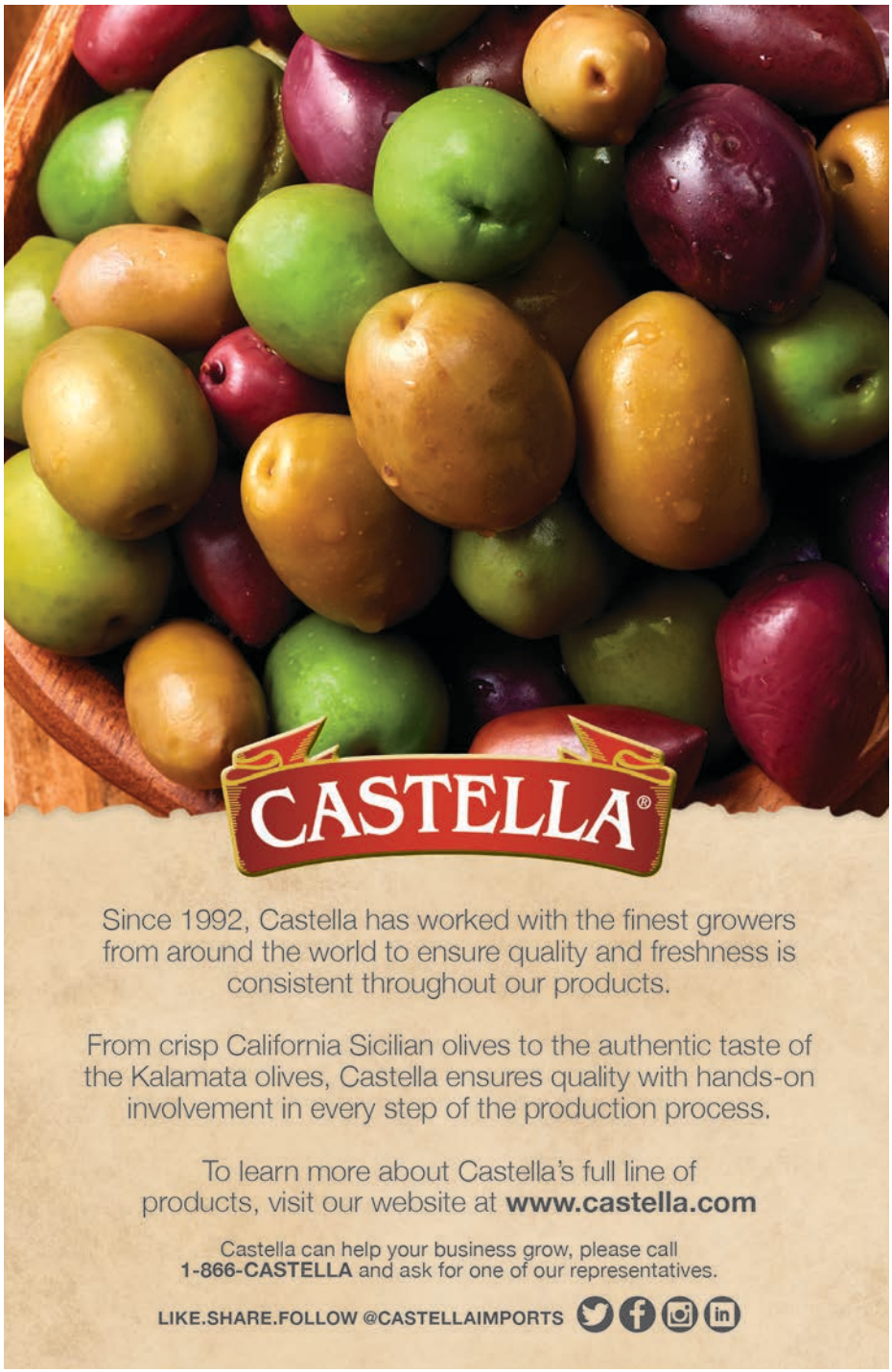
"While the desire to try new flavor profiles and connect with other cultures is extremely prevalent with Millennials, you also see the generations who were raised on steak and potatoes looking to their neighborhood retailers and restaurants to help them 'experience the world' by connecting through food," she says. "Cities and neighborhoods are addressing this trend with chef-owned restaurants specializing in specific regional cuisines, and grocery stores offering items such as white wine chicken and couscous, wasabi ginger dressing, and exotic fruits like papaya and passion fruit. Consumer demand for new and exciting flavors and cuisines will continue to drive innovation in restaurants and in retail."

Bigras notes that having a recipe booklet developed and available for consumers at different locations throughout the store with unique and tasty Mediterranean food recipes and usage ideas can also help.

A Healthier Lifestyle

Studies show people are looking to eat healthier. The Port Washington, NY-based NPD Group released a report earlier this year showing consumers are gravitating toward more personalized health and wellness plans and are seeking healthy food choices when they shop.

"Everyone wants to eat healthy, but everyone also wants to enjoy what they eat. Mediterranean specialty foods like olives and antipasti check both of the boxes," says Gross. "We're fortunate to craft products that are good for you and fun. A healthy salad is no longer lettuce,



tomato and cucumber. With the olive and antipasti bar, you can add marinated beets, balsamic onions, buttery artichokes, marinated mushrooms, stuffed olives, etc. We make healthy accessible and delicious."

The health trend works well with the perceived freshness and simple ingredients of Mediterranean foods, says Kraszewski.

"Traditional ingredients used in this cuisine are now commonly included in healthful food options that are not just Mediterranean," she says. "Lentils and chickpeas, vegetables and legumes, healthy oil and fats, and bright flavors like cinnamon, dill, allspice, basil and oregano are used in the development of a variety of main dishes, snack foods, dressings, dips and other foods."

There's a lot of buzz about the health benefits of eating a Mediterranean diet, and it only makes sense that embracing a diet that is rich in vegetables, fruits, nuts, whole grains and fish is a better way to eat. Delis can help spur this trend. **DB**

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From a product perspective, Brandon Gross, vice president of marketing for New York-based FoodMatch, says the company continues to balance innovation with quality and tradition when it comes to the olive category.

"Olives like the Frescatrano are an exciting example of marrying those three goals," he says. "We've developed an unfermented olive that has a remarkably mild and sweet flavor profile and consistent caliber and color year-round. Our long-term relationships with growers around the world are what has allowed us to develop and perfect this new olive."

Giuliana Pozzuto, marketing director of George DeLallo Co., headquartered in Mt. Pleasant, PA, sees olive trends as being particular to specific regions.

"While olives have been around for centuries, how we enjoy them has evolved in many ways. Where once they were an 'exotic' item, olives have become an everyday staple — from snack to kitchen creation," says Pozzuto. "When we first introduced and innovated the olive bar concept in supermarkets, the consensus was olives were an ethnic food that would only be understood and used by ethnic consumers. These days, Mediterranean cuisine and its bold, brilliant flavors are widely sought after, making olives a popular entertaining item, snacking superstar and recipe rescuer."

When it comes to olives, Shaw notes imaginative cross merchandising drives consumption. He suggests matching olives with tuna salad, cheese, pasta salad and any other simple recipe ideas that engage with a consumer's imagination and appetite appeal.

Tasty Trios is a new promotion from The Olive Branch, designed to drive sales and educate consumers.

"Each quarter, the Olive Branch will feature a trio of theme-related olive products from around the world," says Amato. "To promote the trio, The Olive Branch will provide various merchandising materials. Tasty Trios is a carefully-managed marketing campaign that affords choice retailers the opportunity to elevate the customers' experience while maximizing profit."

Eye appeal is the number one contributor to olive bar success, so refrigerated cases and bars must be kept clean and full. Signage must be clear and concise. Seasonal events and eye-catching signage with recipe and pairing ideas inspire the consumer and lead to increased sales — especially for those who are looking for that night's dinner or quick entertaining options.

Pozzuto says the success of any olive antipasti program is simple: eye appeal is buy appeal. "Create and maintain a visually-appealing destination to entice consumers," says Pozzuto. "Keep it well-maintained and fresh with the right mix of top-selling items, and reserve a few spots for rotating seasonal and trending items."

George DeLallo Co. has found success in offering a calendar year full of olive and antipasti inspiration featuring pairing ideas, simple preparations and more elaborate ideas for incorporating olives and antipasti into everyday cooking.

"Our program focuses on giving retailers ideas for innovative new ways to make their olive and antipasti bar the one-stop destination for easy gourmet entertaining," says Pozzuto. "A great emphasis has been placed on pairings, and so olives and antipasti are natural pairings to specialty cheeses, cured meats, spreads, crackers and other deli staples." **DB**

Building Blocks For Cheese Platters

Learn the secrets to success with these profitable staples

BY HANNAH HOWARD

The only thing better than cheese is a whole platter of fine cheeses artfully arranged with delicious accompaniments. Bundling multiple cheeses and condiments together is an effective way to attract customers and boost sales.

Entertaining can be stressful, and a whole array of cheeses, charcuterie and snacks at a market may overwhelm shoppers. Where to start? Customers seek and appreciate help not only selecting cheeses, but creating a cohesive platter that will impress their guests. Jordan Edwards, who has worked as the head cheesemonger at Pastoral Artisan Cheese, Bread & Wine in Chicago for seven years, says that "a huge part of our business, probably one third, comes from cheese platters."

At Pastoral, Edwards and his team cut cheeses and cured meats for platters to order. Its spreads are especially popular with corporate meetings and events and for holiday celebrations. The stores also merchandise cheeses with condiments, like fig cakes, jams and almonds in-store. This makes it easier for people to pick up everything they need for a ready-to-assemble cheese plate.

Cheese is a crowd-pleaser. In addition to being enjoyable, most wonderful cheeses have storied and fascinating backgrounds. "It's crucial to get the story out," says Marcel van Tuyn, Elizabeth, NJ-based Beemster Cheese's U.S. managing director. Teaching the customer about "animal welfare, history, sustainability and quality" helps customers not only buy more cheese, but value and enjoy the product, which keeps them coming back for more.

Plenty of shoppers may feel intimi-

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dated by shopping for and putting together a cheese spread, which is why van Tuyn stresses that "many people would like to be guided, so we can guide them with cheese logically branded together." Professionals at the store level should have a working knowledge of the product, including who makes the cheese, where they make it and what makes it unique.

Ideally, each deli department employee will have a deep proficiency and passion for the cheese they sell. But because that's not always possible, signage plays a critical role in educating the customer about products, especially when it comes to cheese. This is an effective tool to inform and sell. Every cheese in the assortment, whether self-service or full-service, should have a sign. It pays to be creative and bold while showing off the cheese's characteristics, pairing possibilities and visual qualities.

Effective signage should include the cheese's name and type (for example, Hudson Valley Camembert), the place of origin (New York, USA), the maker (Old Chatham Sheepherding Co.), the milk type (mixed cow and sheep), and the price per unit of sale (piece, wheel, pound, etc.). A description is an opportunity to wax poetic and create excitement that will directly affect sales. Signage is also a great place to give customers inspiration for ways to use and serve their cheese. Stores shouldn't hesitate to suggest condiment and beverage pairings, then merchandise accordingly.

Every cheese in the assortment, whether self-service or full-service, should have a sign.

Building The Perfect Platter

Cheese boards are an art form, and crafting one involves much more than throwing some cheeses and crackers on a plate. There's nothing wrong with a platter full of different Bries or Cheddars, but a well-rounded cheese plate showcasing different styles provides for an enjoyable experience for everyone, and lets guests partake in a variety of flavors and textures.

When building platters to sell or giving advice to customers, aim for variety. Most great cheese plates show off a mix of cheese textures, from soft and gooey to crumbly to crystallized and hard. It also works to think of diversity in terms of origin — cheeses from Europe are excellent, but American cheeses have never been so incredible — and milk types, including cow, goat, sheep and even water buffalo.

For example, a versatile, superb cheese platter might include a soft-ripened cheese like Brie or a triple cream; or something fresh and spreadable like Chevré; semi-soft

cheese like Fontina or Colby; a washed-rind cheese for the adventurous; a harder cheese, like Gouda, Cheddar, Manchego or Gruyère; and a blue cheese, like Stilton or Gorgonzola.

"Know your crowd," says Edwards. No need to serve a super stinker at an office party. Taleggio is a great, ever-so-slightly funky choice.

Helpful hint: don't forget to supply a separate knife for each cheese so flavors don't mingle. An appropriate serving size is about 1 ounce of each kind of cheese per person, and a little bit less for charcuterie.

It's also fun to build a cheese platter around a theme or idea. Di Bruno Bros. in Philadelphia offers a Beer Lover's Cheese Collection, which consists of artisan cheeses that pair perfectly with beer, and a Provolone & Pepperoni Box, a classic, playful party favorite that comes with cerignola olives, sweet roasted red peppers and crostini. Cheese platters can also be assembled based on geography — exclusively feature cheeses from Italy, Spain, France or the United States, and pair them with local nibbles. For example, a French cheese plate might include Brie, Comté and Roquefort with Saucisson Sec (a traditional French dried sausage with garlic and black pepper), French olives and sliced baguette.

Too many cheeses are hard to keep straight for shoppers and guests, and the cheeses start to lose their impact.

You don't need a million cheeses to create a wonderful cheese platter. Too many cheeses are hard to keep straight for shoppers and guests, and the cheeses start to lose their impact. In fact, three or four varieties may be the sweet spot.

When putting a cheese plate together, whole wheels and big wedges look beautiful and striking. At the same time, cutting hefty blocks and wheels into manageable pieces makes it easier to partake. "Try to avoid cheese cubes," says Edwards. "Move away from the 1950's canasta party look." Instead, triangles and slivers appear elegant and organic.

A cheese platter should be approachable and fun. Mary Caldwell, head of marketing at Beemster Cheese, recommends removing the rind using the tip of a chef's knife, yet keeping a big wedge of the cheese intact. In describing her technique, she says, "I carve some cheese [from the wedge], then pile up the pre-cut chunks around it so that the guests can see the cheese that it came from, yet it's effortless to serve themselves." Very soft wheels should be left whole—attempting to cube or slice these will just make a mess, and

it's easy enough for guests to dig in to a spreadable cheese.

A cheese plate is definitely an opportunity for creativity. "Play with the visuals, textures and colors," advises Edwards. "Have some fun."

Spreading The Word

"For us, winter is the classic cheese platter season," says Laure Rousseau, head of marketing for Switzerland's Gruyère AOP. "But on the other hand, cheese plates are nice for an appetizer in the summer." While the holiday season is the busiest time for cheese sales, any holiday or event can be enhanced by one of these platters.

Cheese platters should look abundant and generous. Accompaniments are an important touch and a great way to accomplish this. Condiments and extras "look very beautiful, but keep the cost down and add value for your customer," says Edwards. Grapes are pretty on the plate, but just the tip of the iceberg of possibilities. Sweet fresh or dried fruits play excellently against the salty richness of cheese and add a pop of color to the presentation. Marcona almonds and other nuts, pickled vegetables and sun-dried tomatoes, all varieties of olives, jams, chutneys, mostarda, fig and date cakes, and membrillo (Spanish quince paste typically served with Manchego) are some options for cross merchandising and creative cheese platter additions.

Cheese and crackers are classic, as are slices of crusty baguette — but again, that's just the beginning. Experiment with flatbreads, pita, crackers and crostini. Belgian endive and cucumber slices are also good carb-free alternatives, and rice crackers are a great pick for gluten-free shoppers. Adding meats to cheese platters is another smart idea. Options include chorizo, Prosciutto di Parma, mortadella, sopressata, porchetta, speck and beyond.

Convenient Consolidation

Group items together to make it easy to pick up everything customers may need for their cheese board in one place. "Stores that create beautifully appealing – and appetizing – displays that are shoppable are going to attract a loyal fan following and pull shoppers into their stores to see what they're doing, what they're recommending," says Caldwell.

Even more than smart merchandising techniques, the single most important thing retailers can do to increase sales is to give customers the opportunity to taste the cheeses. Cheese is a tactile, living, breathing food — and no amount of information and encouragement can compare to experiencing incredible flavors, textures and tastes in real time.

Delis should host tastings and give samples as often as possible. Stores should show off favorite pairings and provide serving suggestions.

"You have to be the advocate of what you're selling," asserts Edwards. More than anything, "human interaction and passion really help." **DB**

Vive Le Fromage De France

Capitalizing on Americans' love for French cheeses

BY CAROL BAREUTHER

French military leader Charles de Gaulle is famous for his comment, "How can you govern a country that has 246 varieties of cheese?" More political than culinary in commentary, what de Gaulle's quote highlights is this European country's prominence and dominance when it comes to cheesemaking.

This is no 20th century invention. For example, some of the first goat cheese produced in France dates to 500 AD, when people from North Africa traveled to the Loire Valley. Today, France ranks as both the third largest global producer and exporter of cheese. What's more, counting flavor variations, this republic now produces some 350 to 450 different types of cheese. Thus, France as a global cheese powerhouse is why, on the other side of the Atlantic in the United States, no deli cheese case offering is complete without a full assortment of customary and contemporary French products.

Today, France ranks as both the third largest global producer and exporter of cheese.

What's Hot, What's Trending

"Fresh cheeses like Fromage frais, soft-ripened cheeses like Brie and Camembert, washed-rind cheeses like Epoisses, and hard cheeses like Comté or Emmental, Beaufort, Ossau Iraty and Cantal and of course blues like Bleu d'Auvergne and Roquefort, plus some goat cheeses, are among the staple French cheeses deli operators should be sure to stock," says Charles Duque, the New York-based managing director for the Americas of CNIEL (Centre National Interprofessionnel de l'Economie Laitière) or the French Dairy Board.

This listing encompasses the three main families of French cheeses — soft, pressed and blue — primarily from cow's, goat's and sheep's milk.

In 2016, about half of the cheese imported to the United States from France was soft-ripened, according to Sebastien Lehembre, senior brand manager for Alouette Cheese USA, based in Mahwah, NJ. "This shouldn't come as a surprise when you look at the broad offering of French soft-ripened cheeses in delis."

Some French cheeses are trending in terms of flavor for use in snacking and as aperitifs, according to Christel Vibrac, key account manager for Fromagerie Henri Hutin, headquartered in Dieue Sur Meuse, France, and a member of the Hochland Group. "These flavor trends include Mediterranean, smoked and peppery. Our

1-kilo Brie Couronne with Black Pepper or Chives fits in this category."

Diane Sauvage, the North American branch director for Hoboken, NJ-headquartered Interval USA, agrees. "Deli buyers are going more toward flavored cheeses, like those with added truffles or pimentos. Additionally, buyers are seeking out more PDO-style (Protected Designation of Origin) cheeses or varieties with a specific history and tradition as well as those that are fun to cook with, like Raclette."

French cheeses gaining more traction in the United States include a range of upscale products, explains Alouette's Lehembre. "Examples are Etorki Grande Reserve, the same Etorki you find today but aged seven months for more flavor; Severac, a small, hard cheese made from Salers cows in the Cantal region of France; Montagnard, a soft-ripened cheese from milk of mountain grazing cattle from the Vosgues region; and Bleu de Chevre, a unique farmstead goat blue that you don't see that often in the United States."

In March, Normandy, France-based Isigny Sainte-Mère, represented by Isigny America in Fort Lee, NJ, introduced its new Fromage Frais. This is a soft, unaged, creamy fresh cheese eaten mainly as a dessert. Also introduced this year is the Belletoile Cheese Spread, sold by Fromagerie Henri Hutin, which is now made with goat milk and cream.

"Goat milk cheeses are trending due to their added versatility and being lactose free," says Vibrac.

Simplify The Selections

The cheese case overwhelms many American consumers, says the French Dairy Board's Duque. "Some are intimidated because they deem it as expensive, cannot pronounce the names or do not know how to use it or serve it. I suggest sampling. The French Dairy Board and European Union finance information provision and promotion measures in favor of EU/French cheeses in the United States. Between 500 to 1,000 cheese demos are planned nationwide in partnership with importers, distributors, retailers and the French dairy processors," he says.

On display, make sure cheeses are properly wrapped and always fresh.

"The best way to do this is to change the plastic wrap every other day. Once cut, the cheese should be sold within seven days' maximum. Also, be sure there is no mold growing on the edge of the cheese. Use fake wheels of cheese to create more volume for displays," recommends Interval USA's Sauvage.

Make sure to have ample product and a well-signed display.

"No customer ever wants to buy the last one of anything, so always make sure you have more cheese to replenish displays. A good rule is three or less pieces, and it's time to cut/restock," says Benoit de Vitton, U.S. representative for Isigny. "Proper signage helps. A lot about a French cheese can be determined by the name and place of origin."

Show what other products can go well with a cheese. For example, says Interval's Sauvage, "Demo a cheese with a cracker, or a fruit and jam, or nuts, or olives, or even pair with wine."

Millennial customers are less afraid to try new flavors of cheese and pairings, according to Alouette's Lehembre. "The traditional French cheese board, although still very popular, is geared more toward a holiday-type of situation, while for informal get-togethers on the weekends, consumers like to do 1-2-3 step programs and create absolutely gorgeous pairings."

Simple examples Lehembre offers are a St Agur blue with bacon; Chaumes layered with coco powder and raspberry on a cracker; Supreme on a cracker with dried apricot and honey; and Brie on a baguette with truffle oil.

Routinely promote one hard cheese, one soft-ripened, one blue and one washed rind, recommends Interval's Sauvage. "This encourages the shopper to buy a full cheese plate and try new ones each time."

Finally, be sure to educate deli employees about the cheeses on promotion.

"Sit down for at least 10 minutes with them in advance of a promotion. Give them samples to try and go over why this product is important. Then, your employees will be able to explain this to your customers and make the sales happen," says Isigny's de Vitton. **DB**

LUNDS & BYERLEYS' TOUR DE FROMAGE INTRODUCES FRENCH CHEESES TO CUSTOMERS

Nine cheeses were uniquely spotlighted last summer when Lunds & Byerlys, a 26-store upscale retailer headquartered in Edina, MN, held its first Tour de Fromage promotion. The in-store event took place July 7 to 31, a time that coincided with global sports media hype of the world famous Tour de France bicycle race, which occurred at the same time.

"We had 'teams' of cheeses that battled week to week, as the Tour de France moved through Europe," explains Alicia Baldwin, deli category specialist. "The representatives from each team would compete by having in-store demos where customers could sample and then choose their favorite cheeses. By texting in their votes, week to week, customers controlled the outcome of the promotion. Plus, those who cast their vote by text were entered for a chance to win one of three new bikes. All voters received a coupon for $5 off a purchase of $25 specialty cheese. The cheese teams battled until there was a final winner that wrapped up the same weekend as the Tour de France."

The first week, deli shoppers sampled a Lagrein, all-American two-year-aged Grafton; and Ermitage Brie, with the latter the winner of round one. The second week, taste demos featured a Manchego Young, Marieke Plain Gouda and Chimay Bier, with the Gouda as top vote getter. Week three, there was an Emmi Gruyère, Rembrandt and winning Sartori Montamore. Fourth and finally, a Marieke Plain Gouda beat out its fellow Ermitage Brie and Sartori Montamore samples.

"We utilized our marketing team to have promotional signage made, our cheese specialists (mongers) wore traditional cycling caps, and of course we were posting results as we went on social media avenues, including our blog," says Baldwin, who added that the promotion was so successful, the retailer plans to run it again this year. **DB**

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FIVE TOP TRENDS IN DELI MEATS

The latest unveilings in this burgeoning category

BY CAROL BAREUTHER

Meats have long been a mainstay of the deli. Derived from the German word 'Delikatesse' or delicacy, where this type of shop originated in the 1700s, delis spread to the United States a century later thanks to German and Jewish immigrants, according to John Mariani, author of *The Dictionary of American Food and Drink*. Mariani describes the wares of these early 19th century delis as primarily preserved foods, including cooked meats.

Today, the deli has morphed from a standalone shop to a major perishables department in the supermarket, and meats continue to be a mainstay of the table.

In fact, total deli meat, including bulk, pre-sliced and specialty, represented 20.1 percent of total deli dollars for the 52 weeks ending February 25, 2017, according to New York City-based Nielsen Perishables Group's FreshFacts data, Add prepared foods, and meats represent 37.6 percent of deli dollars.

This meaty prominence in the deli begs the question, 'What are the latest trends for deli operators to capitalize on?'

1. Old World Meets New World

Consumers today want Old World-style authenticity more than simply artisan-produced products.

"Artisan has become an overused word," says Claas Abraham, chief executive and president of Abraham of North America, located in Lincoln Park, NJ. "In past years, we've seen several small, family-owned, owner-operated companies that produce cured meats popping up in the United States. They are following the European way; however, the product is not the same because the raw ingredients are not the same. For example, pigs are leaner in Europe. Shoppers today, especially Millennials, travel more now and are educated. They know the difference."

To meet this need, Paris Gourmet has introduced its Madrange-brand Jambon Maison, an authentic French ham and tradition in this European country.

"This product addresses the demand for natural ingredients, while maintaining the authenticity of the flavor using lean hams and traditional hand-crafting," explains Jean-Paul Grasmuck, national sales manager for the Carlstadt, NJ-based company. "Sampling and providing transparency regarding this product's attributes are the best way to sell."

This September, Fratelli Beretta USA will start limited importation for its Beretta Prosciutto di Carpegna DOP.

"The product will be a 4-ounce pre-sliced line," says Simone Bocchini, chief operating officer and president of the company's U.S. base in Hackensack, NJ. "People waiting in line for their deli meats are something that is disappearing. Plus, 4-ounces is enough for two people or two servings, thus bringing customers back to the deli to buy more for good sell through."

Bocchini suggests using 4-inch-by-6-inch-size cards as signage to let customers know the romance behind the production of the product. Also, deli operators should offer tips for consumers on how to enjoy items, such as with a Grana Padano or Parmigiano Reggiano, or fruit.

2. Clean Labels & High Quality

'Processed food' has become an undesirable moniker, says Daniel Estridge, chief flavor officer for RealDeli & NYDP, headquartered in Westford, MA. "Therefore, shoppers are seeking more natural, less processed, ideally unprocessed options throughout the store, including deli."

The company's newest products, which continue to be single-muscle, un-macerated, open-cooked roasts, are simpler than

gourmet flavored and include a Salt & Pepper Roast Beef. The products are also nitrate and antibiotic free.

"We are seeing an increased demand for antibiotic-free meats," says Justine Giordano, director of sales, marketing and technology for the Vincent Giordano Corp., based in Philadelphia.

Ed Moshaver, chief executive for Protemach Inc., in Canoga Park, CA, which manufactures Halal deli meals under the Almas brand, agrees. "People today are concerned with additives. They want gluten-free, nitrite-free, everything free even if they don't understand what it is."

Indeed, nearly a third of consumers indicate they read ingredient labels when shopping for lunch meals, and ingredient concerns appear to be rising among consumers, according to the *Bacon and Lunch Meat US 2016* report, published by the London-based Mintel Group, Ltd. This same report revealed that of all processed meat products introduced between 2011 and 2015 that carried a claim, 40 percent of these were 'suitable for', 20.5 percent were 'free from' and 18.2 percent were 'minus' claims.

"The future is toward a healthier, cleaner label, natural product," says Diane Slome, marketing director for the Pocino Foods Co., based in City of Industry, CA. "Therefore, we've brought back and improved our USDA Choice line of meats, which are now natural."

On the same trendline, Hormel Food's Deli by Design introduced its Hormel 1891 brand earlier this year.

"This brand is made up of premium quality, whole-muscle meats, with bold flavor as well as a broad line of dried meats that range from salami and pepperoni to the more unique Old World varieties like Goteborg and Thuringer," says Paul Atwater, premium deli brand manager for the Austin, MN-based company.

3. From Tame To Game

Consumers are eating more turkey versus pork and beef products, with chicken trending, according to Slome.

Indeed, the five top-selling deli meat varieties in dollars compared to the year prior are all within the bulk meat category, according to Nielsen Perishables Group FreshFacts data for the 52 weeks ending February 25, 2017. These are turkey (+2.6 percent), ham (-1.3 percent), beef (-3.6 percent), chicken (flat) and salami (flat). The top prepared meat and entreé in the deli was chicken (+2.5 percent), primarily rotisserie and fried.

Variety, however, is the spice of sales. In fact, 'greater variety' was the number one suggestion by shoppers when asked about improving their store's fresh prepared offering. Interestingly, the best-in-class retailers carry 57 percent more assortment than lower-performing retailers across all fresh departments, according to the report, *The Power of Fresh Prepared/Deli 2016*, published by the Arlington, VA-headquartered Food Marketing Institute.

"New trends in flavors include more game meat," says Ariane Daguin, chief executive and founder of D'Artagnan, headquartered in Union, NJ. "Consumers are ready to experiment to a certain extent with less familiar meats like buffalo, venison, quail, pheasant and duck. As a result, we have seen an increase in growth around 15 percent per year for our niche category."

Some of the company's newest products include three artisanal dry-cured Saucisson Sec varieties. These are Wild Boar Saucisson Sec, humanely-trapped wild boar meat with red wine and black pepper; Duck Saucisson Sec, rich Rohan duck meat with aromatic spices, including clove and nutmeg; and Pork Saucisson Sec, heritage-bred pork with garlic.

4. The Flavor Factor

African, Middle Eastern and Latin American are among the top five global flavors identified in the Washington, D.C.-headquartered National Restaurant Association's *What's Hot 2017 Culinary Forecast*, a survey of nearly 1,300 professional chef members of the American Culinary Federation. These cuisines point to consumers' interest in bolder flavors.

"Our newest deli products are our carving turkey breast and bulk smoked natural casing bratwurst varieties, especially our Applewood Smoked Jalapeño Bacon Cheddar Bratwurst," explains Megan Dorsch, marketing manager for Neuske's Applewood Smoked Meats, located in Wittenberg, WI. "These natural-casing links are pre-cooked and made with our own applewood smoked bacon and real Wisconsin cheese blended in, plus just a little hit of red and green jalapeño pepper."

Flavors of deli specialty meats seeing growth include hot and zesty pepperoni, sweet soppressata, Bianco salami, chorizo, picante soppressata, Italian sweet sausage and peppered salami, according to the Nielsen Perishables Group.

Slome of Pocino Foods, which currently manufactures Italian- and Mexican-flavored deli meats, says, "We are looking forward to the next largest buying segment, the Millennials, who are and will drive trends that are now ethnically-driven with Asian flavors rising to the mainstream."

5. Beyond Sandwich-Making

Consumers are using traditional deli

meat and cheese in unique ways, outside of the traditional sandwich, according to Hormel's Atwater. "Snacking continues to be a growing usage of deli items, and specifically charcuterie applications. With the continued growth of protein-focused snacking, this year you'll see us focusing on convenience and single-serve portions."

Snacking between meals is on the rise. In fact, 53 percent of consumers snacked in addition to their three squares in 2016 versus 41 percent in 2014, according to the *2016 Snacking Occasion Consumer Trend Report*, published by Chicago-based market research firm, Technomic.

The effect of snacking is driving volume and variety of specific meats sold in the deli. For example, while specialty deli meats represent only 4 percent of total deli meat dollars, these specialties are showing strong sales growth that is helping overall deli meat performance to stay positive. Consider while bulk meat dollar sales rose only slightly at 0.4 percent and pre-sliced meats were down 2.5 percent; specialty meats were up 3.1 percent, according to Nielsen Perishables Group FreshFacts data, for the 52 weeks ending February 25, 2017.

"This is due to many consumers replacing traditional lunch habits with more snacking and on-the-go options, and specialty meats and cheeses make great snacking options," says Sarah Schmansky, director of Nielsen Fresh.

Deli specialty meat includes items typically merchandised within the gourmet cheese section for entertaining or simple snacking, such as salami and pepperoni sticks, summer sausage and meat chubs for slicing.

New products that speak to this opportunity include finger-sized salami sticks in two flavors — traditional and hot — and a 5-ounce round tray of authentic pre-sliced German salami in three flavors — traditional, pepper and Parmesan. Abraham of North America introduced both this year.

Taking snacking one step further, Fratelli Beretta USA will launch its protein-based snack packs this September. The line will include dried-cured meats like salami with other foods, such as almonds, trail mix and dried fruit for a complete snack. Bocchini says a secondary display unit provided by the company will help deli operators increase the ring with secondary placements in the wine aisle and registers.

"For snack items, it's all about price point, portability and impulse," he says. **DB**

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RIBS & WINGS TAKE OFF

Capitalizing on meal favorites in deli

BY JEFFREY STEELE

Ribs and wings are a staple in most supermarket deli foodservice programs. Yet, although the category's evolution is bringing increasing challenges for retailers, it also offers new opportunities to profit by those effectively marketing these finger-licking food favorites.

"Restaurants specializing in ribs and wings continue to grow, so the category has expanded to incorporate a range of sauces and styles," says Yuba City, CA.-based Sunsweet Ingredients' spokeswoman Kate Leahy. "It's not enough to offer one style. A rotating selection of flavors is expected by fans of ribs and wings."

The growth of the quick-serve restaurant (QSR) channel has forced retailers to step up their game in ribs and wings.

Manufacturers, too, are helping super-

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market delis position these programs for higher profits.

Manchester, NH-based Rainmaker Foods, LLC provides regional sales management services to food retailing industry manufacturers, particularly in deli, meat and seafood. "Flavor innovations and change being [among] the greatest ways to differentiate, many retailers are 'keeping it fresh' by rotating flavors or offering limited-time offers on flavors to generate more excitement," reports Jason Morin, Rainmaker Foods' president.

The biggest consumers of ribs and wings at supermarket delis are likely to be 25- to 54-year-old men.

The biggest consumers of ribs and wings at supermarket delis are likely to be 25- to 54-year-old men. That demographic skewing has traditionally served as a headwind to growing sales, says Ken Meyers, president of Panorama Foods, based in Braintree, MA.

"But that is changing," he adds. "I am shocked the genders have gotten very closely balanced in supermarket shopping. There are a lot more men walking around supermarkets buying food for themselves and their families, compared to 10 years ago. That provides an opportunity to proactively expose them to the product."

The audience for ribs and wings tends to be younger, allowing for more culinary risk taking, says Leahy. Another aspect is also consistent with a skewing toward younger consumers. Fans of these foods can even be a bit competitive, challenging each other to see how many ribs or wings can be eaten in a single sitting, she adds.

The biggest wing flavor for some time has been the variety named for the Empire State city, as the wing craze got its start in Buffalo, NY.

Trends In Flavors

"Buffalo-style continues to be the leader," says Meyers. "But there are other entries, such as teriyaki and Asian-themed and sweet-and-sour wings categories, though these are smaller participants."

Spicy tastes have long been popular, especially with wing fans. Korean Fried Chicken, or KFC, is gaining adherents who like the additional heat and deep flavor, says Leahy.

The flavors are layered. The wings are first marinated in a spicy sauce, then dusted with flour before frying and finally are tossed in additional spicy sauce.

When it comes to ribs, country-style pork ribs are rising in popularity; these pair well with Asian, Italian, Southern and Latin American sauces and cooking methods. "Short ribs aren't always thought of in the same category as barbecued ribs, [but] braised short ribs are popular high-end items in the prepared food category, especially in cold weather," says Leahy.

Surmounting Sales Obstacles

Supermarket delis face a number of challenges growing sales of ribs and wings, but a little creativity and ingenuity may be all that's required to surmount the hurdles.

Retailers selling cooked meat and poultry items are invariably concerned about moisture. They want to ensure the meat doesn't dry out before arriving on customers' plates and that it won't lose moisture when reheated.

Retailers can sidestep this issue by marinating the proteins with ingredients that help lock in juices. "We've found that adding between .5 and 1.5 percent of Sunsweet's fresh plum concentrate to a brine or marinade will enhance moisture retention, in many cases also allowing for the reduction of salt and sugar," says Leahy. "The bonus is the meat also caramelizes better, further enhancing the color of the ribs or wings. When customers have good experiences eating purchased ribs and wings, they'll have it in mind for future meal occasions."

While ribs and wings are often consumed by groups of people, and are not an easy sell to consumers seeking an easy grab-and-go lunch item, looking beyond this pattern of consumption can also increase sales, says Leahy.

"If they're portioned and packaged as part of a larger meal that can be reheated, both ribs and wings can work for lunch," she says. "For ribs, boneless short ribs can make great hot sandwiches."

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One more challenge may be to keep up with the price of wings.

"But serving drumsticks at a hot bar in a wing-like style with a popular sauce can help keep the price palatable for customers," says Sunsweet Ingredients' Leahy.

When it comes to overcoming resistance to purchase, sampling programs are effective. "There's nothing that beats sampling," says Panorama Foods' Meyers, noting sampling fits with the trend toward increased purchasing of prepared foods.

"If you can proactively expose a sufficient number of new consumers to what you're offering, and the quality is high enough, you have them for quite a while," he says.

For retailers looking to increase ribs and wing sales, consistency is key.

"The product must be of consistent quality and always available," says Rainmaker Foods' Morin. "The biggest challenge retailers have is keeping the products fresh and rotated during peak purchase times."

Playing up the flavors used with the ribs or wings is a way to bring attention to the category.

Marketing And Merchandising

Effectively marketing and merchandising wings and ribs at the supermarket deli counter is a matter of using staff training to call attention to the offerings, says Meyers. Prepared food section signage and promotions, along with in-store circulars, also can be impactful.

Playing up the flavors used with the ribs or wings is a way to bring attention to the category. This could be accomplished by displaying a rotating line of sauces near the display to help options appear ever fresh.

"Offering a variety of sauce samples can also get more consumers interested in tasting the different flavors with the ribs or wings, allowing stores to entice more of their customers to take home a tray's worth the next time they have a party," suggests Leahy.

Because QSRs often promote meal and value deals, delis must respond strategically in a way that's appealing to consumer preferences. "Retail's opportunity is to promote a better product and the benefit of saving a trip to a QSR," says Morin.

Cross Selling Opportunities

As for cross mmerchandising strategies, toying with sauces and sides can be effective. An all-American approach can lean toward common barbecue sides, such as baked beans, coleslaw and cornbread.

"But Korean can allow for gochujang, kimchi rice and seafood nori snacks," says Leahy. "Going Latin American allows you to add tortilla chips and salsa into the mix."

It is possible to compete with increasingly popular wing- and rib-focused eateries if a "value for flavor" strategy is emphasized, advises Leahy. "If someone likes to have people over for the big game, they can create their own ambience for a less-expensive occasion, as long as the flavor of the food is there."

The key to successful selling is having a variety of cross-merchandised items, like side dishes and beverages, more accessible in the deli department. This helps ensure a higher ring at retail.

"Don't make the consumer go all over the store to find the items," says Morin. "Remember, these are convenience shoppers. If it's too difficult, you will lose them."

Certain times of the year are ideal for merchandising ribs and wings as important components of special events that are often sports related, says Meyers. Super Bowl, March Madness, summer grilling holidays and the football season all qualify.

But for any food-oriented gatherings, "wings and ribs will be on the short list," he says. "My belief is they will remain relatively stable [in sales], and the growth will come from individual initiatives on an account-by-account basis." **DB**

FRIED CHICKEN SALES HEALTHY IN DELI

This traditional favorite continues to draw in customers

BY CAROL BAREUTHER

Fried chicken is a quintessentially American comfort food. In fact, nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of some 1,600 chefs queried for the National Restaurant Association's *What's Hot in 2016* survey ranked fried chicken as a perennial favorite.

However, the origin of this finger-licking favorite lies in a melting pot of cuisines on the other side of the Atlantic. That is, the Scottish have long fried unseasoned chicken, while West Africans for ages have seasoned their poultry before frying. Put the two together as has happened in the southern U.S. over a century ago and the classic fried chicken was born, according to John Mariani in his 1994-published book, "The Dictionary of American Food and Drink".

Today, fried chicken remains a favorite staple, in spite of the trend towards shoppers seeking out healthier fare. In fact, fried chicken represents 21.9 percent of deli prepared chicken dollars, second only to rotisserie chicken at 42.3 percent, according to New York City-based Nielsen Perishables Group FreshFacts data as published in the International Deli Dairy Bakery Association's *What's in Store 2016*.

Today, fried chicken remains a favorite staple, in spite of the trend towards shoppers seeking healthier fare.

"Fried chicken is not going to be perceived as a health food for sure, but consumers are well-known for making their own decisions on how to balance healthfulness and indulgence," explains Sharon Olson, executive director of the Culinary Visions Panel in Chicago. "We are also finding that quality and fresh ingredients add to the healthful perception of many items, so emphasis on this can add to its appeal. In our most recent study, 75 percent of consumers interviewed felt that it was important to trust their local deli to

buy quality ingredients."

Perdue Farms, headquartered in Salisbury, MD, offers assistance to deli operators in this arena by now offering over 100 retail products and 100-plus foodservice menu items under its No Antibiotics Ever program.

"Consumers love fried chicken, but they also want to feel good about the food they bring home to their families," says John Moore, Perdue's senior marketing manager for deli. For example, "they want to know whether or not antibiotics were used in raising the poultry they're buying, and they want that option at the deli just as they do in the rest of the store."

Staple-selling fried chicken is now experiencing a resurgence. Baum + Whiteman, New York City-headquartered food and restaurant consultants, named fried chicken as one of its 11 Hottest Food & Beverage Dining Trends in Restaurants & Hotels in 2016.

"After flat sales for some time, fried chicken has made a strong comeback in the last two years, experiencing a 6 percent growth in dollar sales in deli prepared foods at retail," says Eric Le Blanc, director of marketing for Tyson Foods, Inc., based in Springdale, AR. "Why the comeback? For one, industry players have increased the quality of their offerings. Two, there's been a notable switch from frozen to fresh in-store breaded or a reformation of flavors for delis that want to stay with frozen. And third, there is better execution now at the store level."

Fried chicken is a best seller at delis in Publix Super Markets, a 1,120-store chain headquartered in Lakeland, FL. "Customers enjoy picking it up from our hot case, grab-and-go and cold serving case," says Maria Brous, director of media and consumer relations.

Boneless wings fashioned out of whole muscle chicken breast are an excellent alternative to bone-in wings margin-wise.

Nationwide, the most popular offering in supermarket delis is an eight-piece fried chicken, according to Brad Dunn, director of retail deli for Koch Foods, Inc., located in Park Ridge, IL. "Beyond this, a two-piece drumstick and thigh is a popular choice for value combos."

Traditional & A Twist

These two choices fit perfectly with the fried chicken buyer demographic, who tends to be younger and from a larger, less affluent household compared to the rotisserie chicken shopper, according to Tyson Food's *Prepared Foods Attitudes and Usage Study*, published in 2015.

"We've been working with two large retailers on customized programs, such as fried chicken without black pepper for kids and a two-flavor program, such as regular and spicy," says Tyson's Le Blanc.

Publix Super Markets offers a number of options, such as fried chicken in tenders, wings and popcorn form in addition to the customary bone-in style.

"When wing pricing is up and availability is down, such as in the fall when demand soars during football and holiday season, some operators offer tenders instead. We see more demand for spicy flavors and now offer a pre-breaded spicy tender that's like Nashville chicken, but not as hot," says Koch Foods' Dunn.

Nashville Hot is what Baum + Whiteman dubbed the 'Chicken Flavor of the Year' in 2016. True to its name, it's

southern fried chicken doused in a super-hot sauce containing obscene quantities of cayenne is designed to put tastebuds on fire for days.

Adding Ethnic Options

Ethnic flavors are especially hot now in fried chicken, according to Baum + Whiteman. As an example, the consultants cite the ultra-crunchy brined-and-fried chicken thigh served at Los Angeles eatery, Night+Market, that is served with ranch dressing, tomato and shredded green papaya flavored with fish sauce, cilantro and fresh jalapeno.

Boneless wings fashioned out of whole muscle chicken breast are an excellent alternative to bone-in wings margin-wise and also can be used as a blank canvas to pair with a variety of flavors.

"We sell our Game Day-brand boneless wings with four sauces, including General Tso, barbeque, honey garlic and buffalo-style. Deli staff can pre-cook these products and sell them cold on a deli platter with reheat instructions. Operators can also create their own flavors, such as a jerk sauce or sweet Thai chili sauce. These flavors can be introduced as part of a fried wing Flavor of the Month promotion," says Koch Food's Dunn.

Publix Super Markets sells popcorn fried chicken in 2-ounce regular sized or 4-ounce large-sized cups from its delis' hot service counters.

"Popcorn chicken is a relatively new product for us in the last year to year and a half. It's a great grab-and-go item positioned for lunch sales or as a snack before dinner. We offer it as fully-cooked breaded and buffalo-style breaded," says Koch Food's Dunn.

One of the newest styles of fried chicken is a ¼-inch slice of breast meat tossed in panko crumbs and fried. It's currently in the frozen entrée component arena, yet some supermarket chains are considering it for their deli, according to Florencia Palmaz, president of Goodheart Brand Specialty Foods, in San Antonio, TX. "It offers good plate coverage and lower cost at 2 to 3 ounces per serving, rather than a typical 5- to 6-ounce serving of protein. Delis could use it in wraps, to make banh mi sandwiches or on top of an Asian-style rice or noodle bowl. It would be best served for grab-and-go hot or in the cold case as a clamshell packed entrée for heat-and-eat," says Palmaz.

"Customers have the opportunity to grab fried or rotisserie chicken as part of a Family Combo Meal, which comes with two sides and a package of Hawaiian rolls," says Publix's Brous.

Sell A Meal

There are endless chances for deli operators to promote fried chicken as part of creative and cravable meal solutions.

For example, "Bundle fried chicken with fresh salad and vegetable sides. Delis are known as a destination for fresh foods, and fresh often equals healthy to consumers," suggests Culinary Visions' Olson.

Additionally, Olson continues, "Many supermarkets also have restaurants within their stores where indulgence in restaurant-style dining might make fried chicken an attractive menu offering. Fried chicken can also span different times of day in the 'grocerant' (supermarket restaurant), with chicken and waffles for breakfast, fried chicken entreé salads for lunch and a home-style dinner in the evening. **DB**

ARTISAN SALAMI IS

Old-world style appeals to consumers

BY CAROL BAREUTHER

The saying what's old is new again certainly applies to salami. The origins of this deli staple date back more than two millennia to when the Romans preferentially used fermentation to preserve pork into a type of sausage. Nowadays, while salami is widely produced in the United States as well as overseas in its native Italy, it is the old-word style, or artisan salami, that is trending in today's supermarket deli departments, as consumers seek more upscale sandwich and charcuterie ingredients.

"Artisan salami has been one of the fastest-growing segments in deli, evolving out of the basics like Genoa Salami," says Walsh Birney, associate director of purchasing for Murray's Cheese, headquartered in New York City.

"I think the growth of the specialty deli category, especially cheese, has driven an increased customer demand for other artisan products, and salami is a category very connected to traditional cheese production and traditions. It also reflects a move away from salami as just another sandwich topping or snack to something that can anchor entertaining platters or be great additions to pizza, pasta and more."

The numbers illustrate this point. Total salami deli meat, including bulk, pre-sliced and specialty, represents 8 percent of total deli meat sales, up 4 percent in dollars over the latest 52 weeks ending Jan. 28, 2017. Specialty or artisan salami represents 10 percent of total salami sales and continues to increase in share, according to data provided by the Chicago-headquartered Nielsen Perishables Group.

"There are many types of salami," says Kimberly Sayid, director of strategic partnerships for Principe Foods USA, in Long Beach, CA. "These include hot and sweet soppressata, fennel, genoa, chorizo, Milano and Toscano, just to name a few. They vary in every sense, from size and flavor, which can be sweet or hot to peppery, to casings, starters, etc. Manufacturing these products takes into account whether the salami requires a finer grind or a coarser grind; natural casings and ingredients; quick or slow fermentation."

More specifically, the most popular salamis are rooted in Italian traditions.

Says Murray's Cheese Birney, "Artisan salami tends to reflect specific regional influences, for example Southern Italy, spe-

PHOTO COURTESY OF OLLI SALUMERIA

ON TREND

cifically Calabria, is a region known for its spicy cuisine, and influences much of the spicy ranges of salami, which are incredibly popular.

Another popular style is Tuscan, known as Finnochionia; this region is known for its wild herbs, such as fennel, and influences a large range of herbed salami. In terms of production methods, the big divider is natural casing versus artificial casing; with natural casing, you get more variation and interesting mold development, but it can lead to inconsistency. Artificial casings are less artisan but more consistent in terms of quality and shelf-life."

However, the essence of artisan salami manufacturing still comes down to time, according to Jennifer Johnson, director of marketing for Olli Salumeria, in Mechanicsville, VA. "If you don't cure it properly and let it hang long enough, you are not going to get the finished product you are looking for. Although technology has improved and grown through the years, you can't cheat time."

The great thing is there has been expansion in the artisan salami category.

"We have gone from the simple 'cooked' hard salami back to strong demand for real, traditionally-fermented and cured salami," adds Johnson.

Driving Demand

There are four key drivers to consumer demand for artisan salami.

First is a demand for 'authentic' foods. The Madison, WI-headquartered International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association's *What's in Store 2017* report notes that seven of the top 10 hot culinary trends have something to do with authentic food driven by chef creativity or artisanal production.

"Millennials, the demographic group 18 to 34 years of age, now rival the buying power of the Baby Boomers and are especially wary of anything that carries the whiff of mass production and 'processing.' They are interested in small batch craft beers; food trucks; charcuterie; artisanal cheese; and meats with authentic old world craftsmanship," explains Stephanie Egan, marketing manager for Piller's Fine Foods, in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada a division of PBOLP.

To satisfy this customer, Veroni, a near century-old cured meat producer head-

quartered in Correggio Emilia, Italy, received the green light from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) last year to import its Italian-made products, including dry-cured salami. The company recently opened a plant in New Jersey to slice and package its meats. Flavors include garlic and pepper seasoned Napoli and a spicy Calabrese.

"Customers today want an authentic product," says Antonio Corsano, chief executive officer of Greenwich, CT-based Veroni USA.

Concurrent with today's shoppers' desire for salami authenticity is both simplicity and wholesomeness.

"Even though meat consumption overall, such as poultry and beef, may be declining in the deli/prep foods department, pork has actually increased due to a growing understanding and demand for artisan charcuterie," says Jeff Fuller, chief marketing officer for Creminelli Fine Meats, based in Salt Lake City, UT. "Part of that is a greater demand for transparency in meat, for example, free of added nitrates and never treated with antibiotics."

Consumer taste preferences are evolving.

Secondly, consumer taste preferences are evolving. Millennials are almost twice as likely to say they prefer new and different tastes than their Baby Boomer parents, according to the IDDBA's *What's in Store 2017* report.

"While the heavy hitters are Genoa-style salami and hot and sweet sopressatas, customers also like unusual flavors. For example, many producers make wine/alcohol-flavored salamis, which can be very popular. Truffle-flavored salamis are also huge hits, as they reinforce the customer's image of traditional artisan salami being a special treat. We are seeing huge demand in spicier, Calabrian-style salami," says Murray's Cheese's Birney.

Third is the trend toward greater interest in charcuterie. In fact, charcuterie ranked fourth in the Top 20 Food Trends identified in the Washington, DC-headquartered National Restaurant Association's *What's Hot 2017 Culinary Forecast*.

"We have observed more retailers are including specific charcuterie sections," says Piller's Egan. "This responds to the trend towards casual, fresh party fare with no-work entertaining."

As a result, Egan says the company's best seller is its Black Kassel Signature shaped salami. Old Forest, Picante and Mailander varieties are sold in flower shapes, while the Mustard Seed is square. Old Forest, Picante and Mustard Seed are newly-available in pre-sliced packaging, as well, addressing trends for convenience with re-sealable packaging.

Pre-sliced is the largest growth segment in artisan salami for Murray's Cheese right now, according to Birney. "We see pre-sliced as a great entry point for customers who are curious about salami, but

are looking for a more convenient and less daunting option than buying a whole one, and dealing with things like peeling. It's a great way to get people hooked and then convert them to purchasing chubs down the road."

Third, "people are using artisan salami more and more for antipasto and snacking than ever before," says Creminelli's Fuller.

Fifty-three percent of consumers surveyed snacked between meals in 2016 versus 41 percent in 2014, according to the 2016-published *Snacking Occasion Consumer Trend Report* by Chicago-based market research firm Technomic.

Additionally, snack foods are growing worldwide, and meat snacks, in particular, are among the most important snacks for future growth, according to the 2014-published report, *Snack Attack: What Consumers are Reaching for Around the World*, by New York-headquartered research firm Nielsen.

"In May-June, we will launch a new beef jerky-like Italian salami in a 3-ounce snack size," says Veroni's Corsano.

Best-sellers for Creminelli are its new sliced snack trays of salami, says Fuller. "We launched three new meat and cheese items – Calabrese & Smoked Provolone, Prosciutto & Mozzarella, and Casalingo & Aged Gouda – in March."

Education Is Key

The best way to promote artisan salamis is to push the fact that they've been handmade and the ingredients used are natural and clean, according to Principe Foods' Sayid.

"Whole Foods Markets in the Northeast does a great job of selling variable weight chubs out of the cheese counter. These products are merchandised behind the counter and individually-cut and weighed to order for the clients. It's a unique, artisan experience that portrays the real value of the excellent quality product they offer," says Murray's Cheese's Birney.

Artisan charcuterie sales typically lead to higher overall basket totals thanks to consumer behaviors, says Creminelli's Fuller. "When someone buys salami, they typically will also include a specialty cheese, crackers and an alcoholic beverage, and sometimes something from the bakery. Giving the consumer as many opportunities in traditional and untraditional applications is key."

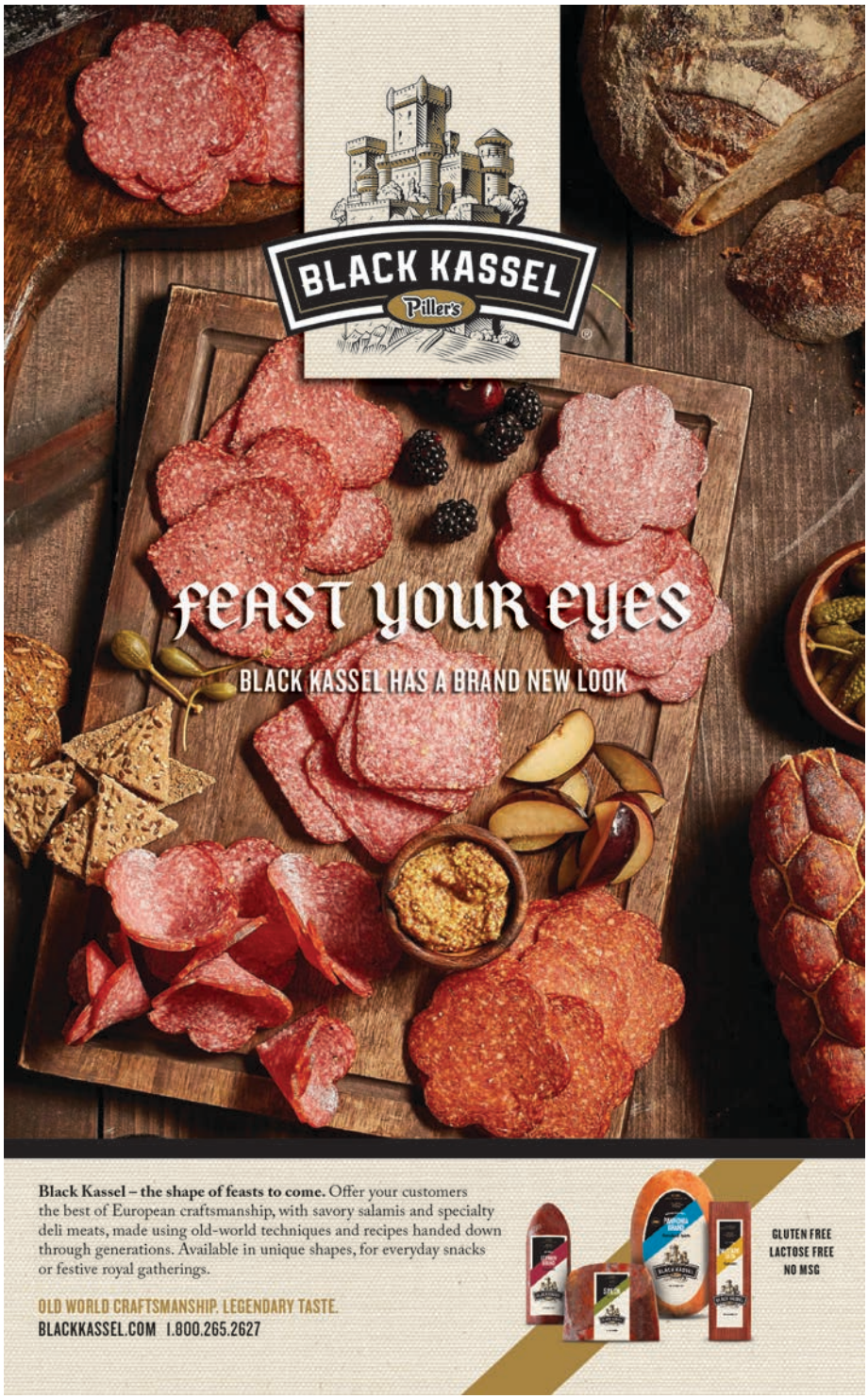
An instructive tactic Fuller recommends is to include salami items in restaurant-quality prepared foods, such as salads and pizza.

In terms of educating deli employees, Birney explains merchandising artisan salami requires the same approach as something like cheese; it needs care and people to sell it.

"It can be a bit of a scary or confusing category for deli associates and customers, so training staff on the products and demoing with things like cheese, olives and antipasti are great and easy approaches," he says.

Birney adds any artisan salami that is not in gas-flushed packaging should be kept refrigerated and can be displayed unwrapped behind a service case.

"A number of beautiful salamis in natural casing displayed upright in a service deli or cheese, ideally in a rustic wooden box, can lend a truly dramatic presentation to your deli case," he suggests. **DB**



FEATURE

Profiting From Pasta

Deli departments are realizing more potential in expanding offerings to meet demand

BY LISA WHITE

Although the supermarket deli might not be the first place that comes to mind for pasta, maybe it should be.

After years of shrinking, possibly due to the rise in low-carb diets, U.S. pasta consumption is on the rise, according to Google's *2016 Food Trends* report. This is backed by New York-based research firm Nielsen, which reported U.S. sales of short-cut pastas, like rigatoni, increased 3.6 percent between 2015 and 2016.

Globally, the pasta market is anticipated to grow at a rate of 2.5 percent from 2016 through 2022, according to Market Research Future, a research firm based in the United Kingdom. This will be driven by the demand for gluten free and vegan pasta as well as the growth of convenience food.

"Deli departments should concentrate on engaging consumers, teaching them about bundling and creating a meal solution out of pasta with cheese on top or as a side, and creating a great sauce," says Larry Montuori, vice president of sales at Nuovo Pasta, based in Delmar, MD. "It's not a difficult meal to make."

Delis have been upscaling pasta offerings since the economic downturn began in 2008 to better compete with restaurants.

Delis have been upscaling pasta offerings since the economic downturn began in 2008 to better compete with restaurants. That's when more departments took advantage of this easy and affordable meal solution and the many opportunities it offered for increasing profits.

Nuovo Pasta has noticed an increase in its deli department pasta business, which coincides with the latest market research on the category.

Today's Trends

There are a number of trends that are contributors to the upswing in consumption and sales.

"Interestingly enough, it's been more back to basics, but it's the good basics," says Montuori.

Nuovo Pasta's niche is in its innovative fillings, yet it's traditional cheese ravioli that remains a top seller.

There are ways to also upscale these dishes with simple ingredients.

"Our spinach ravioli with Asiago cheese and roasted garlic is popular," he says. "We'll also toast spices like cinnamon and nutmeg to get oils out and accentuate flavors, or roast garlic to get a sweet finish. Caramelizing garlic also creates a nice flavor profile."

In terms of pasta profiles, gluten free has become more popular, yet the result is it's more difficult to source.

Also, the quality is less than stellar, according to experts.

"Many types crack or have an unpleasant aftertaste, but these products are still moving," says Alexis Konownitzine, chief executive of La Pasta, headquartered in Silver Spring, MD. "Also, legume-based flours have expanded in this market."

La Pasta introduced rBST-free cheeses in its pasta lines that is made from hormone-free milk.

Upscale deli departments are more likely to pair cheeses with pasta, but this is a practice that can be easily expanded to traditional stores.

"All supermarkets have a big variety of cheese for this," says Konownitzine. "Delis can educate consumers on pairing pasta and sauces."

The biggest issue for delis is competing with sauces and dry pasta sold in the grocery aisle.

La Pasta creates its own sauces in foodservice sizes, selling them to delis by the pound. This creates enough for a meal that can feed between two and four people.

"Some pair pesto sauces, but most are tomato-based or vodka tomato sauces," says Konownitzine. "Stores can do demos in the deli, showing how fast and easy pasta dishes can be prepared and emphasizing the protein aspect of these foods."

When it comes to pasta salad, the category is more fragmented and regional, since all areas have a different variation.

Still, this side dish, which can also serve as a main entreé, remains popular as an inexpensive and extremely versatile way to build a plate.

"The more edgy pasta salad will have protein, carrots, tomatoes and olives," says Carl H. Cappelli, senior vice president of sales and business development at Don's Food Products, based in Schwenksville, PA. "We also view couscous as pasta and that category has grown, as well."

Manufacturers agree that delis can compete with restaurants, as the largest percentage of the country's population is Millennials seeking grab-and-go options.

These consumers want to eat healthier,

Although the pasta salad category has seen less innovation than traditional pasta dishes, healthier varieties like grain salads and those with all-natural ingredients or without artificial flavors, colors and preservatives, are growing.

but not sacrifice taste. This is an opportunity for retailers to position pasta salads as an add-on to main dishes or as a component or ingredient.

A new twist on a pasta salad can better capture the interest of consumers, and there are numerous types with various price points and ingredients.

"Price point-driven pasta salads are basic and offer an inexpensive option for consumers," says Cappelli. "By the same token, more upscale retailers carry pasta salads with grilled chicken, healthy grains or fresh vegetables."

Healthier Options

Pasta is not typically high on the list for those seeking healthier fare, so it's up to delis to change this perception with more nutritious offerings.

"Healthy trends haven't impacted pasta sales, since much of the pasta today is healthy," says Montuori. "It offers a dairy component, decent carbs and even organic options."

There also has been a big push for GMO-free pasta or ingredients that have not been genetically modified.

"Our whole category is embracing this," says Montuori. "It goes back to good basics and ingredients that are healthy, particularly with fresh pasta, which is made of just flour, eggs and oil."

La Pasta does offer dairy-free options as well as quinoa-based pasta for those seeking to watch their carb intake.

However, these products are not as popular as traditional pasta.

"It's about balance," says Konownitzine. "Delis can show consumers ways to eat pasta differently, such as serving ravioli on top of baby spinach or a salad with olive oil and cheese. It's not always necessary to sauce it up or use cream-based sauces."

And because pasta is more filling than other foods, it's easier to eat smaller portions, thus conserving calories.

Don's Salads' executives have chosen not to offer gluten-free pasta due to the lack of interest from its customers.

"I don't know that there is enough volume out there," says Cappelli. "Gluten free has definitely grown, but out of all the things to go after and get a return on investment, traditional pasta really is the sandbox you want to play in."

Although the pasta salad category has seen less innovation than traditional pasta dishes, healthier varieties like grain salads and those with all-natural ingredients or without artificial flavors, colors and preservatives, are growing.

"Retailers are looking for all-natural, clean options, as this is the engine that drives the train in deli," says Cappelli. "Still, potato, mac and cheese and slaw do the most business in terms of deli sides."

In terms of today's trends, vegetable pasta salads remain strong and bulk offerings remain popular.

Like the food category as a whole, pasta has been impacted by the increased popularity of international flavors and profiles or more ethnic twists.

"Ethnic varieties have their place," says Montuori. "Retailers are looking for those things, even though the basics sell best."

He recommends deli departments have a good representation of traditional items, with ethnic selections mixed in.

Hot flavors, like sriracha, help bring additional interest to the category, but serve more as a novelty item than a mainstream flavor.

"In terms of ethnic pasta, dumplings are becoming more popular," says Konownitzine. "Ethnic is more about the fillings, and it's easy to incorporate Mexican or Oriental seasonings as with a dumpling."

To capitalize on the ethnic pasta trend, Don's Food Products created Santa Fe pasta salad with a sweet and smoky Southwestern flavor, as well as Fiesta Pasta, about two years ago.

"We have seen some traction with both lines," says Cappelli. "In looking at retail delis, pasta will always be a key component. The demand continues to grow." **DB**

FULFILLING A NEEDED NICHE

In 1949, Edward Hawkings, Sr. was a chef in Spokane, WA when his boss complained about the poor quality of the blue cheese dressing they served on salads. Hawkins responded to the challenge in an unorthodox manner; he prayed about it. The answer to his prayer was a blend of mayonnaise, spices, crumbled blue cheese and buttermilk. To his knowledge, his original recipe was the first ever creamy blue cheese dressing.

In 1958, Hawkins and his wife Lorena purchased Hurschell's Lighthouse restaurant located on the shores of the Lake Pend Oreille in Hope, ID, a tourist town with a population of 200 and a booming summer trade. People enjoyed the dressing served at dinner so much, they would bring in empty jars to fill and take home.

In 1963, the couple scraped together enough money to purchase 12 cases of jars and had Aunt Ethel Ashley design a logo for a label. The family mixed the dressing by hand in soup kettles, and the first jars of Litehouse Salad Dressing were then sold to the produce department of Rogers Thrift in Sandpoint, ID.

During the 1970s, Litehouse began to expand distribution throughout the Northwest. Until that time, sons Doug and Edward, Jr. would drive around the tri-state area stopping store-to-store, selling and delivering product.

As the decade came to a close, Litehouse operations had outgrown its Datsun pickup truck. The family decided to move the business to Sandpoint, where it currently operates. In 1984, Edward Sr. passed away, and with him the family's desire to be in the restaurant business. Four years later, with 12 retail products and facing no growth, Doug and Edward Jr. developed a business plan expanding on what Litehouse did best: make great products and employ dedicated people to make these products. With a strong portfolio of retail products, Litehouse merged with Chadalee Farms Inc. of Lowell, MI, a company with tremendous background in foodservice and horseradish products dating back to 1893.

During this era of changing landscapes in produce departments, Litehouse expanded its offerings to include freeze-dried herbs, meat marinades, dressing packs for salad bars, dips for vegetable trays, caramel dip and other complementary food products. In 2001, Litehouse leased the 50-year-old Pend Oreille Cheese Co. and started making handcrafted blue cheese as the ingredient for its famous blue cheese dressing. Soon afterward, the company started selling blue cheese crumbles and wheels in produce and deli departments. By 2004, Litehouse made the strategic decision to transfer 30 percent of its ownership to its employees. And by 2014, the company was 100 percent employee-owned.

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