

DELI BUSINESS

MARKETING MERCHANDISING MANAGEMENT PROCUREMENT
DEC/JAN 2018 \$14.95

RETAIL TRENDS TAKE HOLD



ALSO INSIDE

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TAKEOUT
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"Uncommon Flavors of Europe" Campaign Unveiled



Under the "Enjoy, it's from Europe" program adopted by the European Union, a new marketing campaign titled "Uncommon Flavors of Europe" will highlight three products from Italy for the next three years in the U.S. and Canada--Asiago PDO cheese, Speck Alto Adige PGI ham and Pecorino Romano PDO cheese.

The program promotes Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) foods from Europe. It also provides information on the EU quality system, which protects names of agricultural products.

Asiago PDO is made with milk from cows that graze in the provinces of Trento and Vicenza and parts of the provinces of Padua and Treviso. Speck Alto Adige PGI, made exclusively in the Alto Adige region of Italy, is a ham that melds the air-curing traditions of the Mediterranean with the smoke-curing traditions of the Alps. Pecorino Romano PDO dates back 2000 years and continues the long history of ancient Roman sheep's milk cheeses in Italy.

The campaign will market the partner products across web, television, radio, print advertising, digital campaigns, social media, supermarket demos, trips to Italy and through a "learn & earn" page on the campaign's official website: <http://www.uncommoneurope.eu/>.

The Uncommon Flavors of Europe "Learn & Earn" website page is designed to educate industry professionals and consumers about the three partner products. Visitors can complete a quiz to earn entries in a drawing for a trip to visit the production zones of each product during the campaign.

COMING NEXT IN FEB/MAR ISSUE

COVER STORY

Italian Foods

PREPARED FOODS

Pizza

FEATURE STORIES

Consumer Research

CHEESE CORNER

Raw Milk Cheese

MERCHANDISING REVIEWS

Grab & Go

PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES

Vegetarian

DELI MEATS

Rotisserie Chicken

COMING IN APRIL/MAY

DELI BUSINESS will be taking a look at sandwiches.

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TRANSITION



LITEHOUSE ANNOUNCES NEW VP

Litehouse Inc., Sandpoint, ID, has named Robert (Rob) Tyrrell as vice president, manufacturing. In his position, Tyrrell will oversee the operations of five food manufacturing facilities in multiple states. Tyrrell is a 25-year industry veteran who brings to Litehouse extensive food industry expertise in manufacturing, food safety, supply chain management, co-packing and packaging innovation. Most recently, he spent more than a decade at The Hain Celestial Group in manufacturing and operations positions. www.litehousefoods.com



SCHUMAN FILLS MARKETING ROLE

Schuman Cheese, Fairfield, NJ, has announced Jim Low will oversee the company's sales and marketing strategy. Low is filling a position formerly held by Ellen Schum, who is now COO for the Italian and artisan cheese company. Prior to joining Schuman Cheese, Low was the general manager of Enjoy Life Foods in Chicago. Previously, he headed Mondelez North America's U.S. sales planning organization. www.schumancheese.com



INDUSTRY VETERANS JOIN GREEN GIANT FRESH

Green Giant Fresh, Salinas, CA, has named Nancy Bryner as the Southeast regional sales manager/foodservice manager. Her 22-plus years of sales experience includes developing key markets in retail and foodservice for Misionero in Gonzales, CA. Sean Frisby will serve in the newly-created position of director of category management & trade marketing. He brings experience with H-E-B to his post. He most recently served as director of product management at Apio. www.greengiantfresh.com



BLOUNT ANNOUNCES NEW POSTS

Blount Fine Foods, Fall River, MA, has announced a number of personnel changes. Mike Maher will serve as culinary business development specialist; Michael Palmer has been named foodservice business development representative for the Midwest; corporate executive chef Jeff Wirtz has been promoted as senior director of culinary development; and Clayton Burrows has been promoted to join the culinary team as a research and development chef. He had previously been quality assurance technician. www.blountfinefoods.com

ANNOUNCEMENTS



FOREVER CHEESE CELEBRATES 20 YEARS

Forever Cheese, New York, NY, is celebrating 20 years in business. Founders Michele Buster and Pierluigi Sini incorporated in 1998. The Sini family made Genuine Fulvi Pecorino Romano and other sheep's milk table cheeses, then brought in more Italian cheeses and expanded their business to include cheese from Spain. Sensing a gap in Portuguese and Croatian cheeses in the U.S., Forever Cheese broadened their focus to include those countries. Today, the company imports cheese accompaniments, as well. www.forevercheese.com



UPLANDS CHEESE HONORED AT SLOW CHEESE

Uplands Cheese, Dodgeville, WI, is the first American cheese producer to receive the 2017 Slow Cheese Award, bestowed biannually to leading cheesemakers around the world at the Bra, Italy festival. The award was presented by Slow Food founder and president Carlo Petrini to Uplands Cheese owner and cheesemaker Andy Hatch. www.uplandscheese.com



KONTOS CELEBRATES MILESTONE & EXPANSION

Kontos Foods, Paterson, NJ, recently celebrated its 30th anniversary and set plans for continued expansion of its production staff. In addition to hiring more full-time employees, the manufacturer and distributor of traditional artisan breads plans to expand its facility and add new machinery. The upgrades are projected to be complete by the end of 2020. www.kontos.com



WISCONSIN CHEESEMAKERS DONATE TO HURRICANE VICTIMS

The Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board, Madison, WI, partnered with Wisconsin cheesemakers, Appleton, WI-based Independent Procurement Alliance Program and Wisconsin dairy farmers in a state-wide effort to send 30,000 pounds of Wisconsin cheese to Florida for those impacted by Hurricane Irma. The 32 pallets arrived at Feeding South Florida, which distributes to a network of 400 partner agencies throughout the community to get the food into the hands of those who need it most. www.wmmb.com

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NEW PRODUCTS



HORMEL ACQUIRES COLUMBUS

Hormel Foods, Austin, MN, has announced that it has entered into a definitive agreement to acquire Columbus Manufacturing, Inc., parent of premium deli meat provider Columbus Craft Foods, from Chicago-based Arbor Investments. In a statement, the maker of Hormel, Jennie-O, Applegate and Di Lusso brand products announced it planned to purchase the deli meat and salami maker for approximately \$850 million.

www.hormel.com



PROTEIN-PACKED SNACKS

Emmi Roth USA, Monroe, WI, is launching a new line of natural snack cheese to meet consumer demands for protein-packed snacks. Available in three flavors, Roth Creamy Gouda, Roth Creamy Cheddar and Roth Creamy Whole Milk Mozzarella, the snack cheese will be sold in bags of 6- or 10-count easy-to-open, single-serve packages for lunch boxes and briefcases.

www.us.emmi.com



CUBE LINE EXPANDS

Placon, Madison, WI, has launched a new product as part of its Fresh n' Clear GoCubes packaging line. The new four-compartment, 24-ounce base, joins the already established product line, which launched in 2015. Available in six base sizes from 12 to 36 ounces, GoCubes work with a one-size-fits-all recycled PET lid option with secure seals, easy open tabs and anti-fog technology. Made with EcoStar recycled PET material from curbside plastic bottles, GoCubes are reusable and recyclable.

www.placon.com



DIP LINE ADDS THREE

Reser's Fine Foods, Beaverton, OR, has added three products to its Stonemill Kitchens premium dip line. Made with ingredients like crème fraîche, pumpkin, maple syrup and peppermint bark, these dessert dips have no high fructose corn syrup or artificial flavors. Varieties include Gingerbread Dessert Dip, Pumpkin Spice Dessert Dip and Peppermint Bark Dessert Dip.

www.resers.com



MEATS ARE ALL NATURAL

Fratelli Beretta USA Inc., Budd Lake, NJ, offers all natural reduced sodium Italian meats under its Mount Olive brand. The company has been providing cured salami from Mount Olive, NJ since 1812.

www.fratelliberettausa.com



A HEALTHY ALTERNATIVE

Naturipe Farms, Salinas, CA, offers healthy, convenient snacks that pair fresh-picked strawberries, blueberries and grapes with specialty cheese and seasoned whole nuts in a portable package. The ready-to-eat snack includes protein, fiber, Vitamin C and calcium, with no prep time required. Six varieties with different combinations of fruit, cheese and nuts are available.

www.naturipefarms.com



BISCUITS NOW IN A BOX

Effie's Homemade, now offers its biscuit line in boxes. The buttery and lightly sweetened tea biscuit line is made from quality ingredients. The biscuit's crisp texture, hint of sweetness and slightly salty finish make it a good accompaniment to a meal or as a snack. Varieties include Oatcakes, Corncakes, Nutcakes, Cococakes and Ryecakes.

www.effieshomemade.com



A PRE-PACKED MEAT

Piller's Fine Foods, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, is extending its Black Kassel premium deli meats with pre-packaged, shelf-stable meat snacks. Salami Whips and Salami Chips offer a convenient, sharable, pre-packaged and shelf-stable product geared for on-the-go consumers. Both are available in Old Forest and Picante varieties.

www.pillers.com

Don't Forget About Price-Oriented Shoppers



By
Jim Prevora
Editor-in-Chief

The optimistic case for the deli department is this: Though grocery has long been commoditized, convenience and the cost of information still allowed for profitability. The challenge of online services and a growing range of price-comparison sites means that consumers can now more easily identify where commodities and national branded products are cheapest. This will enable these items to be more easily purchased and arranged for delivery.

This is an online extension of the supermarkets' dilemma for some time. Groceries were more inexpensively available at Walmart and warehouse clubs, but with high-low pricing, not everything had the lowest price and not all the time. So it was difficult for consumers to always find and buy the cheapest product.

The idea of competing by adding service and other things that add cost is the same as ceding half the grocery market.

Chains such as Best Buy that sell high-priced electronics have been suffering because they became free showrooms. Consumers come in, find what they like, then research where they could get it at the best price.

Grocery items are comparatively cheap, so consumers typically didn't bother to research each individual item to find out where they could buy it cheapest. And even if they knew, it just didn't pay to go out of their way.

But now, even Aldi is experimenting with Instacart, so consumers will be increasingly able to identify cheaper vendors and arrange delivery. It won't be long before consumers will be able to speak to some ALEXA-like device and identify the least expensive way to get all the groceries.

It is hard to imagine making a living selling Tide or Del Monte green beans when one has to be the cheapest to make it happen. So, of course, the answer is to differentiate. This is going to happen with the fresh departments and, to some extent, with private label that contains unique flavors and formulations. Deli and foodservice departments stand a good chance of being saviors of the store

with unique flavors, theatre, everything ripe for differentiation, and, crucially, prices that are very hard to compare.

It is the same effective theory that was used to fight Walmart; Be the anti-Walmart – organic, high-service, community engaged. But in many cases, it didn't really prove an effective tool at combatting Walmart; it was more a guide for getting out of its way. So chains such as Safeway closed lots of stores in poorer areas while remodeling stores in more affluent areas in its Lifestyle format. In other words, all that service and organic products and fresh worked well with consumers who were affluent enough to purchase amenities they valued; but Walmart just kept growing.

Seeing deli departments as these upscale differentiators is fine, but it will not be sufficient to deal with the enormity of the challenges ahead.

Walmart is the largest food retailer in America, Aldi is the fastest growing established chain and Lidl is the fastest growing start-up food store. They are all discounters. Aldi and Lidl, together have almost a quarter of the grocery market in Ireland. Here, they have, combined, less than 2 percent -- for now.

Today, Walmart is about 20 percent of the food market, warehouse clubs are 10 percent and Amazon is 1 percent (that excludes Whole Foods), so likely these new discount formats are aiming for half of the U.S. grocery market. This means that the idea of competing by adding service and other things that add cost is the same as ceding half the grocery market.

For some, this may be a wise strategy. But, on an industry-wide basis, it is a massive retreat for today's supermarkets.

What we need is a strategy to go high – service, organic, local, culinary-- and go low – drive costs out of the supply chain and offer items at competitive prices. Whether this means opening up new Aldi/Lidl-like concepts or finding ways to offer discount private label lines or store-within-a-store formats within conventional supermarkets, if conventional retailers fail to think about the price-oriented shopper, they better hope their market demographics are crying out for high service and differentiation.

DB

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "James P. Prevora".

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Getting Personal with Food Choices



By
Lee Smith
Publisher

Category management is often evaluated by analyzing short term goals and objectives, and the future is usually next year. This is not entirely wrong, as most buyers will have little input into the long-term decisions made by senior management. As such, most trends evolve around new technologies, new products, flavor selections and the growth of subcategories, such as specialty cheese or lunch meats.

Therefore, the most significant trend of 2017 and a trend that will change the world of retailing, is often overlooked. It is consumers' move away from a primary retailer to a more personalized menu of purchasing choices. While most retailers strive to meet most of their customers' needs, they also believe most consumers will settle for the

or I can pick up my order at Whole Foods if I use Amazon. A friend who works at Walmart says they are running out of space for customers who order online and pick up their orders at the store.

The internet is far from the only serious competitor. I live in an area where local farms are all around me. During the summer, every Saturday, we go down the road to shop at our favorite farm stores. Great fresh produce, often picked more than once a day, is usually much less expensive. These same stores also sell local honey, jams, apple butter and baked goods. Last year, we calculated we saved about 30 percent on our grocery bill. One of my favorite places is a local farm that sells their USDA pasture-grazed beef. They also have a cooler with organic eggs and yogurt, local cheeses and meat snacks. Customers just write down what they take and put their money or check in the tin can. You can also go to the local cheesemakers and buy cheese directly from them, usually in the barn's cold case.

Small specialty stores are also growing. By focusing on local products and local tastes – lobster in New England, scrapple in Pennsylvania, barbecue in the Carolinas – these small stores are making inroads. Selections may be limited, but are highly focused to local tastes and very high quality.

For a long time, large regional and national retailers moved to consolidated buying with often only one buying headquarters, believing that their price structure was better served by eliminating regional SKUs and local buying. The backlash is strong and, as consumers are more interested in where their food comes from, and natural and organic products, with an aversion to chemicals and additives, small retailers are back in the mainstream mix.

This is a consumers' marketplace, and traditional supermarkets are only one option. As an industry, we need to be thinking outside the box and not depend on the in-the-box solutions of the past.

DB

While the internet is not the only competitor, online competition is just growing stronger.

brands and products they do sell, provided they stock the most popular brands and products that support their corporate missions.

The biggest threat comes from online shopping, which often offers more variety and free delivery for lower prices than brick and mortar stores. I, for one, am a strong supporter of local retailers, but I am being swayed. My local pet store is great, but items are often out of stock. I can order online, get the brands I want, and delivery is free at prices about 20 percent lower. I don't want the store to close, so I hang in there, shopping once a week, but how long will I forgo the obvious benefits?

For supermarkets, the challenge is even greater. While the internet is not the only competitor, online competition is just growing stronger. I can get virtually any specialty food I want and have it delivered,

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RETAIL TRENDS TAKE HOLD

A look at what will be buzzing
in delis come 2018

BY KEITH LORIA



A savvy retailer understands that, in order to continue being successful, one needs to change with the times and be up on the latest trends occurring in the industry. That's why it's vital that delis pay attention to what's popular and evolve along with these trends.

With the calendar set to turn to 2018,

here are some of the hottest trends people in the industry expect to be popular in the year ahead.

Becoming A Destination

Supermarket delis as a destination is a trend that will continue into 2018 and beyond, according to many following the industry.

"Delis are doing more to make the

deli a destination — both within the store and as a draw for the supermarket itself," says Shayna Snyder, account director at Olson Communications, headquartered in Chicago. "We know consumers' impression of the deli is important to the store's perception from our recent Deli Destinations survey, where 45 percent of respondents said they decide which supermarket they

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shop at based on the quality of the deli; furthermore, 67 percent believed if the food in the supermarket deli is fresh, then everything in the store is better.”

Delis become a destination when they create unique experiences, such as a food marketplace atmosphere. Food halls and farmers markets are trending, and studies show consumers like to shop in food market environments.

For example, Lowe's Foods in North Carolina has redesigned all sections in the perimeter of the store to have their own identity within a marketplace-style environment. The deli features their proprietary SausageWorks shop, with house-made sausages, branded jarred condiments like peach chipotle sauce, cooked Vidalia onions and a Southern chow chow relish, along with grilled made-to-order specials.

Deli departments are moving toward customization more than ever before. Made-to-order grill stations using proteins and produce from other store departments are one way deli departments have responded to the trend.

“Traditionally, there have been prepared options for consumers available hot and ready to eat or in disposable packaging to heat at home; the customization trend now goes much further toward keeping consumers in the store with in-store seating areas and separate check-out for the deli section,” says Snyder. “Some units have expanded to include kiosks or restaurant-style concepts within or near the supermarket’s deli department — everything from sushi, ramen and oyster bars to made-to-order sandwiches with fresh side dishes from the deli.”

She adds that these are typically national trends, with some variation on menu items providing regional flair. For example, Pete’s Market in Chicago has locations with various restaurant-style concepts, including coffee, fresh-squeezed juice and gelato concepts and with different menu items ranging from smoked brisket and pizza to made-to-order tacos and sushi.

“Neighborhood demographics are an indicator of what you’ll find in the store — more variety of fresh-made salsas and guacamoles, plus ceviche bars in Latin neighborhoods, while other neighborhoods might have a more expansive barbecue program,” says Snyder.

Oscar Villarreal, vice president of



marketing for BelGioioso Cheese Inc., Green Bay, WI, says he is seeing trends in freshness and convenience, clean ingredient labels, and flavored cheeses.

On-The-Go Snacking

However, it’s on-the-go snacking that seems to be everywhere at the moment. He says the snacking trend is national, and convenient options for snacking are widespread and very popular with all demographics.

“Smaller portion sizes packaged for convenience is the trend that has taken over almost the entire supermarket, including the deli,” he says. “The trend has been around for decades with individual sizes of chips, crackers or cookies, and also in the produce and dairy aisles. It has recently surfaced in the specialty cheese case, as consumers are looking for higher quality, natural snacks.”

The company offers a 1-ounce individual portion fresh Mozzarella snack and has since expanded its line with Fontina, Parmesan and Provolone and Salame rolls.

“Consumers are especially interested in more flavorful, specialty cheeses and learning about their craftsmanship, ingredients and history,” he says. “Trends do change, but with the increase in single households and families constantly on the go, we believe smaller, convenient portions that deliver on flavor and nutrition are here to stay.”

Smartly, retailers are creating specific spaces in their specialty cheese cases for snacking and smaller cuts and wedges. BelGioioso Cheese does its part by pro-

viding display cases for retailers to use within their specialty cheese case to better highlight its smaller 4-ounce cuts.

Meal Kits

Another trend worth watching is the rise of meal kits and deli prepared foods, which are ripe for rebranding or repackaging as ready-to-eat meal kits.

A recent Harris Poll revealed 25 percent of adults purchased a meal kit last year and 70 percent of meal kit purchasers have continued to buy them, so it only makes sense retailers would want to get in on the action.

Snyder notes retailers can take advantage of this trend by creating easy meal kits in different sizes geared for singles to families with kids.

“[With displays], for the marketplace approach, adding simple touches like ‘clip your own’ herbs can create a more local feel,” she says. “If a large-scale redesign isn’t practical, displays using baskets, rustic wooden cutting boards and other farmhouse design elements can start to foster the trend.”

Stories Behind the Product

Mindfulness is a trend that could branch out into multiple facets of the deli experience; for instance, this may include using responsibly-sourced ingredients and eco-friendly packaging.

“Another manifestation of mindfulness could be focused on telling the story behind the product — providing consumers with more information to make a connection to the products they’re buying, such as placards or dis-



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plays showcasing a description of the supplier, how to use the product, and what makes this product special,” says Olson Communications’ Snyder.

According to a recent Culinary Visions Panel study, 63 percent of consumers surveyed “love talking to vendors who are passionate about the food they sell.”

“Taking this a step further, stores with a marketplace concept could invite vendors into the store and start to create a culture of connecting with con-

sumers,” she says. “Nurturing a feeling of hospitality and belonging within the community will extend to the supermarket and help strengthen the reputation of the business.”

The consumer mindfulness trend seems poised to stay, as consumers are motivated to find ways to improve their quality of life, and their decisions in the deli reflect that overarching goal; mindfulness comes into play when consumers increasingly want to know where their food comes from and how it was raised

and harvested when deciding whether to include meat in their diet and also when choosing to patronize supermarkets that treat employees well.

Hot Bars

Hectic schedules and increased commitments for work, school and family have made it challenging for consumers to find the time to make a proper hot meal. Food marketing expert Phil Lempert, recently reported that prepared hot meals have grown into a \$25 billion-a-year industry. That’s why hot bars have been popping up in delis much more than usual, with added offerings to the usual soups and buffet food.

Bob Sewall, executive vice president of sales and marketing for Blount Fine Foods, Fall River, MA, says there’s a big emphasis on expanding the hot bar in the deli section of a supermarket.

“That could be prepared foods, soups, deli meats, side dishes, mac and cheese; the trend here is all about clean label food and healthier options,” he says. “It can be decadent, it can be indulgent, but it has to have minimal ingredients and a clean label. People are more educated about this now — especially the Millennial consumer.”

Responding to the trend, Blount Fine Foods continues to use fresh ingredients, including real dairy, fresh vegetables and antibiotic chicken in its soups.

“We’ve never known any other way. We’ve always been cooking this way and woke up and found out we were on trend,” says Sewall.

The challenge with adding a hot bar to a retail store is it requires equipment, labor and space that some stores may just not have. Sewall notes that savvy retailers are finding ways to make it a reality and then highlighting and marketing the hot bars to bring new customers into the stores.

“They have to let the customers know what they are serving. In a hot bar, it’s all very confined, and you have this beautiful layout of all this food out there. There’s really a minimal area to put signage and calorie counts, and that can be hard,” he says. “As a food provider in a supermarket chain, we need to figure out a better way to get this information across, whether it’s done by phone or signage. We make a concerted effort of providing materials to our retailers to call attention to our food.”

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NO LONGER A SIMPLE SIDE

Dips and spreads are moving from minor accompaniment to major component

BY MANDY ELLIS

To infinity and beyond. That's where the uses for dips and spreads are heading. No longer cast off as a flavor bonus for vehicles like chips or veggies, these creamy concoctions are permeating dishes from pizza and paninis to sandwiches and rotisserie chicken. Considering them as components over sides opens the door to a multitude of deli department uses.

This billion-dollar segment of hummus, pâtés, mousses, sal-sas, indulgent dips and more is making strides. "They're a category that's taking off, and dips and spreads will be a mainstay in the American home," says Michael Miscoe, chief executive of Lilly's

Hummus, based in Portland, OR. "Numbers show they're are on the rise due to people not cooking as much as well as the convenience and time-saving factors." Thanks to the continuing snacking trend, unique ingredients, colorful grab-and-go packages and single-serve containers are striking a chord with customers.

According to Margi Gunter, sales planning manager at Litehouse Inc. headquartered in Sandpoint, ID, hummus leads the category with \$994 million in sales annually. "Dips and spreads are driven a lot by hummus and grab-and-go," she says. "It's important that executives include those in their upcoming resets to capture what shoppers are doing."



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Supermarket deli executives who rewire their retail environments to think of dips and spreads as components, provide classic and differentiated flavors, plus indulgent and healthy options, and offer single-serve packages side-by-side with complementary items will see community dollars flow back into their department.

Standbys And State-Of-The-Art

"Buffalo chicken is our number one dip," says Carl Cappelli, senior vice president of sales and business development for Don's Food Products and Melanie's Medleys in Schwenksville, PA. "What makes ours unique is it's smoother, creamier and already has hot sauce and Blue cheese mixed in." Coming in second place is spinach, artichoke and cheese.

As for the category leader, hummus, Miscoe says basic styles are the bread and butter: classic, roasted red bell pepper, and roasted garlic.

Up-and-comers, like pâtés and mousses, are beginning to entice shoppers, as well. "Mousse truffée has been our classic for years; it's a pork and chicken liver mousse with truffles," says David Kemp, chief executive of Les Trois Petits Cochons in Brooklyn, NY. "We launched organic pâtés last year to meet that healthy alternative the consumer wants."

Customers are venturing outside of their comfort zone more, and Kemp says

although their mousses and pâtés wouldn't come to mind first, they add variety to dips and spreads. Gourmet cream cheese spreads are flourishing, as well, with their applications in everything from flatbreads to party trays.

For something new with a twist, kalamata olives, pickles, sea salt and vinegar, and spicy peppers are popping up as intriguing dip and spread ingredients. Off-the-beaten-path styles like black garlic and turmeric also are getting attention, while providing an edge for delis more than competitors.

"Listen to the consumer and address a need that already exists; don't invent a need," says John McGuckin, chief executive of Taunton, MA-based Tribe Mediterranean Foods, LLC. "Smoky, spicy and sea salt and vinegar; no surprise, those are the chip flavors resonating. By bringing those flavors to dips and spreads, you're appealing to customers who already love them and attracting them to the deli."

Dessert hummus is also picking up steam, with types like chocolate cookie, peanut butter and pumpkin. "Customers like decadent, dessert-type items with big flavors that combine health and indulgence," says Miscoe. "When you incorporate a rich flavor into a health-oriented product like beans, they eat those with less guilt."

The Battle Of Good And Bad

In the mind of the consumer, it's still good versus bad when considering fats, ingredients, labels and how responsibly sourced or natural items are. And as shoppers become increasingly educated, the products they buy are under further investigation.

"Consumers understand the difference between fats, and they're not what's bad because to get low fat, you have to use ingredients they don't want," says Gunter. "It's about the ingredients and making them understandable." Low fat, low calorie dips and spreads are losing a bit of excitement due to research showing they're full of artificial ingredients.

Other negative targets? Sodium and sugar. "Sugar is under scrutiny, as it relates to diabetes," says McGuckin. "Work to lessen the sodium and sugar, and ensure that the fat content inside the product is what customers recognize as good fat over bad fat."

In addition to ingredient analysis, transparency with ingredients and sourcing is critical. Customers today care for healthier dips and spreads that are responsibly sourced, manufactured in ways they can feel good about and crafted without any artificial ingredients.

That's why clean labels continue to rise. The label-reading trend leads consumers to place unnatural products with unrecognizable ingredients back on the shelf. As dips and spreads move towards cleaner labels without artificial colors, flavors or preservatives, consumer demand continues to increase.

Complement, Convenience, Connection

Placing mainstays like crackers, toast, chips or fresh produce near dips and spreads might be expected, but what other creative applications are there? If supermarket deli executives reimagine these items as components, the possibilities are endless. "We have a spinach, artichoke and Asiago cheese dip, and it becomes the crack cocaine of any retail environment," says Don's Food Products' Cappelli. "Consumers get addicted to it, and use it for grilled chicken, sandwiches, flatbreads, paninis, pizza, wraps and burgers."

McGuckin says as dips and spreads become more mainstream, additional usage occasions are developing. This allows retailers to tie them to meals as a side or as an element in a composed dish. Creating more spreadable occasions also helps bump household penetration back up to 30 to 35 percent.

Delis can generate greater convenience by placing the accompaniments, like charcuterie, adjacent to the dips and spreads section to snag two purchases over one. Customers will pay more if the items are designed as a meal solution with grab-and-go accessibility.

For marketing, pump up the power of suggestion to attract more shoppers. Employ enticing images to propel purchasing and offer recipe booklets with usage ideas. Then, direct customers between deli and bakery, produce or grocery with signs detailing exciting combos and where they

can find them.

Social media should be dipped into, as well, to attract tech-savvy shoppers like Millennials. "Instagram and Facebook are where we meet our future customers and bring them back to the retailer," explains Tribe Mediterranean's McGuckin. "Another highly-effective method is for manufacturers and retailers to partner, and utilize the retailer's appeal to neighborhood shoppers through unique avenues like loyalty programs."

Pocket-Sized Packages To Meal Kits

Environmentally-friendly packaging that retains freshness in grab-and-go, single-serve clear containers is the hottest packaging craze yet. Customers want different portable dips and spreads, so providing an assortment of small packages is crucial. "They're looking for grab-and-go," says Litehouse's Gunter. "Some retailers are even considering adding snacking sections, because the segment is huge and growing. As long as they keep their eye on it, they'll be ahead of the curve."

Clear containers are catching the eyes of consumers through toppings, easy sight

of the product and colorful labels. Items that stand out make it easy for customers to add them to their cart during their two- to three-second shelf scan. And if these containers are sustainable and recyclable, that's even better.

Retailers would be wise to think ahead and consider meal kits, as well. "Retailers will beat other services at their own game, if they jump on meal kits now," says Cappelli. "Think components. You could have fresh veggies and an all-natural cream cheese spread or an indulgent kit where customers take home dips and spreads for use with sandwiches or wraps." Consider the advantages of having meal kits available in-store or hop on the snacking trend where dips and spreads are included as something to munch on while cooking the kit.

Overcoming Obstacles

Even with expansion and cross merchandising opportunities, dips and spreads still face challenges in the supermarket deli. "Shelf life is always an issue. Brands providing clean label, organic products see 60 days," says McGuckin. "When you go beyond that to 120 or 130 days of shelf life,

customers wonder how fresh the product is. Shorter shelf life raises concerns about shrink, while longer shelf life raises concerns about a product's freshness, authenticity and viability."

Deli executives using products on the cutting edge of shelf life will reduce shrink and improve their bottom line. High Pressure Processing (HPP) has assisted the trend of tasty, natural dips and spreads by providing longer shelf life. Kemp says their move to HPP enabled product to reach 12 weeks of shelf life, which opened up opportunities for their pâtés and mousses to be stocked at more supermarkets.

Shelf space is another issue that plagues both manufacturers and deli departments. "In deli, the prime real estate is the refrigerated section," says Lilly's Hummus' Miscoe. "Let executives know your product will sell well, and it's a good opportunity for them to add other vendors. Say, 'You've got these dips, but you don't have ours with these beautiful benefits.'" Supermarket deli executives who have products that are truly differentiated will see that variety reflected in dollars to the deli and category growth.

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Takeout Takeaways

There are a number of ways delis can capitalize on this lucrative segment

BY JEFFREY STEELE



Today's supermarket delis no longer view their chief competition as home-cooked meals. No, increasingly, delis are competing against restaurants and upscale eateries. This means deli professionals are facing the task of providing high levels of convenience, freshness and quality, rivaling those of the finest restaurants' takeout services.

This brave new world is helping usher in dramatic changes in how deli takeout foods are prepared, presented, packaged and perceived. It's even altering how delis are designed and promoted. To investigate these sea of changes, we convene this month an esteemed panel of deli food and packaging experts, asking them for ways delis can leverage their takeout services to ensure they're top of mind as consumers' food destinations.

These are some of their suggested takeout takeaways.

Becoming A Destination

One of supermarket delis' primary challenges is becoming a destination for the food-minded consumer. Simply put, how can delis best compete for the foodservice dollar?

From the perspective of Mary T. Shepard, national sales manager with





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Kirkland, WA-based Fortun Foods, maker of Fortun's Finishing Touch Soups and Sauces, delis must showcase the same quality and freshness as their primary competitors, restaurants.

"The supermarket deli has to 'up' its marketing and atmosphere to make it desirable to pay more of a premium price," says Shepard, enumerating fresh, clean ingredients, uniqueness, quickness and international options as vital selling points. "To drive [patrons] into the stores, they have to deliver on every sensory [promise]."

Jeff Lucash, vice president of sales at Madison, WI-based packaging supplier Placon Corp., emphasizes similar points. "Many supermarket delis are already offering prepared foods, including meal and snack options, for consumers," he says. "To continue to become more relevant and competitive in this arena, supermarket delis need to elevate the profile of food offerings through quality, variety, customization and meal inspiration."

One approach is focusing on what customers want, then providing options for a variety of target markets, including grab-and-go and prepared meals in individual and family sizes, he says. It's also essential for supermarket delis to offer foods that are on-trend through flavors, ingredients and personalization or customization..

In addition, supermarket delis must package food to sell at a value price representative of the quality. "Good packaging protects the integrity of prepared foods and keeps them attractive," says Lucash.

For Marilyn Stapleton, director of marketing for Anchor Packaging in the St. Louis suburb of Ballwin, MO, the key is advertising signature dishes that allow delis to differentiate. "Offering meal solutions and daily specials, plus quick in-and-out areas to make their destination fast and easy, will help them to compete," she says.

Newest Opportunities

Stapleton says delis have several key opportunities to become more relevant to

consumers. One is allowing meals to be consumed by customers without forcing them to leave the premises. Patrons may be taking food to go, but many don't want to go far.

"Many [delis] have added tables and chairs to the store, and some have created the ambience of a restaurant experience," she notes. "Providing full-service counters for prepared foods with menu boards, meal highlights and separate checkouts encourages the consumer to enter the store knowing it won't take too long, and there is a nice area to eat."

Busy lifestyles and the internet-fueled era of ordering anything online to be delivered to your location are now part of daily



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANCHOR PACKAGING

meal and snack decisions, she adds.

"Restaurants are moving to third-party delivery options to keep pace with this trend and investigating technology to obtain orders from various sources. [This helps determine] what menu items to offer and how to preserve the food integrity while in transit," she says.

"Some retailers have mastered the chilled takeout to reheat prepared foods, and have included it as part of the larger shopping list of items for your cart or ordered on the store's app for delivery," says Stapleton. "Should the retailer consider offering a single chilled meal ready to reheat in the microwave within minutes to an office or home?"

When it comes to the tried-and-true versus brand new, Shepard says soup and salad should always have a presence in supermarket delis. "What has changed is the demand for fresh and high quality," she adds. "Customers are not looking for the food technologists' version.

"[Customers want] true chef-inspired real foods. The newest opportunities are bundling to take home a protein or gourmet sauce and salad. And now you have a gourmet restaurant-quality meal. Just a heat and serve option, but for some, that is

Consumers turn to supermarket delis to generate ideas that can help them create their own meals.

their idea of cooking in today's world. No more frozen dinners, no more fried chicken from the deli. Instead, it's options that bring you back to the supermarket deli a couple times a week."

According to Lucash, the newest opportunities lie within the family meal area, due to the fact convenience remains a top priority.

Consumers turn to supermarket delis to generate ideas that can help them create their own meals, and also ensure there will be a delicious and nutritious dinner expeditiously placed on the table come supper time. Because today's consumers seek healthier options, bulk vegetables, fish and other locally- or regionally-sourced foods are in high demand, according to Placon Corp.'s Lucash.

"Snack-sized grab-and-go options are now considered a staple in supermarket delis, offering portability to the end user," he observes. "Consumers snack multiple

times a day and view snacking as essential to daily nutrition. To meet this growing trend, Placon recently launched a new product as part of its popular Fresh n' Clear GoCubes."

This new four-compartment, 24-ounce base joins the company's already-established product line and offers greater merchandising opportunities for convenient, grab-and-go snacking options, says Lucash. "Packaging with multiple compartments ensures ingredients are safely kept separate with consistent portion sizing highlighting specific ingredients, while keeping food looking better and tasting fresher for longer," he adds.

Challenges In Takeout

One of the most significant challenges confronting the supermarket takeout segment is that the food offering has to offer a quality appearance commensurate with its price, says Lucash.

Olives Go Mainstream

BY CAROLE SINCLAIR

Olives continue to be a profitable staple in today's delis, as consumers seek accompaniments for dishes, ingredients for salads and options for party platters.

"The key to a successful olive bar is a wide variety of product," says Giuliana Pozzuto, director of marketing at DeLallo, based in Jeannette, PA. "This is why we offer a range of flavors and colors, including Greek Kalamata, natural green Castelvetrano from Italy and our own California Green pitted olive. But a successful bar is about more than olives, which is why it is crucial to offer antipasto mixes featuring more favorites like bite-sized cheeses, artichokes, roasted peppers, etc."

The free-standing self-serve olive bar is the ultimate for merchandising, but careful attention to cleaning, decluttering and rotating product is a must. Islands range in size from 10 to 50 items.

Along with freestanding bar programs,

DeLallo offers integrated bulk bars all the way to an assortment of packaged olives and antipasti wall merchandisers. Even if a retailer only has a small space to work with, offering these items is crucial due to the fast-growing charcuterie and cheese board category.

An olive bar should be featured near the specialty cheeses and cured meats, creating a well-rounded destination for gourmet entertaining.

There are complementary items that can be merchandised with olives. The consumer is looking for ways to perk up their charcuterie plates and cheese boards, so offering such curated items as mustards, jams, cured salumi and Italian focaccia toasts adds a new dimension to their presentations. These items also can increase incremental sales.

Variety, too, is key to creating an olive destination in delis.

Katerina Barka of My Olive Roots points

out that Greece has a wide variety of olives, both black and green. Very few of these can be found on American shelves. Her company sources from select and smaller Greek producers.

Ron Johnson, an owner of Encore Specialty Food Importers, based in Hingham, MA, says not only do olive bars require hourly maintenance, cleaning and rearranging, but varieties must be refreshed each day.

He also says complementary items include refrigerated dolmas, sweet peppers and marinated garlic.

Starting new trends is nothing new for Olive Branch, a division of Islandia, NY-based Farm Ridge Foods, reports Patty Amato, senior vice president.

"We offer two new additions for olive bars, Mediterranean pickle pears in balsamic brine and Greek style pickle chips."

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This problem can be solved with the right packaging, offering high visibility of the quality food inside. Today's consumers, he adds, are food savvy and demand transparency in ingredients, production and quality. "Seeing the quality food inside the package helps merchandise the product and maximize sales," says Lucash.

Another challenge is making sure the deli staff takes the time to educate the consumer. Customers should be instructed on options and be provided a "road map" on what they can do now and what they can do for dinner later, says Fortun Foods' Shepard. "Education and service at the counter can highlight the value of coming to the supermarket deli for a variety of needs throughout the week. Maybe look into customer appreciation deals or punch cards for meals or soup and salad. Make the repeat customer feel valued."

Packaging Options

Maintaining the food quality and presentation in the package is among the cornerstones of Anchor Packaging's philosophy, says Stapleton. "We have worked with supermarket deli retailers for many years perfecting the hot and cold grab-and-go packaging."

The whole rotisserie chicken package, MicroRaves packages and the Crisp Food Technologies are a few examples. Anchor's packages offer the versatility to display food hot or chilled for microwave reheating. Clear, anti-fog lids let the appetizing items shine through to drive multiple sales.

"Many shapes and sizes in leak-resistant stackable designs allow the consumer to mix and match entrées and sides."

At Fortun's Finishing Touch Sauces, freshness is sealed in, so the integrity of the fresh soup or sauce can't be compromised. The packaging is double-tamper-proof, says Shepard.

Packaging is vital to the success of supermarket deli takeout offerings, says Lucash. Among the must-have packaging attributes are a microwaveable base, and what he calls "an incredibly clear lid" to allow consumers to visually inspect the food before purchase.

"Placon's HomeFresh Entrée line, launched in 2017, is made from microwave-friendly polypropylene and easily goes from the supermarket to the kitchen table without re-plating," he says. Available in five stacking sizes, the HomeFresh Entrée containers meet the needs of end users by conveniently and functionally



PHOTO COURTESY OF PLACON



offering a complete meal.

Also of concern to consumers are environmentally-responsible materials to package healthier, locally-sourced, sustainable food available in supermarket delis. Placon's food containers are made with recycled PET material from curbside bottles and offer delis another opportunity to meet the increasingly specific needs of today's shoppers.

Continuing Evolution

Supermarket deli takeout has come

a long way from the days of offering little beyond fried chicken and potato wedges. Watch for takeout at retail to continue to evolve, all in the name of freshness, quality, sustainable packaging and greater convenience than ever before.

Shepard says the trend line will continue to move toward fresh, gourmet and chef-inspired, upscale restaurant-worthy foods like her company's Lobster Bisque with Cognac gourmet soups.

In addition, she says today's supermarket deli consumer wants what she terms a "great footprint and sustainability," noting her packaged soups don't require shipping liquids. "At home you add your milk or water, depending on the flavor," she adds. "This gives you the ultimate freshness, because it's not sitting in liquid for weeks or months on the shelf."

As for Lucash, he says that vis-a-vis home-cooked meals, convenience is the primary advantage offered by takeout food from supermarket delis. "Consumers want the convenience of a fast food restaurant, but fresher, healthier options and more customized choices." "Millennials, parents of small children, singles and young couples, are the target consumers. All place a high value on convenience, healthier options and customization. The extensive variety at supermarket delis can help suit different preferences among household members."

For her part, Stapleton notes many supermarkets have developed apps to get groceries delivered in an hour or less, and some have combined components to send meal kits for delivery. Why not individual meals, to compete with restaurants?

"Keeping an assembled meal hot and secure while maintaining the texture, especially of fried foods, is essential, given the extra time needed for delivery," she says. "We are monitoring these evolving changes and have packaging solutions to face these challenges."

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Italian Foods STILL GROWING

**Premium products lead
the way in deli growth**

BY BOB JOHNSON

As Italian meats and cheeses build on their leading role in the deli, the highest quality products play a prominent role.

While U.S. imports of Italian salumi were up more than 25 percent in year over year sales the first eight months of 2017, according to Maurizio Forte, Trade Commissioner at the Italian Trade Commission New York office, New York, suppliers report their strongest growth was among higher-quality meats,

"With prosciutto, we've had an increase in San Daniele compared to Parma," says Anna Gallo, director of marketing at Savello USA, Wilkes-Barre, PA. "It is somewhat more premium, and the flavor is sweeter rather than salty. It has been increasing for six or seven months."



Savello USA, a family-owned and operated importer, has built close relationships with a network of Italian producers that supply 500 food products, including around 100 different types of cheese.

Gallo believes there is a general trend

toward more premium products in the Italian deli category.

"People read more labels, and they are going beyond GMO and gluten free and reading the ingredients and nutritional information," she says. "They are deciding

higher-quality products are worth it. I've seen that mostly this year."

Deli customers are also looking for a health premium in their cheese, as per capita consumption of natural as opposed to processed cheese increased from 27 pounds to 34 pounds over the last two decades, according to the Madison, WI-based International Dairy Deli Bakery Association's (IDDBA) *What's in Store 2017*, and the greatest increase was in natural Italian cheeses.

"We're seeing Italian gourmet cheeses growing very rapidly," says Allison Schuman, club sales senior director at Schuman Cheese, Fairfield, NJ. "We've seen upwards of 10 percent growth in our specialty items."

Schuman is a fourth generation Italian cheese company that began importing more than 70 years ago and, more recently, started producing its own line of products.

The Good Stuff

As a sign of the times, a leading producer of artisan meats in central Italy is experiencing a warm welcome after entering the U.S. market a year ago.

"We saw an opportunity in the U.S.," says Antonio Corsano, chief executive at Veroni USA, headquartered in New York. "We are doing very well. We import all our products from Italy."

Veroni came to the United States a



year ago, more than nine decades after the brothers Fiorentino, Francesco, Paolo, Adolfo and Ugo Veroni opened their shop in Corregio, selling food products obtained from nearby farms and small towns in central Italy.

"After people hear it is authentic, imported from Italy, they want to taste the product," says Corsano.

More than half of consumers make Italian food at home, according to IDDBA's *What's in Store 2017* report, which earns it the top spot among ethnic foods ahead of Mexican food.

"Italy ranked number one in value and in quantity, in U.S. imports of cheeses from January to August 2017," says Forte. "The imports of Italian salumi grew constantly in the first eight months of 2017. Compared to the previous period of 2016, the total value of U.S. imports of Italian salumi increased by 26.4 percent."

Italian cheese suppliers also report that their premium quality products, though still relatively small in volume, are enjoying the greatest growth.

"We're seeing a big push in Italian cheeses, and not just Parmesan and Mozzarella, but also a number of specialty items," says Schuman. "We're seeing rubbed cheeses with unusual spice blends that are really blowing up. We took our creamy Fontina and had our cheesemaker rub it with spice blends."

Two of Schuman's newer hand-rubbed cheese items, both introduced in 2015, have been received particularly well.

The website describes Harissa as "a smoky blend of chili, cumin and caraway seed that creates an exotic combo with Fontina's rich and nutty flavor."

The company's other award-winning cheese, named Tuscan, is described as "a classic blend of Italian herbs and spices that pairs perfectly with the rich and nutty Fontina flavor."

Two thirds of consumers say it is important that Italian and other international cheeses be authentic, according to IDDBA's *What's in Store 2017*, and that number is even higher among Millennials.

Producers are also responding to the demand for digestibility as, from 2012 to 2015, gluten free claims of Italian deli products rose 44 percent, according to *What's in Store 2017*.

Some cheeses are beginning to make their mark, in part, because they are easier on the stomach.

"Everyone is eating more goat cheese;

it's easier to digest," says Gallo. "In the United States people generally only drink cow's milk, but in Europe they drink cow and goat milk."

While producers in both Italy and the United States are displaying creativity, there are still time-honored standards in Italian meats and cheeses.

"The most popular cheeses from Italy available in the U.S. market are: Parmigiano Reggiano DOP; Grana Padano

DOP; Mozzarella di Bufala Campana DOP; Piave DOP; Gorgonzola DOP; and Provolone Val Padano DOP," says Forte of the Italian Trade Commission. "Taleggio and Mascarpone are new. The most popular salumi from Italy available on the U.S. market are Prosciutto di Parma DOP, Prosciutto di San Daniele DOP, Mortadella, Prosciutto Cotto and speck. Coppa, Salamini Italiani alla Cacciatora DOP, Prosciutto di Modena DOP and

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While consumers crave the highest quality traditional Italian deli products, they also want convenience.

“The pre-sliced category on Italian salumi continues to grow at a double-digit rate, and I would consider them as staples at this point,” says Alberto Minardi, chief executive of Principe Foods USA, Long Beach, CA. “The newest growing segment is snack items, where specialty meats with either cheeses or breads are easy for the Millennials to enjoy.”

Principe has grown since its birth after World War II to become the largest producer of San Daniele ham, at 430,000 salted legs a year, and ships a full line of Italian meats to the United States, Japan and throughout Europe.

Salami and other Italian meats combined account for more than 30 percent of pre-sliced deli meat, according to IDDBA's *What's in Store 2017*, which is more than either turkey or ham.

Italian specialty meats, at more than 7 percent, and salami at 18 percent, were among the fastest growing in the deli sliced meat category.

Part of the growth in meats already sliced can be explained by the development of products with better shelf life.

“We slice all our imported meats like prosciutto; there is more interest in sliced,” says Veroni USA's Corsano.

Producers generally are developing appealing products that offer the convenience of pre-sliced meat.

“Sliced salumi are increasingly present in the mainstream stores,” says Forte. “As always, the Italian packaging is innovative, suggestive, attractive, classy and artsy. In a word, beautiful. The trends will always respect the tradition of a food culture that has conquered the world, but they will also take into consideration and use the latest techniques applied to paper, cardboard and color scheme.”

Part of the growth in meats already sliced can be explained by the development of products with better shelf life.

“The pre-sliced for the deli meats has

grown a lot more again this year and has been increasing for a couple years,” says Gallo from Savello USA. “It is more grab and go. The shelf life is also longer than it used to be. Some people who had 30 days shelf life are now up to 60 or 90 days.”

The Convenient Stuff

Half the delis surveyed by Technomic offered grab-and-go ethnic entrées, according to IDDBA's *What's in Store 2017*, and customers are flocking to deli packaging that responds to the need for convenience.

“Easy to peel, snack combination and party trays are prevalent packaging trends,” says Principe Foods' Minardi.

One way to feed off the growing desire for fine dining made convenient is to display together all the Italian deli foods that make for a memorable dinner.

“You can combine and coordinate products for a complete meal made with all Italian ingredients,” says Anna Gallo.

This display might effectively include a few Italian items not usually thought of as deli foods.

“In addition to the meats and cheeses, you can also have the jellies, crackers and breadsticks that go with them,” suggests Francesco Gallo, purchasing manager at Savello USA.

The list can be expanded to include a number of other well-received Italian products that go with deli fare.

“Italy is the number one exporter into the United States of products that are not proper ‘deli-products,’ such as pasta, mineral water and wine,” says Forte. “We can safely say that Italian food exports are increasing, due to the continuous demand from the ever more knowledgeable American consumer.”

Show Them And They Will Buy

As the market for fine Italian deli meats and cheeses expands, it includes more people with limited knowledge of the products and how they are best used.

“I believe, for the consumers and retailers, the cheese category is tricky because it's hard to become an expert,” says Schuman. “Delis need to make it less intim-



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identifying with signage and sampling. It helps to have information about what to pair it with, and what wine it goes with."

Much of the work of familiarizing the public with Italian foods has already been done by U.S. representatives of the major Italian producer organizations.

"The first Italian producers and consorti of deli products exported to the United States worked incessantly to promote and educate American trade and consumers about their cheeses and salumi," says Forte. "A considerable amount of time was invested in explaining each product's territorial and cultural ties in order to instill the appreciation for authentic, unique, high-quality products. These 'pioneers' did the leg work for the companies and consorti that followed."

Sampling Sells

A simple and common way to bridge the knowledge gap is to give customers a taste supervised by knowledgeable deli staff.

"Nowadays, tastings at the points of sales are a valid solution to continue spreading the knowledge," says Forte. "Trained staff can create awareness among shoppers who taste the product and ask questions about its origin, ingredients, nutritional facts and ways of using it in a recipe. The key is educating the American consumer to recognize the particularities of a food product that is 100 percent Italian."

The deli can take tasting a step farther by demonstrating how the cheese or meat can be paired.

"Demos and cross merchandising products with other departments, such as cheese and fruit, work," says Minardi. "The customer is looking for a full experience in discovering a new taste, or reaffirming his or her loyalty to a specific product."

The education pioneers have already made staples of many Italian foods.

"Parmesan has become a staple item," says Schuman. "Mozzarella is one of the most highly-consumed cheeses, behind only Cheddar, and maybe number one when you count pizzas. Gorgonzola, Asiago, Pecorino and Romano are staples. Romano is historically a Southern Italian cheese, and we have a lot of second and third generation Southern Italians in the eastern United States. You're going to need 10 Italian cheeses."

There is no set formula for how many meat and cheese products to stock, as it comes down to how ambitious a store wants to be in going Italian.

"You need at least prosciutto, mortadella, Prosciutto Cotto and two or three Italian salamis, such as Milano, Parma and Calabrese," says Corsano.

New food safety technology could add to that list the popular cured but not cooked pancetta, which, roughly translated, is Italian bacon.

"For now, we don't import pancetta, because you can only import it if it is cooked," says Corsano. "With the new

high pressure pasteurization technology, eventually we will be able to import it."

Delis already have opportunities to target consumers interested in experimenting with unfamiliar flavors.

"The variety you need depends on the retailer and what they're trying to build," says Schuman. "There is the entry-level case all the way up to the premium case that includes items that consumers haven't heard about before."

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BENEFITS TO BUYING LOCAL

How this trend is impacting supermarket delis

BY CAROL BAREUTHER

The 'buy local' trend is everywhere. It can be seen in food selections from small towns to urban downtown farmers markets, sold in mom-and-pop and national supermarket chains, menued in casual cafes and by celebrity chefs, and even in stadium fare, airports and rest stops along major highways in the U.S.

This is because people feel they're doing the right thing when they support regional companies connected to these ingredients, according to the January 2017-released report, *When It Comes to Health and Wellness U.S. Consumers Will Do It Their Own Way in 2017*, by the Port Washington, NY-headquartered NPD Group.



TOP PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW SEASONS MARKET; PHOTO BOTTOM LEFT COURTESY OF DANIELE

"Buy local" is an increasing priority for customers, because of the greater transparency in where food comes from as well as the fact that shopping 'local' often means shorter steps from farm to table, hence greater freshness and flavor," says Tracy Hardin, group director of merchandising at New Seasons Market, a 20-store Portland, OR-based chain where more than 26 percent of products sold in-store, including the deli, are made in Oregon, Washington or Northern California. "Deli customers from all demographics are inter-

ested in buying local, but I think the ones most drawn to the trend are those who are environment-savvy and sustainability-focused. They tend to want to make an impact on the local food economy and buying local enables them to do that."

Traditional grocery retailers (46 percent) and farmers' markets (44 percent) are the top destinations American's shop for local products, according to a recently-released Harris Poll report, *American Split on Importance of Buying Local at the Grocery Store*. This shows supermarket

departments aren't equal to shoppers when it comes to the importance of buying local. The produce department ranks highest, with two-thirds (67 percent) of Americans saying it's important for them to purchase locally-grown or sourced food there. Second is dairy (56 percent), followed by bakery (55 percent), meat (52 percent) and deli (43 percent), followed by seafood (39 percent) and frozen foods (26 percent).

Local Opportunities

Two areas where local is found in the deli are in individual products and ingredients in prepared foods.

"Some of our local products in deli are Rachel's Vegan Raw Wraps and Comfy House Foods vegan rice puddings," says Richard Ferranda, deli and cheese director at Bristol Farms, a 12-store chain headquartered in Carson, CA. Olli Salumeria offers all-natural salami here in San Diego County, making for a great local partner, even though they ship all across the country. Our extremely fresh Burrata cheese is made less than 30 minutes away from our distribution center, allowing us to offer fresh cheese twice a week. This is rare for most chains and even restaurants, unless they are making the cheese in house."

On the supply side, two good examples of local products are Central Point, OR-based Rogue Creamery's Blue cheeses and Pascoag, RI-headquartered Daniele's, Inc., local charcuterie line.

"We preferentially source ingredients from suppliers in the Rogue Valley, and if not there, then look to Oregon and the Northwest," says Rogue Creamery's director of marketing Francis Plowman. "Each of our Blue cheeses reflects a sense of place in its name. For example, we have

Rogue River Blue, Crater Lake, Oregon Blue and Oregonzola."

Locally-raised hogs are the New England link in Daniele's authentic Italian-manufactured meat products. The products, which include capocollo, chorizo, pancetta and sopressata, were developed as part of an initiative to support local New England farmers. The product label was inspired by design students at the Rhode Island School of Design, and recipes for use of these products were created by chefs from Johnson and Wales University in Providence, RI.

As for ingredients, Raven and Boar Testa, Liuzzi Ricotta and Cascun Farms Chickens are some of the items locally sourced at Eataly, in Flatiron, NY, one of five stores nationwide, according to Fitz Tallon, executive chef of the Flatiron, NY, location, who oversees sourcing for all restaurants and retail counters. "We use these items as fresh components of sandwiches. After all, customers demand the best ingredients, and buying locally definitely allows us to have the freshest and best products."

Indeed, shoppers are interested in seeing deli/fresh prepared food featuring locally-sourced as well as organic, non-GMO and gluten free foods, according *The Power of Fresh Prepared/Deli* report, released by the Arlington, VA-headquartered Food Marketing Institute in November 2016.

Challenges & Opportunities

Finding local producers to source from isn't difficult, says Christopher Droste, deli buyer, sales and merchandising for Kings Super Markets, Inc., a 25-store chain based in Parsippany, NJ. "We look for local vendors and they will reach out to us. Cheese

is one of the main categories where we'll source local product for the deli."

Across the country, Bristol Farms' customers frequently find favorite local products at neighborhood farmer's markets or in restaurants. Many times, they ask the vendor to contact the chain so that these products will be available in the store, explains Ferranda. "We define a local vendor in different ways, depending on the products we are discussing. For example, while the central coast is local for an artisan cheese and 300 miles north may be local when referring to poultry as opposed to being shipped across the country, it may not be as impactful as a vendor from the city of the store itself."

One of the biggest challenges in buying from small-scale local producers is volume, says New Seasons Market's Hardin. "Reliability of product availability can be an issue, as smaller food suppliers and growers often run with a leaner staff, more minimal amounts of storage and maybe have less flexibility to meet their demands."

On the supply side, Rogue Creamery's Plowman agrees. "Supply and demand can be a fine line to manage, especially on products that need to age for one to two years."

Getting vendors up to speed on important issues like liability insurance and health department requirements is another challenge, according to Bristol Farm's Ferranda. "Some local vendors, while they offer a unique product, have a difficult time taking all this into account when costing out their product and can't get past the first step in selling to retailers."

"Local for our New England product can cost four times that of product produced on a larger scale," agrees Daniele's Dukceovich. "After all, the goal behind the product is to help small local farmers have a sustainable cash flow from hogs in the winter. For some deli customers, the price point is too high. That's why offering choices are important."

On the other side of the coin, one of the biggest opportunities is helping small, local vendors bring their products to market, says New Seasons Market's Hardin. "We have a program called Local Finds, which makes it easy for small-scale vendors, whether they are just getting started or have been around for a while, to



LEFT TO RIGHT: PHOTO COURTESY OF DANIELE; DAVID GREMMELS, PRESIDENT OF ROGUE CREAMERY

submit a product and help prepare it for shoppers. Program members get tailored support with everything from packaging and FDA approvals to marketing. To date, our Local Finds products run the gamut from gluten-free muffins and kimchi to cycling hats. It's all about working with vendors to get the right help at the right time so they can grow sustainably."

Local & Locale

Sometimes, especially for deli products, local producers may be a continent away; in other words, in a locale known for its high-quality production of the product.

"We also purchase items from Italy like Sicilian anchovies, prosciutto and cheeses like Parmigiano Reggiano. These items are only produced in specific areas of Italy. Essentially anything that we can make in house or purchase from a local purveyor that we believe to be outstanding, we will, but when Italians produce a product that we love, and is often times protected to honor tradition, we will bring it in from Italy," says Eataly's Tallon.

There is no nearby USDA pork producer to supply charcuterie to Ann Arbor,

MI-based Zingerman's Delicatessen, says William Marshall, retail manager. "In terms of local products, that's Jiffy baking mixes. That company is a half hour away, but I don't know anyone who would call that local. Instead, we seek out small, multi-generation producers who use time-honored methods. These producers may be in Italy, Spain, France or one of the four families in Somerset, England, that still make cloth-bound wrapped Cheddar. For us, local is not a distance, but a quality factor. We tell that story on signage, plus the price of admission for a 'free sample' is listening to me tell you the story behind the product."

Consumers do seek greater on-label visibility into the farms, ingredient sources and supply chain of each item in their shopping basket, according to the November 15, 2017-released, *What Hot in Food for 2018*, by the New York-based Specialty Food Association.

Marketing Local

The feel-good vibe that locally-sourced products bring to the deli can be a potent marketing and sales tool. For example, in October, Roche Bros. Supermarkets, an

18-store chain headquartered in Wellesley, MA, held its annual food festival where 25 vendors displayed locally- and regionally-made product. In the cheese department, this included Jasper Hill Creamery, Vermont Creamery, Plymouth Artisan Cheese and Great Hill Blue Cheese.

"We are big on local items because that's what our customers look for," says Kathy Shannon, cheese buyer/merchandiser. "Local for us means New England."

Rogue Creamery partners with Fred Meyer, a 130-plus retailer headquartered in Portland, OR, and part of The Kroger Co., on a billboard campaign, says Plowman. "In addition, we'll do personal appearances, demos and signage for shoppers in-store, plus contests for employees. Last year, we had the winning retail employees travel to our Grant's Pass creamery, where they got to help make the cheese. This hands-on education goes right back to shoppers when the managers tell the story of their experience and our products. That's the advantage of the deli. It's one department where there is always someone available to ask questions, and that's important when marketing local."

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BEYOND MANCHEGO

Diverse Spanish cheeses open up a world of possibilities

BY HANNAH HOWARD

PHOTO COURTESY OF
C.R.D.O. QUESO MAHÓN

Spanish cheeses have a rich tradition. They are incredibly delicious and diverse. Yet ask someone to name their favorite Spanish cheese and only diehard cheese lovers can think much beyond Manchego.

We have history to blame for the crushing of generations of cheese techniques and expertise. Technocrats associated with Opus Dei, the conservative Catholic organization that was particularly powerful

under the dictatorship of Francisco Franco after the Spanish Civil War, required industries to work to minimum production standards. They outlawed the production of artisan cheeses in the name of modernization — small-scale cheesemaking was seen as inefficient and backwards. Cheesemakers were given big industrial quotas to meet.

The sad outcome was that the majority of Spain's artisanal cheesemakers



went out of business. A few went underground. Unfortunately, Spain lost many of its beloved cheeses and much of its deep-rooted cheesemaking tradition.

But democracy returned. With it, the craft of making small-batch cheese has made a slow and steady resurgence. Today, about 100 cheeses are made in Spain. 26 cheeses are classified as D.O.P. — *Denominación de Origen Protegida* — by Spain and the European Union. Because of variations in climate, geography, culture and culinary heritage, each region of Spain produces distinct varieties of cheese with unique characteristics. For businesses and their customers, the rewards of celebrating Spanish cheeses are vast.

Manchego: A Prized Staple

It seems everyone loves Manchego, and for good reason. The cheese is a beautiful balance of sweet and savory, creamy and nutty, tangy and buttery. “In super-market venues, buyers typically focus on Manchego and not much more,” says Richard Kessler, vice president of sales and marketing at Millington, NJ-based Specialties Inc.

Manchego is made exclusively from whole milk of the Manchega sheep raised

in the La Mancha region of Spain. This includes the provinces of Albacete, Ciudad Real, Cuenca and Toledo. Sheep’s milk contains nearly twice the butterfat content of cow and goat’s milk, which gives Manchego an unctuous richness. Its rind is etched with a crisscross pattern, which comes from the traditional use of esparto grass belts to shape the wheels of cheese. This type is Spain’s most consumed DOP cheese. It makes up more than a third of all cheese production in the country.

Manchego is a fairly hearty, easy to store cheese and available from a variety of producers in a range of ages. In fact, wheels in Spain are categorized according to their age, which begins with *fresco* (only two weeks old), then goes to *semicurado* (aged up to four months), *curado* (four to six months), then finally *añejo or viejo* (one to two years). As the cheeses age, they develop a more concentrated, intense flavor and a drier texture that becomes flaky in the most mature wheels.

“Young Manchegos are popular,” says Jeffrey Shaw, director of Foods from Spain, based in Madrid. “The young varieties, aged for about three months, are a creamier, smoother cheese. The cured Manchegos, aged for more than nine

months, are drier and more intense in flavor with a distinctive nuttiness.” All varieties are a classic match with marcona almonds, quince paste (*membrillo*) and fruity, dry Tempranillo — all beloved Spanish culinary favorites. They also make for a tempting appetizer, marinated in olive oil and served with bread.

More Unique Varieties

Manchego acts as a perfect gateway — for consumers and grocery buyers alike — to a wider world of Spanish cheeses. “My personal favorite is Mahón,” says Kessler. He loves the six-month aged variety of Mahón best of all, “with its emerging calcium lactate crystals and flavors of burnt



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caramel and whiskey.”

Mahón is a cow’s milk cheese named after the capital of Menorca, one of Spain’s Balearic Islands. In Spain, it’s second in popularity only to Manchego. It’s milky, sharp and surprisingly buttery, with a well-balanced saltiness. Mahón is traditionally served as an appetizer, drizzled with olive oil, and it’s also wonderful shaved on top of pasta, rice and vegetable dishes.

Spanish goat’s milk cheeses, with brands such as Drunken Goat/Murcia al Vino and Winey Goat, are also increasingly sought after. Drunken Goat is crafted from the milk of Murciana goats in Murcia, in south-eastern Spain, then bathed in red wine for two to three days as the wheels age. The cheese has a distinctive purple hue. It’s mild and smooth, with a pleasant acidity and fruitiness from the wine on the finish. Drunken Goat is a total crowd-pleaser, and another great “starter cheese” for those new to the world of artisanal cheeses.

Another goat’s milk find is Garrotxa, a traditional cheese made in the Garrotxa region of Catalonia in Northern Spain, on the craggy ranges of the Pyrenees Mountains. Inside its firm rind lies a pearly white paste with a semi-soft texture that melts on the tongue. Garrotxa has an earthy flavor with a subtle herbaceous quality. It’s served drizzled with honey and paired with cava.

Unique Options

For Manchego fans looking to branch out, Iberico cheese is another great option. Also made in La Mancha with a cross-hatched rind, it’s easy to get the two cheeses confused. But while Manchego is made with 100 percent sheep’s milk, Iberico is crafted from a blend of cow, goat and sheep’s milk, which creates a balanced wheel with a lovely depth of flavor. It’s approachable and rich, perfect for savoring with a glass of Rioja or melting into an omelet or grilled cheese sandwich.

Spain is also home to an impressive lineup of Blue cheeses.

They’re “not sold in great quantity in the U.S., yet they’re a definite part of a cheese case in order to offer a rounded variety,” says Shaw.

Cabrales is a spicy Blue cheese from the village of Cabrales, carefully aged in caves near the Cantabrian Sea. It’s produced with raw cow’s milk, and sometimes sheep’s milk cheese is added in the spring and summer months. The blue-green veins are not manually injected, but come organ-



PHOTO COURTESY OF C.R.D.O. QUESO MAHÓN

ically from the walls of the oceanside caves. Cabrales is fudgy, piquant and intense.

Valdeon is another bold, hearty Blue made from goats and cows that graze the Picos de Europa Mountains in Castilla y Leon. It’s aged for at least two months, then wrapped in sycamore maple or chestnut leaves, a gorgeous presentation that helps Valdeon stand out in a crowded case. Valdeon is a bit mellower than Cabrales, with hints of vanilla and inky blue veins. It can be served with red wine or sherry, or added to salads and sauces.

Since many of these cheeses are relatively new to supermarket consumers and buyers, the challenges are “bringing the deli buyers and merchandisers along to view Spanish cheese as the centerpiece, as the perfect meal component and snacking occasion,” observes Kessler. It’s a challenge worth accepting.

Kessler sees Spanish cheese’s popularity growing, “particularly in ‘Main Street’ retail venues where the procurement is forward-thinking and pushing the awareness and education of other Spanish cheese to their customers.” In other words, when markets invest in education and the quality and range of their offerings, their shoppers enthusiastically respond.

Becoming a Destination

“Spanish cheeses are unique and different but everyone who loves cheese should embrace these items,” says Marissa DeMaio, director of retail marketing at

Atalanta Corp., based in Elizabeth, NJ.

Spanish cheeses really shine when paired with the right products.

“Anytime we can include cheese and deli items with specialty grocery items it’s a gigantic plus,” explains DeMaio, “and shows the breadth of a full and thriving Spanish category.”

Spanish charcuterie like Serrano and Iberico ham and chorizo are spot-on pairing, as are olives and fresh fruit.

DeMaio recommends taking advantage of Spanish shelf stable items like marcona almonds, caramelized walnuts and quince paste to create beautiful displays outside of refrigerated cases. Picos (Spanish breadsticks) and Spanish olive oils are also smart choices for effective cross merchandising.

A challenge is making it clear that all of these items go together, which is where sampling, recipe cards and signage are valuable tools. Customers love tapas — and Spanish cheeses are easy to demo drizzled with peppery olive oil or served on fresh crusty bread.

“Spanish cheeses are unique and different,” says DeMaio. “The culture and cuisine are a definite growing trend.”

According to Kessler, in order for stores to become a destination for Spanish cheeses, “the buyers need to commit to assortment innovation and educate themselves. They must move beyond the safety of what has worked in the past. It’s difficult to see the road ahead when one’s vision is locked onto the rear view mirror.” **DB**

Organic Options

There are a number of opportunities for organic products in deli departments

BY KEITH LORIA

Studies show that the organic shopper base has expanded far beyond the traditional group of hard-core organic loyalists, with many analysts saying it has more than doubled in scale in a very short time. That's why many delis in the supermarket have made it their mission to expand organic offerings.

"As of late, there has been a shift in consumers looking for products with more than a simple ingredient list and clean label; they want organic ingredients that also follow diet restrictions like paleo and keto," says David Kemp, chief executive of Les Trois Petits Cochons, based in Brooklyn, NY. "Over the past few decades, the art and tradition of charcuterie has undergone a modern revival — both on the part of chefs and brands as well as for consumers who have a growing desire to know what's

in their food, where it came from and how it was produced."

Organic options back in the early 1990s and early 2000s were still considered for the earthy crowd. As the National Organic program was put in place in 2002 and there became a reliable national standard, organics began making headway into more mainstream stores. There is still a huge opportunity in this category, as more and more people are able to find organic products in local stores.

The organic business continues to boom, and today's consumer expects organic options in every category.

Cara Figgins, owner of Simply Delicious, based in Des Moines, WA, says there is a strong new movement to organic deli meats, and that has been the catalyst to the change in supermarket delis' options of these products.



"We are seeing more and more organic options, and what goes better with snacking on organic cheeses and meat than organic wholesome crackers?" she says. "Organics are a strong part of our business and, as consumer awareness about cleaner labels grows, so does their interest in organic choices."

Holding It Back

In the conventional supermarket space, there is still some resistance to organic, says John McGuckin, chief executive of Tribe Mediterranean Foods, based in Taunton, MA. The reasoning, he theorizes, is that the early stages of organic saw products with lesser taste.

"I think there has been some tremendous progress made, as people have nurtured their R&D and quality departments, as we have, in sound ways to create a much better flavor profile for organics," he says. "I'm not sure the consumer at large has that full confidence yet."

Fiorella A. Cutrufello, head of sales for Calabro Cheese Corp., headquartered in East Haven, CT, laments that too many grocery stores aren't interested in high-

The demographics for organics is primarily health-conscious Millennials.

lighting organics, and it's really only the deli departments in specialty stores that are doing well. That's something she would like to see change.

"We have a whole list of dairy products that we make organic," she says. "The problem is people don't want to always pay the price. The stores aren't doing enough to highlight the differences and benefits."

Considering that there's often a 35 percent sticker shock of a higher price as well, it has slowed the progress somewhat.

What's New?

Les Trois Petits Cochons has been a leader in artisanal pâtés and charcuterie since launching in New York in 1975, and continues to pioneer the category with the creation of its new organic line, featuring Organic Pâté de Campagne, now certified paleo and keto; Organic Pâté aux Pommes

et Cidre; Organic Mousse aux Cèpes; Organic Whole Wheat Petits Toasts; and an organic gift basket.

Kemp says the company has taken note of consumer trends by adding organic products to its lineup, and organic meats are known to be better than the traditional version because they do not contain additives and chemicals.

"Organic options for specialty meats are harder to come by and, when found, are usually from high-end producers with premium price tags. This is due to the fact that the meat and other ingredients used are harder to source and costlier," says Kemp. "The variety of flavors and seasoning can be very limited in organic options. That's led to our new products."

McGuckin says organics are becoming a larger part of Tribe Mediterranean Foods, and it has a new organic platform that is attracting people back to the organic hummus category.

The Evolution Of Organics

Evidence shows the demographic for organic products is predominantly health-conscious, Millennial professionals. The evolution of the organic segment comes from a generation that has created a cultural transformation in the way people grow and eat food.

"This new generation isn't just focused on the taste of food anymore; they care more about the ingredients, where they came from and how they were grown or how the animals were raised," says Kemp.

Figgins says the benefit to the consumer is reduced consumption of pesticides, preservatives and stabilizers that go into conventional food products.

"There are also the benefits to the soil and environment with organic farming practices that use fewer chemicals in the production of organic foods," she says.

While all products are different, some organic foods have a shorter shelf life because they are made with natural ingredients and no preservatives, but that's not the case with all.

"Les Trois Petits Cochons does not have any issue with shelf life due to our careful cooking methods," says Kemp. "In regards

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to our organic products, there is no difference in shelf life in comparison to the rest of our product line.”

Figgins notes shelf life and organic products are not necessarily related, and all of the company’s cracker products are organic and natural and have a one-year shelf life.

“The ingredient of a product determines shelf life. There are organically-accepted preservatives just as there are conventional preservatives,” she says. “If you buy an organic item that is preservative-free you can still expect a reasonable shelf life from the product.”

Although here are several places to get organic certification, they all have to

operate to the standards of the National Organic Program.

“The program allows for products that are made with organic ingredients, which is at a certain percentage; there is a certification for organic and a certification of 100 percent organic,” says Figgins. “All of the requirements are specified in the National Organic Program manual.”

At Les Trois Petits Cochons, it all starts with the product concept, and then it turns to sourcing organic ingredients and getting all of the proper organic certifications from the suppliers.

“Once that is complete, we move on to submit to the certifying agent (PCO)

for approval. If the product/process is different from what we already have been certified for, they will schedule a visit to the manufacturing plant to review that specific product for approval,” says Kemp. “Following product approval, the label is submitted to the USDA with the proper paperwork from the certifying agent (Pennsylvania Certified Organic).”

Marketing Matters

While the center store has been selling organics for years, Figgins says the deli has not been a destination for organic products until recently.

“If consumers can count on finding organics in the deli, it will attract a whole additional segment of shoppers,” she says. “I believe that it is still a growth opportunity in the store. More and more consumers are concerned with the ‘bad stuff’ in their food, like preservatives and additives of color or flavor, etc. The easier it gets to find the organic products [in the deli], the more we will see growth.”

Kemp says deli retailers can do more to entice customers to buy organic.

“Supermarket delis can offer a range of fresh, made-to-order organic charcuterie platter options, including a certain amount of meats and cheese in their offerings, along with add-ins for easy consumer purchasing and serving,” he says.

Calabro Cheese’s Cutrufello would like the delis to offer more samples and is happy to provide them to the stores, but retailers aren’t doing their part.

“I offer to do demos, I bring them samples, but too many retailers are worried about the price,” she says. “The high-end stores are doing well with organics because they are not afraid to get them out there in front of people.”

The secret to increasing the category, McGuckin says, is education.

“It begins in the perimeter with the produce department and then it will wind its way through to the deli,” he says. “The messaging you want in the store is to be about organics. It will lead to higher rings and better margins, and it can be a differentiator for a supermarket trying to compete with some of the new offerings out there.”

In conclusion, while organics for many deli products are difficult to source, bringing in organics and publicizing them will set the department up to block smaller competitors from encroaching on profitable sales.

DB



The World Of Flatbreads

A look at what's trending in the deli

BY ANTHONY STOECKERT

The breads may be flat but that doesn't mean their sales have to be.

With home kitchens across the country becoming more international, flatbreads and similar products are growing in popularity. The variety available within the flatbread family, and the many ways these product can be used, offer an opportunity for deli departments.

Flatbreads also have staying power, perhaps more than

PHOTO COURTESY OF KONTOS

any other product sold at delis.

"Flatbreads have been around since ancient times, so they are often part of people's history or culture," says Jenni Bonsignore, marketing manager for Valley Lahvosh Baking Co., based in Fresno, CA, which has been making lahvosh for 95 years. "Also, flatbreads tend to be healthy and versatile. Our lahvosh cracker can be paired with cheeses, eaten as a snack or used as a pizza crust."

William Stoll, marketing director for Kontos in Paterson, NJ, says the growth of Greek foods is a big contributor to the



PHOTOS COURTESY OF VALLEY LAHVOSH BAKING CO.

popularity of flatbreads.

"Flatbreads are growing because Greek and Mediterranean ethnic foods overall are growing, and flatbreads are an integral part of that," he says. "Everyone understands the Mediterranean diet is very much in vogue right now, and people are looking for anything ethnic and anything Mediterranean and Greek, as well."

A Comprehensive Category

Milt Weinstock, marketing director of Toufayan Bakeries in Ridgefield, NJ, says the flatbread category includes ethnic breads, such as pita, which he says is the oldest and most popular flatbread. Lavash is a long flatbread.

"The growing popularity of authentic naan, which is becoming the fastest-growing new flatbread variety, is why we just introduced the first and only organic version in both Regular and Garlic varieties," says Weinstock.

Bonsignore says popular items in the flatbread category include lahvosh, pita, naan, matzah, focaccia and tortillas. "You see tortillas, lahvosh, pita and naan on a lot of menus, but I think flatbread in general is pretty ubiquitous these days," she says.

The growth of the popularity of flatbreads and similar products is going hand-in-hand with a rising trend toward international foods.

"I think the trend toward ethnic fare is part of why flatbreads have become more popular," says Bonsignore. "Everyone loves bread, and flatbreads are a delicious way to try something ethnic with ingredients that are familiar."

Worldly Flavors

Stoll says Kontos has more than 50 varieties within the categories of flatbread, pita and naan. He explains that pita is used to describe Greek flatbreads, while Naan is Indian and flatbread is a generic term. There also is "Pan Plano", which stems from the Latino market.

"And the flavor cocktails of each of those breads is going to be different, too," says Stoll. "For example, the Pan Plano line has four different varieties that include cilantro-jalapeño, sweet onion, pico de gallo and chipotle."

He adds that those flavors are spicier than other flatbreads. And gone are the days when the only way to satisfy a craving for authentic Mexican food was at

a restaurant, as supermarkets across the country are featuring sections filled with ingredients for Mexican cooking.

"The American palate is not just centered around meat and potatoes," says Stoll. "It's basically people looking for all kinds of variety in the foods that they enjoy. We're now a global world."

He predicts Greek and Mediterranean cuisine are likely to surpass Mexican food in popularity someday.

Ethnic Breads Become Mainstream

According to Weinstock, consumers' appetite for ethnic foods has grown because of exposure on cooking shows and the internet. The growth of ethnic restaurants has led to people wanting to eat these foods at home, as well.

"These breads are a way mom can feed her family some more adventurous fare with little downside risk, given the familiarity of the taste and texture these breads have, mainly thanks to out-of-home eating," says Weinstock.

Another factor in the popularity of flatbreads is their variety of uses. Obviously, they're used in sandwiches, such as wraps, pita sandwiches and paninis.

"While a lot of flatbreads are used for entertaining as a carrier to dips and hummus, they are fast becoming a staple as a sandwich alternative, which has historically been made with white, rye and club breads," says Weinstock. "As a sandwich bread, they are seen as a lighter, healthier alternative that provides a variety differential to traditional breads. We are also seeing flatbreads becoming an alternative for personal pizzas, tailored as a treat for family dining and snacks."

These breads also can be sandwich differentiators. Kontos has introduced a panini bread, complete with grill marks. This allows people to make paninis at home without a panini machine.

"Not everyone has a machine, but they like the panini concept," says Kontos' Stoll. "So you can bring home a panini bread from Kontos, you can put your ham, your cheese and other ingredients on a frying pan, or a flattop on your stove, and have an authentic panini sandwich."

Another concept growing in popularity is homemade pizza. Stoll says this trend started a few years ago as part of the individualization trend where everyone in the family wants their dish prepared to their taste. One person may want a cheese pizza while someone else wants pepperoni and another family member wants mushrooms.

"With 7-inch ready-made dough, all you need is sauce, cheese and toppings and everyone can have their own pizza in minutes," he says.

To satisfy that pizza market, Kontos has recently introduced a package of two 7-inch pizza crusts. These, and Kontos' new 9-inch panini breads, are sold in new airtight packaging with printing designed to increase their visibility in retail outlets. That new packaging also means a longer shelf life than breads sold in standard packaging with a twist tie.

Not Just Meals

More and more people are including flatbread products as a part of appetizers and snacks.

"Flatbreads are natural carriers, so can be used with dips, spreads and cheeses," says Valley Lahvosh's Bonsignore. "However, they can also be placed in bread baskets and used as an alternative to traditional pizza crust."

This offers a savvy marketing opportunity. Deli retailers should be promoting flatbreads near an olive bar or pair them with cheeses, olive oils and various spreads,



PHOTO COURTESY OF KONTOS

he says.

Stoll adds flatbreads can even be part of deli dessert offerings.

"Imagine if you take some of the bread and you brush it with melted butter, sprinkle some sugar on top and bake it down a little bit more to a crisp," he says. "Then you have a sweet cracker that you can pair with ice cream and chocolate sauce."

Promoting Flatbreads

Flatbreads are a natural for cross promotion in supermarket deli departments. Beyond typical sandwiches, Stoll suggests getting creative with tuna salad and similar lunch staples.

"Consider selling containers of those salads, and cut up flatbreads in pieces to sell with the salads. The flatbreads can even be baked to make them crispy," he says. "Instead of eating it as a sandwich, you can just dip into tuna salad, chicken salad or egg salad."

Bonsignore says there are all sorts of appropriate items to pair with flatbreads, including cheeses, spreads, meats, soups, salads and dips.

"Merchandising flatbreads is about giving the customers recipes and serving suggestions so they understand all of the potential applications for the product," says Bonsignore. "The great thing is you can then build a display around flatbread with, for example, all the ingredients needed to make a pizza. It's perfect for the deli and an

easy menu idea for the customer."

Toufayan Bakeries' Weinstock suggests promoting the convenience of flatbread as an efficient meal solution that can fit the various tastes within a family.

"It's an everyday staple bread that provides variety and adds excitement to an everyday hum-drum sandwich," he says. He also suggests partnering flatbreads with more than hummus and other Mediterranean foods. "They should be combined with meats and cheeses that provide quick and easy meal solutions to the busy mom."

Part Of The Health Trend

Specialty products in the flatbread line can fit health and diet trends, as well. Weinstock says Toufayan Bakeries has added products that appeal to consumers who are drawn to the organic lifestyle.

"For example, in the past three years we've expanded our flatbread line to include four gluten-free wraps and five all-natural organic flatbreads," he says. Those include organic pitas, wraps and the first organic naan.

"We've also found strong receptivity to sprouted grains flatbreads, believed to be more nutritious and healthier, and we have therefore incorporated these varieties in our flatbread lineup," says Weinstock.

Stoll notes Kontos' offerings include gluten-free products, as an increasing number of consumers seek out these items.

"We have a couple of varieties of gluten-free wraps, one of which comes with grill marks on it," says Stoll. "So you can have a sandwich without the full bread, you can have the wrap, and it can be gluten free, which obviously is an increasing trend currently."

Just like with traditional breads, Stoll says white bread remains a top seller. But many people are looking for healthier options, which is why Kontos sells a Greek Lifestyle bread with more protein, less sugar and fewer carbs and calories than standard flatbreads.

"Everybody is looking for things that are earmarked as Greek or Mediterranean," says Stoll. "This bread has half the carbohydrates per gram per serving than regular flatbread, and it has twice the protein. It also has a little less sugar and as a result, less calories. That is our number-one selling item; it has surpassed regular traditional white pita bread."

It all means that flatbreads are a world of opportunity for deli departments. **DB**

SWEET BEGINNINGS



The idea behind Otis Spunkmeyer cookies was sparked at a Los Angeles shopping mall in 1976. That's where Ken Rawlings got a whiff of fresh-baked cookies and realized that he could make a living from the decadent dessert. When it came time to pick a name for his cookie shop, Rawlings actually turned to his 12-year-old daughter, who came up with the now iconic name, "Otis Spunkmeyer".

The first Otis Spunkmeyer store opened in Oakland, CA in 1977, and by 1983, 20 new stores had opened throughout the state. It was in the mid-1980s that Ken began transitioning the company from retail to wholesale. By the end of the 80's, over 40,000 restaurants, delis, cafeterias and hospitals were serving Otis Spunkmeyer's fresh cookies and baked goods. Otis Spunkmeyer foods were also shipped internationally to military bases all over the world, providing U.S. soldiers with treats from home. Rawlings, who had a passion for philanthropy, created a fundraising program for schools, scouts, sports teams and other organizations to purchase cookie dough and snacks at wholesale and sell for a profit to raise the funds needed.

In 2006, Otis Spunkmeyer was acquired by ARYZTA, a global leader in specialty bakery. As a result of Rawlings' passion, Otis Spunkmeyer is still a top-selling foodservice cookie dough in America - and the #1 selling cookie dough in fundraising. Otis Spunkmeyer snacks can now be found in stores nationwide, in addition to the various lines of foodservice cookie dough, muffins, loaf cakes and other indulgent snack items. The Grab-N-Go portfolio of foods are made with the "No Funky Stuff" promise, meaning all foods are free from artificial flavors, colors, high fructose corn syrup and partially hydrogenated oils. In addition to the Grab-N-Go portfolio, Otis Spunkmeyer is in the process of transitioning all foodservice foods to adhere to the "No Funky Stuff" promise.

This year marks Otis Spunkmeyer's 40th year as a foodservice staple. Rawlings passed away on May 20, 2017 at the age of 84, leaving a lasting legacy within the cookie industry.

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