

DELI BUSINESS

MARKETING MERCHANDISING MANAGEMENT PROCUREMENT

AUG./SEPT. 2009 \$14.95



The Philosophy of Sustainability

ALSO INSIDE

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COVER STORY



DELI MEATS

The Versatile Choice For Hard Times 50

Consumers are turning to turkey for health, convenience and economic reasons



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STUDENT CULINARY COMPETITION WINNER

Kraft Foodservice, Glenview, IL, has awarded a \$20,000 culinary scholarship to Institute of Culinary Education (ICE) student Kamal Rose for winning the 2009 Chefs of Grey Poupon Student Culinary Competition, held on May 6, 2009, at the Chopping Block in downtown Chicago. Rose won the grand prize with his original recipe, Crisp Chicken Duo with Dijon and Hazelnut Crust, Morel Jus Lié, Baby Beets, Wilted Greens and Fines Herbes Salad, and a surprise Mystery Basket Challenge dish he created, Cheese Bacon Crumble. Three other culinary students from top culinary schools across the nation also won scholarship prizes.



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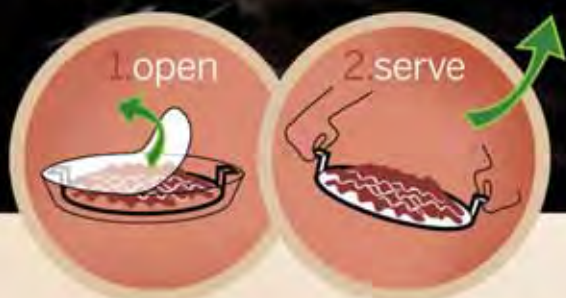
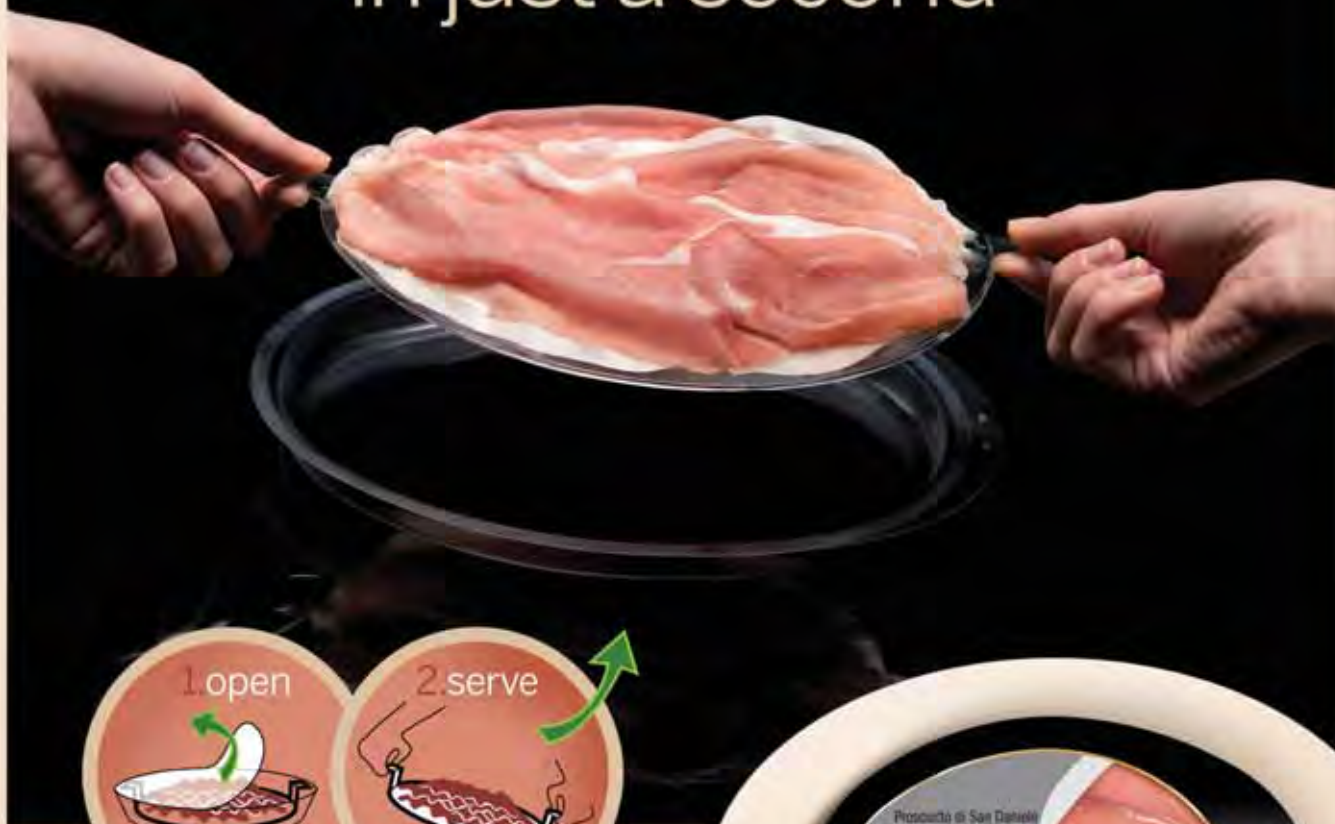
DELI BUSINESS looks at retail trends to help retailers prepare for the upcoming year.

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by Jim Prevor, Editor-in-Chief

Selling Cheap Just Won't Work

The role of the deli/retail foodservice operation during a time of recession is unclear. Many retailers have jumped on the “value” bandwagon, but the results are mixed and how much value consumers want — and in what fashion they want it — is an open question.

Royal Ahold's Stop & Shop and Giant chains stole a jump on the value emphasis back in 2006 when they launched their Value Improvement Program. Basically focused on rationalizing assortment by reducing SKU count, the idea was to reduce handling costs, gain velocity on fewer items thus reducing inventory costs, and providing fresher product to consumers. Finally, because the expectation was for more rapid movement of fewer products, the program would increase Royal Ahold's leverage to negotiate price discounts with suppliers. In the current environment, this approach has been very successful, and sales have actually increased with same-store sales rising 1.7 percent at Stop & Shop and 3.7 percent for Giant-Landover.

Supervalu, still struggling with the investment needs of many of the stores it acquired in the Albertsons acquisitions and burdened with some heavy debt payments, tried to tap-dance around the issue of value. It lowered prices on a limited assortment of items in the hope of wooing consumers to its full-price lines. The plan was a bust, with identical store sales for the quarter ended June 20 down 3.2 percent from last year. This comes after a 2 percent decline for the quarter ended February 28. Don't think this refusal to slash prices preserved profits — for the quarter ending June 20, earnings fell by 30 percent.

Safeway, hoping that its Lifestyle stores — focused on freshness and upscale décor — would attract spending, was disappointed. It found sales dropped in the most recent quarter with same-store sales down by 2.2 percent.

The mighty Kroger Co., relying heavily on a sophisticated use of loyalty-card data dictated by a Dunnhumby analysis, was able to boost same-store sales by 3.1 percent in the first quarter. Although CEO David Dillon acknowledged reducing prices, he claimed it was part of a multi-year strategic approach to win over valuable customers, not a panicky move to boost sales that most likely would catch just cherry-pickers.

What role can the deli/retail foodservice operation, typically a high-margin department, play in this value-seeking world?

Each chain, indeed each store, is different. Even the chain reports mentioned above are not directly comparable as these chains operate in different areas and have

different formats and customer bases.

One thing is clear though: The response of many deli operations to assume that all the customers are impoverished and to promote the cheapest boiled ham is not typically a strategy likely to succeed.

Many consumers who “trade down” from restaurants to retail are generally upscale. Even if they have temporarily lost a job, they are conditioned by years of living and eating a certain way to look for a certain type of experience. A paper plate taped to the deli case and offering a cheap cold cut isn't likely to appeal; it certainly is not likely to win a long-term customer.

One place to look for clues as to how to adjust to the recession is foodservice operators. Many are finding customer counts are holding up reasonably well, but it is the size of the check that is dropping.

- Menus are being rearranged to offer “small plates” and make clear that appetizers can be used as entrées.
- Menu planners are looking to reduce the use of expensive proteins and use more fruits, vegetables and starches in their dishes, thus allowing for lower price points.
- More *prix fixe* offerings make it clear to consumers that they can get a complete meal within a budget.
- Sampler platters, because they feature a lot of different foods, seem, to most consumers, to be more than they are.
- New offerings, other than just a traditional meal, are being suggested: Just a fruit and cheese assortment, for example, or just appetizers, or just soup and bread or just dessert.

Few retail deli operations are showing the kind of explosion of creativity that these foodservice operators are exhibiting — but that's the exact kind of creativity that will be necessary to satisfy consumers in a new economic environment.

In an age of margin compression, deli/retail foodservice operations are rare in having the ability to satisfy consumers in ways other than price. That is crucial both because it means that a creative approach can woo customers to the store and because when others are deep-discounting to attract the increasing numbers of consumers who buy almost everything on sale, there is still a department that can make a little money.

In times such as these, that is a valuable department indeed.

DB



James F. Prevor

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by Lee Smith, Publisher

Somebody Better Remember Marketing

Private label is the hottest strategy in supermarket retailing, but the deli department needs to bless its lucky stars for national branded promotions. In fact, an ongoing private label strategy has been the primary reason deli departments have not grown as fast and as profitably as one would have expected.

Retailers benefit from private label when they can source products and pay cost of goods without promotional allowances. Some of the savings are passed along to consumers and the rest is used to boost the bottom line. During a time when consumers are stretching their dollars, the private-label savings are especially attractive.

Branded promotions that raise consumer awareness increase sales, and private-label strategies benefit from their parasitic relationship. A good deal is only a good deal if a similar product is priced higher. Private label peanut butter is a good seller because peanut butter has a national identity. National brands' promotional activity boosts brand awareness and keeps an entire category top of mind. Should national companies decide there's no longer any need to promote peanut butter, peanut butter sales will gradually diminish and so will private label.

The deli is more of a foodservice department so most products don't have a national identity or a cheerleader. Rotisserie chickens were a staple in most delis on the East Coast and fried chicken a staple in the South. Boston Market's rise to Wall Street darling awakened the sleeper, making rotisserie chicken the No. 1 foodservice offering in supermarkets across the country. Customers realized what a good deal it was and supermarkets started looking at the category with fresh eyes. Rotisserie chickens were introduced around the country, but without the impetus of Boston Market, it's unlikely mainstream supermarkets would have recognized or capitalized on its potential.

The reason is: Actualization of promise is usually deemed the manufacturers' responsibility. It's their responsibility to bring new products to market, generate awareness, provide marketing support and suffer the consequences if they're wrong.

The loser of a private-label driven department has always been deli's prepared food. Family-size pasta meals should have been the next prepared-food winner. With its low food cost and high mainstream appeal, especially with kids, it should have been launched years ago. Today, its success is largely going to be determined by the success or failure of Pizza Hut's new product launch — and retailers will be playing catch-up.

Unfortunately, most supermarket chains are ubiquitous with multiple locations and different retailers carrying similar products. What stores carry is largely dependent

upon a manufacturer's expertise and independent movement reports. The mantra has been — you, the manufacturer, are responsible for the sales of your product. We put it on the selves and sell what customers buy.

Trader Joe's, Fairways in New York City, and Whole Foods are exceptions. Trader Joe's has 80 to 85 percent of its products private-labeled, but it also takes responsibility for picking and choosing what products to sell, and it has buyers searching the world for winners. Fairways has its own form of marketing genius but again takes full responsibility for making sure the products it sells reflect its mission statement. Whole Foods — not doing quite so well in this environment — built its success around an easily defined business model. In all three cases, products sold are determined by independent buyers who are customer advocates, and product selection is not an outsourced responsibility with the lowest cost of goods being the ultimate goal.

One of the dangers in letting private label drive sales is that manufacturers may abdicate their traditional promotional responsibilities. Deli meat is an excellent example. More manufacturers are responding to retailers' demand for private-label deli meat. Product quality ranges from superb to middle-of-the-road or anything the buyer specifies. Most studies show consumers don't rank brand as a purchasing driver. Instead, they buy with their eyes, evaluating product and making decisions based on point-of-sale experiences. This is especially true of mid-range products. High-end products such as prosciutto di Parma, prosciutto di San Daniele, serrano ham and high-end salami are more brand sensitive.

The problem is that no one is actually promoting sandwiches, except Subway, even though sandwiches are one of the lower-cost meal solutions with a very high "likeable" quotient, excellent value and high quality protein. What happened to the Oscar Meyer bologna jingle? Who's telling Americans they should buy lunch meats?

For manufacturers, the costs of national campaigns are the same regardless of the decline in branded sales. And, if retailers aren't going to pay promotional dollars, logically manufacturers are going to stop promoting. Unfortunately, it may also result in a declining category. Retailers that are using private label as a tool to force manufacturers to lower prices better be figuring out how much it really costs to create a marketing-driven offer.

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THIS MEDITERRANEAN FROMAGE PLATE features bread, wine and French Cheese — a healthy trio that may explain the “French Paradox.” You’ll find fromage plate recipes and more at CheesesofFrance.com.

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Announcements



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Beemster, Westbeemster, The Netherlands, will be supporting the Susan G. Komen for the Cure fund to help find a cure for breast cancer. For every pound of Beemster Vlaskaas sold from Sept. 15 through Oct. 31, 2009, Beemster will donate 50¢ to the fund. A poster, special repack labels and special wheels with the pink ribbon decal will be available to retailers.

www.beemstercheese.us.



SARTORI CHEESE WINS SEVEN AWARDS

Sartori Foods, Plymouth, WI, received seven awards at the Wisconsin State Fair Cheese & Butter Contest. Sartori Reserve Dolcina Gorgonzola won a first place. In the flavor hard cheese category, first place went to Sartori Reserve Balsamic BellaVitano, second place to Sartori Reserve Black Pepper BellaVitano and third to Sartori Reserve Raspberry BellaVitano. In the mixed milk cheese category, Sartori Reserve Pastoral Blend took first place.

www.sartorifoods.com



CUSTOMER R&D CENTER

Reser's Fine Foods, Beaverton, OR, has opened a new customer R&D center to help foodservice operators and retailers create more appealing menus, leverage the latest flavor trends, meet regional taste preferences, reduce food costs, and meet exacting food-safety standards. The Reser's professional chefs use the center to help retail and foodservice customers create customized recipes and products to build consumer loyalty and maximize sales.

www.resers.com



"MINI" PACKAGING

Roth Käse USA, Monroe, WI, introduces American Artisanals 4-ounce "Mini" Slice Packaging for sale in the deli section. Varieties include Grand Cru Gruyère, Landhaus Lace Käse, Van Gogh Gouda, Van Gogh Smoked Gouda, Krönenost Fontina, Alp & Dell Muenster, MezzaLuna Rofumo, and Ostentorg Havarti — Plain, Dill and Horseradish & Chive. Each package has six .66-ounce slices perfectly sized for sandwiches, burgers, and panini, and a recipe on the back panel.

www.rothkase.com

New Products



READY-TO-USE TORTILLA STRIPS

Sugar Foods Corp., New York, NY, introduces Fresh Gourmet Tortilla Strips, ready-to-use tortilla strips. Versatile crunchy toppings eliminate labor and prep costs, save time and energy, and add texture and crunch to your menu. Shelf-stable with 100 percent yield — no need for refrigerated or frozen storage, no oil to prepare and no waste. Simply open the bag and toss onto whatever you're making. Available in stay-fresh 1-pound bags.

www.foodservice.freshgourmet.com



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Crave Brothers Farmstead Cheese, Waterloo, WI, has introduced Fresh Mozzarella Medallions. This pre-sliced fresh Mozzarella offers the ultimate in convenience, and the size of the medallions is ideal for quick and easy use in many dishes — from classic Caprese salad to sandwiches, crostini and pizza. The cheeses make it easy for home cooks to prepare restaurant-quality meals and snacks.

www.cravecheese.com



HOLIDAY PARTY TRAY

Kretschmar Deli, Cincinnati, OH, is launching a new fixed-weight party tray offering quality and convenience at a competitive price. Eco-friendly packaging allows the consumer to clearly see the premium products inside, including hard salami, Genoa salami, Colby Jack cheese, Provolone cheese and Sweetie Pepps. Meets consumer needs for an affordable, grab-and-go deli tray for easy, at-home entertaining.

www.kretschmardeli.com



SORRENTO MOZZARELLA/PROVOLONE BLEND

Lactalis Foodservice, Buffalo, NY, introduces Sorrento Prima Cucina Mozzarella/Provolone Blend. When baked, its soft, smooth texture and creamy flavor result in a caramelized sweetness that will keep customers coming back for more. It even caramelizes beautifully in high temperature ovens, making it ideal for brick ovens. Melts smoothly, without becoming oily. Comes shredded in 5-pound bags.

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The Philosophy of Sustainability

A conceptual image of the Earth as a seedling growing from a green vine against a dark background. The Earth is depicted as a small globe with blue oceans and white clouds, nestled within a green, fleshy seed pod. A long, thin green vine emerges from the bottom of the seed pod and winds its way down the page, ending in a small, emerging leaf at the bottom right. The background is a deep, dark green, creating a sense of mystery and focus on the central image.

More than a tactic or even a strategy, sustainability is becoming a retail doctrine

BY JODEAN ROBBINS

Sustainability is one of the most popular buzzwords in today's food world, yet adopting a sustainability model can feel like opening Pandora's box. Challenges include the very definition of the issue, balancing what consumers say they want with their actual buying habits, and managing costs.

Even in this time of economic turmoil, sustainability issues are still in the forefront; in fact, many people see green initiatives as one path out of the current turbulence. Food retailers that treat sustainability as a tactic or even a short-term strategy risk failing to understand what could very well be the most important trend in contemporary business.

Taking on the issue of sustainability means looking into the future. "As energy costs rise and economic conditions continue to become a concern to many Americans, consumers will continue to evaluate their purchasing decisions," shares Chad Pawlak, president of Grass Point Farms, an organic farming operation that produces grass-fed dairy products, in Thorp, WI. "Grass Point and other companies must understand the economics of the country but [still] remain committed to a fair and

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sustainable farm-to-market model. Cheap food, like cheap credit, was a bubble we all lived through, but it's time to look longer term at what cheap food really costs the environment, communities, banks, and our health and vitality."

Megan Warmouth, project manager for Chicago, IL-based Gordon Hanrahan, Inc., representing Unilever Foodsolutions (Hellmann's, Knorr, Lipton), Desert Glory NatureSweet Tomatoes, and Carlisle Food-

service Products, explains, "At this point, by promoting sustainability and sustainable practices, you're at the head of the pack, helping to educate consumers about what sustainability is and how it affects the food they eat. Patrons are more conscience of companies and brands committed to green and sustainable practices — and they make an added effort to deal with those companies. It's not just a Gen Y issue. Gen X and Boomers are looking at this as a brand and

company attribute."

Ryan Till, product manager for Avon, OH-based Carroll Manufacturing & Sales (CMS), which offers a complete line of food packaging under the Flavorseal brand, recognizes the paradox inherent in sustainability issues. "Consumers are increasingly growing conscious of environmentally friendly packaging. However, in the current economic environment, cost is the dominant factor influencing purchasing decisions at the deli. Sustainable packaging influences only a small percentage of consumers at this point, but growing awareness of sustainable packaging will increasingly influence buying decisions. This is very important to deli business."

Defining The Issues

The simple question of defining sustainability leads to many answers but it is, essentially, a comprehensive philosophy. According to Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for Publix Super Markets, Inc., based in Lakeland, FL, "Sustainability means balancing the needs of humanity with the needs of the living earth. It's meeting today's demands without compromising what's essential for tomorrow. That's why Publix got into a Green Routine in 2001 —

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"We view sustainability in multiple parts," explains Bruce Miller, president of Groucho's Franchise Systems in Columbia, SC. The company owns, operates and franchises 21 Groucho's Deli units, having evolved from a purely retail deli to mostly foodservice restaurants. "Part of it has to do with the quality of the product we serve. This has worked for multiple, multiple generations and hopefully will continue — and for us that's sustainable. Then you have the external environmental things such as wax paper and plates. When we view product change, we take a comprehensive view from customer perception to quality to cost impacts to the impact on our legacy."

Some focus mainly on the environmental aspect. "Sustainability is responsible packaging," says CMS Till. "This means responsibility in terms of the effect it has on our environment, using less energy getting packaging to market, monitoring the creation of waste, and increasing safety for consumers throughout the life cycle of the product."

"Look at using less packaging to get prod-



"TO OUR ORGANIZATION, SUSTAINABILITY MEANS MANAGING OUR RESOURCES WISELY."

— HANNA SJOLUND
INNOWARE, INC.

uct to market, such as fewer overwraps, thinner plastics, etc. Packaging life cycle is another area," he continues. "The deli will progress into the sustainable mind-sets with more recyclable or reusable packaging options. Finally, packaging responsibility plays a role when the deli demands environmentally responsible barrier resins to keep their products fresh. Certain types of oxygen barrier resins cannot be recycled, or their production may cause negative environmental effects."

Others link sustainability to a comprehensive resource and production view. "To our organization, sustainability means managing our resources wisely," reports Hanna Sjolund, marketing manager for InnoWare, Inc. in Alpharetta, GA. "We do this by using recycled materials, by designing our packaging to reduce the amount of plastic and, wherever possible, using raw materials from annually renewable resources that also can be composted. Our Eco line of packaging helps to

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decrease fossil fuel use and lower greenhouse emissions when compared to the production of traditional plastics."

"We define sustainability as the ability to utilize resources at a rate and in a way not negatively impacting the environment, health of the cows or the prosperity of the family farmer," explains Grass Point's Pawlak. "We go further by producing a product with a scientific increase in naturally occurring health attributes and a richer, creamier flavor as a

result of diets rich in grasses/pastures."

But as with many environmental and social issues, sincerity is the root of success for a sustainability program. "Customers will expect a sincere approach to improve the environment, use of energy, use of raw materials, etc. and thus sustain it for future generations," cautions Brous. "As with food safety, sustainability should be viewed not as a competitive tactic but as a social responsibility for everyone."

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Putting It To Practice

Sustainability in the deli is an important issue because of the high percentage of take-out containers used. Yet operators report great results with just small steps. "Using recycled paper, biodegradable packaging or energy efficient equipment can make a big impact and consumers notice these," Hanrahan's Warmouth explains.

Brous reports, "At the Publix Deli, we focus on the following three issues in regards to sustainability: emphasis on domestic versus imported cheese; paper versus plastic where possible and still protect the quality of the product; and we expect our suppliers to demonstrate sustainability efforts as well."

Deli operators large and small are already implementing unique and easy changes. "Groucho's has taken a proactive approach to reducing our carbon footprint," says Miller. "Most recently we got rid of our Styrofoam plates, switching to wax paper and baskets. We reduced our waste about 33 percent system-wide."

"Our cup and to-go box manufacturers that are still using Styrofoam have made proactive steps to maximize efficiency, promote environmental attributes and develop new products," he continues. "Our cup manufacturer has provided us with material explaining how making foam cups creates less waste than plastic-lined paper cups because it uses less energy to produce, it doesn't hurt the ozone layer, and it's 90 percent air."

Groucho's also uses a dishwashing system called OptiFill as a component of its sustainability initiative. "OptiFill automatically dilutes the concentrate according to the amount of water dispensed through the system," according to Deric Rosenbaum, president of Franchise Consulting and Services Corp., Columbia, SC, which manages and launches new Groucho's Deli units and is also a franchise owner. "This not only prevents chemical waste, but it also reduces the amount of transportation required to ship the product. This means zero product waste as well as not putting excess chemicals into the sewer systems."

Operators are cautioned to look at the entire life cycle of a product to make good decisions regarding sustainable practices. "Paper is not always eco friendly," warns InnoWare's Sjolund. "You cannot recycle paper with plastic coating. Look for BPI-approved [Biodegradable Products Institute] packaging meeting the ASTM [American Society for Testing and Material] standard for compostability. Look at the whole life cycle of the package. Where is it made? Is it made from a sustainable material thereby reducing fossil fuel use and greenhouse gas emissions? What is the end of life of this package? Since



"IF A RETAILER PROMOTES SUSTAINABILITY AS ONE OF ITS CORE BELIEFS, IT WILL ATTRACT CONSUMERS SHARING THE SAME BELIEFS."

— RYAN TILL
CARROLL MANUFACTURING & SALES

most packaging ends up in landfills rather than going back into the recycling stream, we recommend deli operators look at how the package is made rather than focusing on the end-of-life aspect where we have little control."

Franchise Consulting's Rosenbaum adds, "We've looked at many options like compostable containers, paper cups, etc., but many of them are just not cost effective in any way, shape or form. And, how many people go home at end of the day with a

compostable to-go box or dinnerware and actually take it to a composting facility? They don't, they put it in their trash and it goes to a municipal trash dump."

Small changes in packaging can reap big benefits. "Going to the Groucho's branded wax paper on a natural product printed with soy ink was a natural step and it has really reduced the carbon footprint in the amount of aggregate trash we produce at the end of the day for all of our units," explains Rosenbaum.

Support From All Sides

The deli cannot stand alone in this issue. "A department cannot address this matter independent of the rest of the company," cautions Publix's Brous. "There must be a clear stance by the company with a tangible halo effect over each area of operations."

Many manufacturers in the deli arena have established corporate and brand sustainability initiatives and provide support to their deli customers. "Carlisle Foodservice Products has many items helping back of house with waste and water management and efficiency," says Warmouth. "Desert Glory NatureSweet Tomatoes has established an environmentally sound process of production from soil to shipment. Unilever, and its foodservice branch, Unilever Food Solutions, has developed a global sustainability initiative ranging from office practices to the certification of its entire tea category, Lipton, by the Rainforest Alliance by 2015. The Rainforest Alliance ensures ethical and sustainable practices within the communities where Lipton Teas are grown."

"A lot of everything we do and every decision we make back here at the corporate office is based on the tradition of how my

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grandfather believed in quality as the most important ingredient in a sandwich," Groucho's Miller explains. "He believed in giving back to the community and looking out for your community and this is what we preach to each new franchise in each new location we open. So something like switching over to wax paper from foam plates is actually in the tradition of my granddad — doing what's good for the community without being asked to do it. Just doing it because you know

what's right."

What Can You Do?

The most important first — and continuing — step for deli operators is to engage the concept. "Do not ignore the issue," advises Publix's Brous. "Seek to understand how to promote sustainability in a tangible, clearly defined way."

Promoting your commitment to sustainability will help consumers who are looking

to make the commitment as well. "Operators can promote their deli as the consumer champion for sustainability issues," says CMS's Till. "If a retailer promotes sustainability as one of its core beliefs, it will attract consumers sharing the same beliefs. When consumers trust the retailer to be environmentally conscious, the consumer doesn't have to make purchasing decisions based on packaging because the retailer has already worked to offer the most responsible packaging option for them."

Development of a logo or indicator to help customers quickly identify a sustainable item is a productive option. "We encourage our customers to emboss or label their packaging as environmentally friendly," says InnoWare's Sjolund. "This helps consumers understand the package is from a sustainable resource. The logo can be placed on the deli menu or next to product signage in the deli case. Also, make the information available to customers through flyers, posters, case clings, etc. to help educate why sustainability is important to the deli and to the customers themselves."

"Our research has proven to us that consumers want sustainable, healthful and environmentally sound products," she continues. "They're willing to pay a little more if they believe they're helping to support a better environment, and operators should use packaging making it easier for consumers to make these choices. A clear/clear PLA clamshell resembling regular plastic does not, in itself, get the consumer's attention. Tell the story by using packaging with a distinct color, an embossed lid, or by labeling, which makes its eco-friendliness stand out. Our Eco line of packaging features an earth-toned base that helps operators convey a green message to their end users."

Customer outreach is another important component of any initiative. "Let customers know about your department's or company's commitment to green and sustainable practices," advises Gordon Hanrahan's Warmouth. "If the store or department has special practices such as new low-energy refrigerated units, etc., tout those. Sustainability goes beyond recycling and involves several aspects, including packaging, sourcing and production. Deli operators need not focus only on their own sustainability efforts, but on those of the products they use and sell."

Grass Point's Pawlek advocates a blend of technology and tried-and-true methods to get the message out to consumers. "In-store demos have worked historically, but more progressive operators are using social media forums, flyers, and in-store 'good-for-you' food tours hosted by in-store dieticians or other health professions."

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WISCONSIN CHEESE

Beyond Rotisserie Chicken

Faced with stiff competition from restaurants, retail deli operators find new ways to give customers meal solutions

BY JULIE COOK RAMIREZ



The economic recession has caused consumers to re-think their spending habits. Faced with less discretionary income, consumers are tightening their belts. For many, this means eating out less. That doesn't mean they're willing to sacrifice good taste, however. Today's time-pressed consumer still wants delicious, convenient, restaurant-quality meal solutions — at home.

"A restaurant experience at home —

that's what people are looking for," says Eric LeBlanc, director of marketing, foodservice retail marketing, Tyson Foods, Inc., Springdale, AR. "They either can't afford or don't have the time to go out like they used to, but they aren't looking to lower the bar of their expectations of food quality."

For supermarket deli operators, it's the proverbial perfect storm, an opportunity to move beyond rotisserie chicken — far and away, their best seller up to this point — and

offer consumers a bevy of options that will enable them to enjoy great-tasting meals in the comfort of their own home without the high cost of eating out.

"Rotisserie chicken will always have its place as a staple item, but it's not all about chicken anymore," notes Todd Griffith, vice president, sales and marketing, Alto-Shaam Inc., a Westminster, MD-based manufacturer of ovens, holding cabinets, rotisseries, fryers, and other equipment. "Progressive retail

deli operations have moved beyond rotisserie chicken and are moving into ethnic and specialty menu concepts, self-developed restaurant style brands, and expanded foodservice offerings based upon a continually changing customer base."

Not surprisingly, restaurants have already recognized this trend and are moving quickly to respond to consumer demand for tasty, convenient, economical meal solutions. Among the most visible examples is Pizza Hut's Tuscani Pastas. Available in three varieties — Premium Bacon Mac 'N Cheese, Meaty Marinara, and Chicken Alfredo — the entrées come with breadsticks and are said to feed four for just \$12.99, delivery included. The chain markets the dishes as authentic-tasting, yet economical. Needless to say, retail deli operators are sitting up and taking notice.

"When you have folks like Pizza Hut come out with some very economical quality food, which can then be delivered, I don't know if it's exactly a threat, but it's certainly causing a lot of our retail customers to challenge themselves to offer more restaurant-quality meals," says Tyson's LeBlanc. "It goes back to the old saying that good competition just makes us sharper. Ultimately, the consumer benefits because both channels try to get more creative about how to meet the consumer's needs."

Unfortunately, many retail delis are limited by a lack of equipment, explains LeBlanc. Those retailers with convection ovens have much more flexibility, he says, yet many delis have only two preparation methods at their disposal — the rotisserie and the fry basket.

Pizza Hut hit a home run by offering a complete meal of pasta and breadsticks,

something consumers have been yearning for, according to Mary Stiles, senior business manager in charge of innovation, foodservice retail marketing, for Tyson.

**"PROGRESSIVE RETAIL
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— *ERIC LEBLANC*
TYSON FOODS, INC.

Tyson has responded to its deli customers' demand for easy-to-assemble complete meal solutions with a new line called Fresh-Made Meals Inspired by Mom. Each meal kit ships frozen to the store, allowing retailers to thaw it when they need it, thereby controlling their shrink. Store employees thaw the components, assemble four meals out of every kit,

and sell them in the refrigerated case. Dual-oven packaging allows the consumer to heat the meal in a microwave or conventional oven. Current varieties include: Italian Herb Breaded Chicken with Mini Manicotti; Baked Penne and Italian Style Meatballs; Chicken Enchiladas; Country Style Chicken and Buttermilk Biscuits; Seared Beef Chop Steak with Homestyle Mashed Potatoes.

"It allows [retailers] to be in that business without having an additional cooking method, without having to invest a lot of time and labor, and also without having a lot of ingredients to manage," says LeBlanc. "It gives this confidence of 'Hey, this was made right here,' and yet, it has very few steps for the retailer."

Mark Phelps, president and COO of Innovasian Cuisine Enterprises LLC, a manufacturer of Asian foods for the deli, headquartered in Kent, WA, calls the Pizza Hut initiative appealing, but says he has not yet seen retail deli operators respond with similar programs of their own. But, he notes, both Costco and Sam's Club have been very effectively merchandising chilled family-size offerings for years.

On the other hand, Tom Quinn, vice president of Nuovo Pasta Productions Ltd., Stratford, CT, says his company's deli customers are "looking to parallel the restaurant experience." That includes more exotic cheeses such as Fontina and Asiago and ingredients such as lobster and portobello mushrooms. "It's not vanilla, if you will. It's not your cheese ravioli. It's 'give me something different that gives people a reason to look at it.'"

Crab cakes are seldom top of mind when considering budget entrées but delis that want to present a restaurant-style dining



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experience at home should consider them as a way to differentiate themselves from competitors. "We have a crab cake for every venue and every budget. We have crab cakes that will cost anywhere from \$12 for four people to \$25 to \$30 for four people. The money factor is the size of the lumps," says Dennis Gavan, corporate executive chef and global director of R&D at Phillips Foods, Inc., Baltimore, MD. "The more and bigger the lumps, the more expensive the crab cake."

Raising Awareness

Nuovo's Quinn credits the tough economic times, not Pizza Hut's pasta offerings, for lighting a fire under retail deli operators. However, he does feel such restaurant initiatives have boosted awareness of the array of options consumers have for take-home meals. "It gets people thinking about what other alternatives there are to bring home," he says. "If that spurs their thought, when they go to the deli case, they're going to look for some nice quality pasta items or complete meal kits ready to go."

However, deli operators must keep pricing top of mind. Tyson discovered that firsthand when researching a new product concept.

"It tested out at a certain price point" 18 months ago, says LeBlanc, but tested again recently, the price point was down a dollar. In other words, to maintain the same purchase intent, the price would have to be a dollar lower.

"The economy is really pushing retailers and their manufacturer partners to get creative about how to reach these price points," says LeBlanc. "One of the things that Pizza Hut has so successfully done is really zeroed in on how they can offer a meal at that value price point."

While he admits he doesn't have any hard data to back up his assertion, LeBlanc says there's plenty of anecdotal evidence that it's important for a retailer to offer a dinner solution under \$10.

When it comes to different day parts, heat-and-eat lunches for less than \$5 are growing, according to Alan Hamer, vice president, sales and marketing, Stefano Foods, Charlotte, NC. Stefano's grilled sandwiches, panini, calzones, and stromboli fall into this category.

Of course, consumers still have to make their way to the store to pick up deli offerings. With more restaurants offering online ordering and quick — and often free —

ONCE YOU FACTOR IN THE FREE DELIVERY AND THE SIDE DISHES, RESTAURANTS HAVE THE UPPER HAND. . . . "THIS IS NEW COMPETITION TO GROCERY STORE DELIS AND ANY PLACE THAT SELLS PREPARED MEALS TO GO."

—BOB SARIC
PLACON CORP.

delivery service, delis may find themselves struggling to keep up.

"It's a matter of convenience," says Mary Ann Valente, president, Pasta by Valente Inc., Charlottesville, VA. "They can just call and get an entrée delivered, which solves



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some problems for entertaining and provides an easy dinner solution."

Once you factor in the free delivery and the side dishes, restaurants have the upper hand, notes Bob Saric, national sales manager, Placon Corp., a Temecula, CA-based provider of thermoformed packaging. He feels such take-home restaurant offerings are a threat to retail deli operators because they simply can't compete in terms of value. "This is new competition to grocery store delis and any place that sells prepared meals to go," he explains. "The delis can offer the same level of service but can't be cost competitive and still offer the delivery service many consumers want."

Of course, the one thing most restaurants can't provide is the opportunity to participate in the preparation of the food. Many delis offer so-called take-and-bake options in response to a trend toward high-convenience offerings, says Nuovo's Quinn, explaining his former boss used to call such products "participation food."

"You boil the water, you cook the pasta, you warm the sauce, and in seven to eight minutes, you have a meal," he says. "People want to feel they did something gourmet, but they don't have the time or the expertise. Sure, they gave you all the components, but you still made dinner for the family."

Tyson doesn't "overemphasize" consumer involvement because "that need for involvement only exists in a certain sub-segment of

the population," according to LeBlanc. For many consumers the trade-off of a much longer prep time in exchange for the ability to feel they played a role in the meal's preparation is just too much, he contends, adding, "There are many segments of the population that are more than happy to have all the work done for them and have no guilt about it whatsoever."

The general consensus seems to be that the deli case is more about mainstream fare than regional or ethnic preferences. In fact, says LeBlanc, 80 percent of deli consumers say they're looking for "the usual."

Quinn calls this phenomenon the "Gap-ization of food" — that is, little in the way of variation from coast to coast. "You go to a Gap [store] in Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago, or New York, and all the clothes offerings are the same — that's what we're dealing with in food. People are looking for food trends. Ethnic trends might play nationally in certain cases, whether it be a popular spice or a type of meat, but it really is national in scope."

Home Meal Replacement Redux?

While it's clear consumers are looking for prepared — or partially prepared — meals they can take home and serve in relatively short order, LeBlanc bristles at the suggestion that the current trend in deli family entrées represents the resurrection of the home meal replacement (HMR) wave that swept the industry more than a decade ago.

In fact, he equates "those three words" with "one four-letter word."

"It's just a bad memory for almost anybody who lived through it," he says. "It was very expensive and there was a lot of shrink associated with it."

That said, LeBlanc concedes the goal remains the same — "to provide convenient meal solutions for consumers to get at their local retailer." However, he says today's solutions are notably different in that they are "not just plated-up foodservice offerings."

What will distinguish this round of HMR to what we saw 10 to 15 years ago is a shift toward more flexible, smaller-batch production. Still, LeBlanc says, challenges remain, particularly with regard to shelf-life. "You could go after the market with a longer shelf-life packaging, but you have to be careful you don't start looking like frozen food."

Packaging, in general, is a challenge for delis looking to compete with the Pizza Huts of the world. Saric says Placon's deli customers are looking for "upscale functional sustainable packaging at a competitive price — and it needs to be microwavable."

"Our customers are presenting us with consistent new challenges based on increased competition for market share, coupled with a recessionary economy," he continues. "Costs and value are more important than ever, so they can remain competitive and still present their food in an appealing and appetizing presentation."

DB



What's For Lunch?

Busy parents turn to the deli when school is back in session

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, R.D.

August and September mark the start of a new school year, and many parents will once again be faced with the daily task of packing nutritious, delicious lunches for their children. Retailers can take the hassle out of back-to-school by positioning the supermarket deli as a solution center for easy, convenient, healthful lunch-box fixings.

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Cc: Southern Pride, sales@sopride.com

Good Morning!

- Well, just thought I would let you know.
- 8 weeks, 38% increase in sales, in the deli over last year.
- This is way too easy?
- Had a guy tell me the other day that I missed my calling and I should open a restaurant.... I just smiled (knowing its not me at all...its the smoker)
- Pulled the smoker through the 4th of July parade Saturday morning, smoking. Took 8 slabs of ribs cut them up and put one rib in a snack size ziplock and threw them to the moms and dads at the parade...BIG hit.
- Sold 176 slabs of ribs last week...130 of them on Friday and Saturday...we were sold out by noon on Saturday.
- 8 weeks, Smoker is now paid for.
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Jon Birky - Klema Hometown Market
Store Manager/Owner



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The deli is the perfect destination for back-to-school, says Paula Shikany, senior brand manager for Sara Lee Food & Beverage, Downers Grove, IL, "because sandwiches are the No. 1 lunch entrée." There are several ways deli operators can tap into consumers' mind-sets when they're looking for lunch fixings, she continues. "One of these is to display everything for making a sandwich, for example, in one place — meat, cheese, bread and condiments."

"Grade-school-age kids have simple palates and like the staples — turkey, ham, roast beef. We don't see any trend here," notes Adam Grogan, vice president of marketing for Maple Leaf Consumer Foods, Ontario, Canada. "However, teens today are a lot more nutritionally aware. Lean proteins fare better with this group, especially those with a flavor variance. In Canada we see this as a trend for ethnic flavors, like poultry with tandoori and Mediterranean flavors, for example. In the United States, this trend is apparent in the demand for hot and spicy flavors such as Buffalo chicken and lemon pepper turkey."

He advises retailers to take a cue from Kellogg's less-than-50¢-a-bowl breakfast cereal campaign to let consumers know how



economical a quality sandwich can be. "The focus in the past in the service deli has been speed. Today, the pendulum has swung to an added value perception where more information is available to customers. Capitalize on

this by using signage or ad flyers to call out the price per serving rather than price per pound of each component of a sandwich. This helps lessen sticker shock and opens the door to an up-sell, especially when a quality meat or cheese is only pennies more per serving. Deli operators could also advertise a few days or week's worth of sandwich fixings for one price point. This is akin to how some delis advertise a chicken dinner for four, for example, for \$10."

"The days of kids eating only white bread, bologna and mustard sandwiches is over," explains Rod Steele, director of category planning for deli at Sara Lee. "Today, they're more aware of different flavors by eating at quick-serve restaurants. We have a number of recipe cards that deli operators can offer to parents to give them ideas for making different types of sandwiches. One, for example, is Kid's Sushi," which calls for honey ham, Swiss cheese, ranch dressing and shredded carrots, all rolled up in white bread and sliced into pinwheels.

Guy Giordano, president of the Vincent Giordano Corp., Philadelphia, PA, recommends appealing directly to the kids. "Let kids customize their sandwich by offering a variety of condiments and add-ons in made-to-order sandwich programs or by merchandising pre-made sandwiches near the salad bar."

Pre-made sandwich programs offer perhaps the most convenient way to pack children's lunches. This spring, Farm Ridge Foods, LLC, Commack, NY, introduced a single-serve panini line in modified atmosphere packaging ready to merchandise in the grab-and-go case. Jeffrey Siegel, president, relates, "The tuna melt is popular with

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younger kids, while the older kids go for the chicken fajita, chicken Caesar, Cuban, Tex-Mex and even the vegetarian."

Think Outside The Box

Beyond sandwiches, delis can position a number of items as lunch-box fare.

String cheese is a strong snack item with kids, relates Jay Allison, vice president of sales and marketing for Tillamook Cheese, Portland, OR. "This opens the door for the deli to merchandise different cuts and flavors of cheese as snacks. For example, delis typically offer cubed cheese for party platters. Cubes can be combined with other items such as cubed meats, crackers and fruit to create a light lunch or larger snack. This has the added benefit of boosting sales of cubed cheese beyond the traditional holiday time."

Back-to-school is an excellent time for sampling, he notes. "If kids get excited about the taste of something, something healthful such as a cheese, parents are more willing to buy." And don't forget macaroni and cheese — a kid-favorite for almost any meal. "Delis can sell kid-size servings for lunch, or sell it by the pound and encourage Moms to buy for more than one day's lunch."

Of course, thinking about the box itself,

can open up a slew of merchandising ideas. One is the bento box. "Bento boxes have several different compartments that can be

**THE BENTO BOX IS "A
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MERCHANDISE MEALS —
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THE FOOD FROM GETTING
MIXED TOGETHER, BOTH
OF WHICH ARE GREAT
FOR KIDS."**

— KATHY LENKOV
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filled with all the components of a healthful lunch," Kathy Lenkov, manager for corporate communications and public relations Nestlé

Professional North America, states. Historically, a bento box holds a Japanese box lunch, in which individual foods are packed compactly and attractively into an appealing box. This type of eye-catching presentation can tempt picky eaters. There's also a 'green' feature — no need for plastic bags and disposable containers.

Delis can offer bento boxes as part of a bundled meal promotion "or as part of a promotional offer where shoppers get a cents-off coupon for the box with the purchase of targeted deli item," she suggests. "It's a new way to merchandise meals — it looks fun and keeps the food from getting mixed together, both of which are great for kids."

Some delis "create back-to-school sections within the deli where they'll merchandise sandwiches and entrées as well as fruit, chips or cookies and drinks. This helps time-pressed shoppers find everything they need for packing lunches both quickly and conveniently," Lenkov feels it is important to support a back-to-school program "by calling out lunch-box foods, or entire meal deals, in the supermarket's weekly ad."

Make the back-to-school connection instantly, advises Deanna Finegan, marketing manager for Norseland, Inc., Stamford, CT,

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“by integrating a lunch-box into the display. For example, put a lunch-box into the cold case and fill it with a sample lunch. Then display these foods around the lunch-box or adjacent to the display, depending on whether or not the items require refrigeration.”

Think About The Box

The deli is an ideal location to cross-merchandise thermal lunch bags. Sign the display of bags with words that resonate with consumers, such as Remember Food Safety.

Nestlé's Lenkov reminds retailers that

freezer packs are a great tie-in to the food safety idea — and they increase the ring.

Maple Leaf's Grogan suggest cross-merchandising lunch ingredients and lunch bags. “For example, customers who buy a pound of a certain type of luncheon meat can obtain a voucher to mail in for a refrigerated lunch bag. The deli can let customers know about this promotion in a flyer or other type of POS.”

Retailer Promotions

Last year, the Stop & Shop Supermarket

“PUT A LUNCH-BOX INTO THE COLD CASE AND FILL IT WITH A SAMPLE LUNCH. THEN DISPLAY THESE FOODS AROUND THE LUNCH-BOX OR ADJACENT TO THE DISPLAY, DEPENDING ON WHETHER OR NOT THE ITEMS REQUIRE REFRIGERATION.”

— DEANNA FINEGAN
NORSELAND, INC.



Company, a 360-store chain based in Quincy, MA, promoted fun, healthful back-to-school lunch ideas through its consumer affairs publications. The chain's consumer advisor, Andrea Astrachan, wrote, “Packing a lunch at home is one way parents can feel confident their children are eating healthy at school.” Her deli-oriented lunch-box suggestions included Bat Boys — thin slices of deli low-fat ham wrapped around shredded Cheddar cheese, mayonnaise and a breadstick or pretzel rod.

At Publix Super Markets, a 1000-plus store chain headquartered in Lakeland, FL, notes Maria Brous, director of media and community relations, “We’ve run a promotion where if you purchased one pound of Boar’s Head Oven Gold Turkey Breast, the consumer would receive ¼ pound of cheese free.” Last year, “The deli gave away brown paper bags as part of a Boar’s Head promotion for a drawing to receive an insulated tote lunch bag.

“At the same time, the deli offers an assortment of other luncheon meats, wraps, pita pockets and side salads, for example, that are all great options for packed lunches,” she adds.

Wegmans Food Markets, a 72-store chain based in Rochester, NY, hosted a back-to-school event in many of its stores last year. It featured a 4-hour Saturday sampling session where parents and kids could taste products from many store departments. In the deli, they could try wraps made with 98 percent fat-free turkey slices. The event also featured a demo on packing a healthful, safe lunch and a flyer offering interesting lunch and healthful snacking ideas.

DB



Marketing Mexican Food In The Deli

Different consumer segments want different kinds of Mexican fare

BY BOB JOHNSON

Salsa is the most popular condiment in the United States. Tortillas have emerged as a healthful and versatile alternative to bread. And a whole new world of cheese is just waiting to be discovered.

Mexican-Americans have brought the United States an impressive array of foods that are steadily gaining in popularity, a trend that figures to increase for several reasons; Hispanics are the fastest growing U.S. demographic and many mainstream consumers have embraced what was once considered ethnic Mexican fare.

The challenge for the deli is identifying potential

customers, because mainstream consumers looking for new food items and Hispanics looking for familiar foods are probably looking for different products.

Different merchandising strategies are needed to attract each group. For many Spanish-speaking customers, nothing is more important than a Spanish-speaking person behind the counter. However, this may not be enough to entice these consumers into mainstream delis.

Many recent immigrants are more comfortable in small stores with a product offering that reflects what they bought in Mexico. These stores, known as *carnicerías*, carry the cheeses, meats and other products most important to traditional Mexican cuisine. According to Bill Finicle, vice president for sales and marketing at Los Altos Food Products Inc., a producer of fine Mexican cheese, based in City of Industry, CA, "Mexicans buy 90 percent of Mexican cheese, and they don't shop at the deli. They buy their cheese mostly from their parent country or in a meat market."

!Comida Muy Deliciosa! in the April/May issue of DELI BUSINESS explained that Packaged Facts, a New York, NY-based market research firm, categorizes Hispanic foods and beverages into three segments: Authentic

Hispanic — products imported from Hispanic countries or produced domestically using traditional recipes; Mainstream Mexican — foods that have become a part of American culture, such as tortillas, tacos and salsa; and Nuevo Latino — traditional American foods made with spices and flavors associated with Hispanic countries and islands.

Mainstream delis will no doubt have difficulty competing for those consumers seeking Mexican foods that would fall within the Authentic Hispanic category, but for those seeking Mainstream Mexican and Nuevo Latino — assimilated Mexican-American and mainstream consumers — the deli is a logical destination.

"Mexican foods have definitely become more popular because of the growth of the Hispanic population. They shop for fresher items, and they shop at the deli. The Anglo people are also looking for new food items," says Cindy Jensen, director of sales and marketing at Queso Campesino, a producer of fine Mexican-style cheeses, headquartered in Denver, CO.

Salsa Rules

Traditional tomato salsa has already established itself as a healthful condiment, sauce and dip. The next extension appears to

be a move toward more healthful, more natural salsas in a wide variety of flavors.

"People are always looking for new items and there is a trend toward all-natural salsa out there," according to Craig Jaunzemis, national sales director for La Mexicana Food Products, Vernon, CA. La Mexicana, which makes fresh salsas, recently added peach-mango salsa and black bean and corn salsa to its product list.

The flavor profile offered should reflect the customer base. Hispanics are not as likely to choose the new flavor profiles, for example, as are non-Hispanics. "The products you offer have to be a function of the customers. If it's a Hispanic market, you need to have hot, medium and mild salsas," Jaunzemis advises.

The fresh salsa in the cold case is generally perceived to be a better-tasting product than the longer-lasting salsa on the grocery shelves, but it is often "an impulse purchase. The fresh salsa is higher quality than the shelf-stable products," says David Lakey, vice president for marketing at Reser's Fine Foods, Inc., Beaverton, OR. Besides its extensive salad offerings, Reser's also manufactures a line of Mexican items under the Baja Café brand.

The New Staples

Tortillas have entered the mainstream, both in their original usages and as flatbread wraps for non-Mexican dishes.

Joe Ketchum, senior marketing manager for Olé Mexican Foods, Inc., which manufactures Mexican cheeses, tortillas, yogurts and more, based Atlanta, GA, stresses the importance of flavored or seasoned tortillas. "You can put them on a rack in front of the beans and cheese, or you can put them on a rack where the deli and bakery kind of spill together," he advises.

Flavored tortillas might include tomato basil, spinach herb and multi-grain, low-carb whole wheat. The most healthful tortillas are high in omega-3s, low in fat and high in fiber.

A small-ticket item such as quality tortillas can boost sales of numerous other deli items that can be used in conjunction with the tortillas. "Mexican tortillas are a good meal-planning item. They can add incremental sales to any deli," Lakey says. "Mexican foods come in so many forms and are found in so many parts of the store — you should start with high-volume items that work best in the deli."

In addition to a display of tortillas, Lakey suggests offering prepared Mexican items such as burritos with a variety of protein and vegetable fillings. Tacos with fish or shrimp provide another alternative.

"In the hot case, I'd do fried burritos.

They're extremely successful," advises Marilyn Vincent, senior marketing manager at Don Miguel Mexican Foods Inc., Anaheim, CA. Don Miguel produces a line of Mexican foods not targeted to the Hispanic population. She suggests including a beef-and-bean and a bean-and-cheese burrito. Some stores have also done well with breakfast burritos. "Flautas do fairly well in the deli section," Vincent adds. Flautas are a variety of taquito, a small rolled tortilla, usually filled with beef or chicken and fried.

"A SPECIALTY CHEESE TABLE SHOULD HAVE HISPANIC CHEESES ALONG WITH CHEESES FROM OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD. REFERENCE THE MEXICAN CHEESES TO CHEESES THAT PEOPLE ALREADY KNOW."

— VARS INJIIAN
KAROUN DAIRIES, INC.

Some suppliers are offering authentic dishes of high enough quality to satisfy the Mexican-American market. "There are prepared foods so the deli can sell take-home foods. The suppliers are matching what mom and dad used to cook at the house," says Denis Oratowski, owner of Crown Bakery Inc., Los Angeles, CA.

He advises offering, as a minimum, rice and beans, a meat dish, a chicken dish and one or two additional center-of-the-plate dishes. He also suggests offering cheese, beef, chicken and pork tamales with red or green sauce to suit customers with different tastes. Tamales can be merchandised with many side dishes, including potato or macaroni salad.

The Mexican food section can have a mutually beneficial relationship with the rest of the deli. "Rotisserie chicken can be remade into handheld Mexican items," Reser's Lakey suggests.

Different Kinds Of Cheese

Mexican cheeses are unique products that are still unfamiliar to most Anglo shoppers.

Queso Fresco — which translates as fresh cheese — is the No. 1 Mexican cheese, according to Queso Campesino's Jensen. Slightly salty, it crumbles and does not melt at even very high temperatures. It's crumbled on fruit, beans or other dishes. It's also used as a grilling cheese. Mexican-American consumers are very familiar with Queso Fresco, Jensen says, but because fresh cheeses last only 30 to 45 days, they might be poor candidates for delis making their entrance into Mexican cheeses.

Another popular cheese is Oaxaca, a mild white cheese that is quite similar to Mozzarella, which takes its name from the Mexican state of Oaxaca. This cheese is braided into a ball and can be used as either a melting cheese or a snacking cheese, according to Jensen.

One common denominator among Mexican cheeses is that they are bland rather than bold in flavor. "All Mexican cheeses are white, bland — there are about 15 of them," Jensen adds.

The Merchandising Challenge

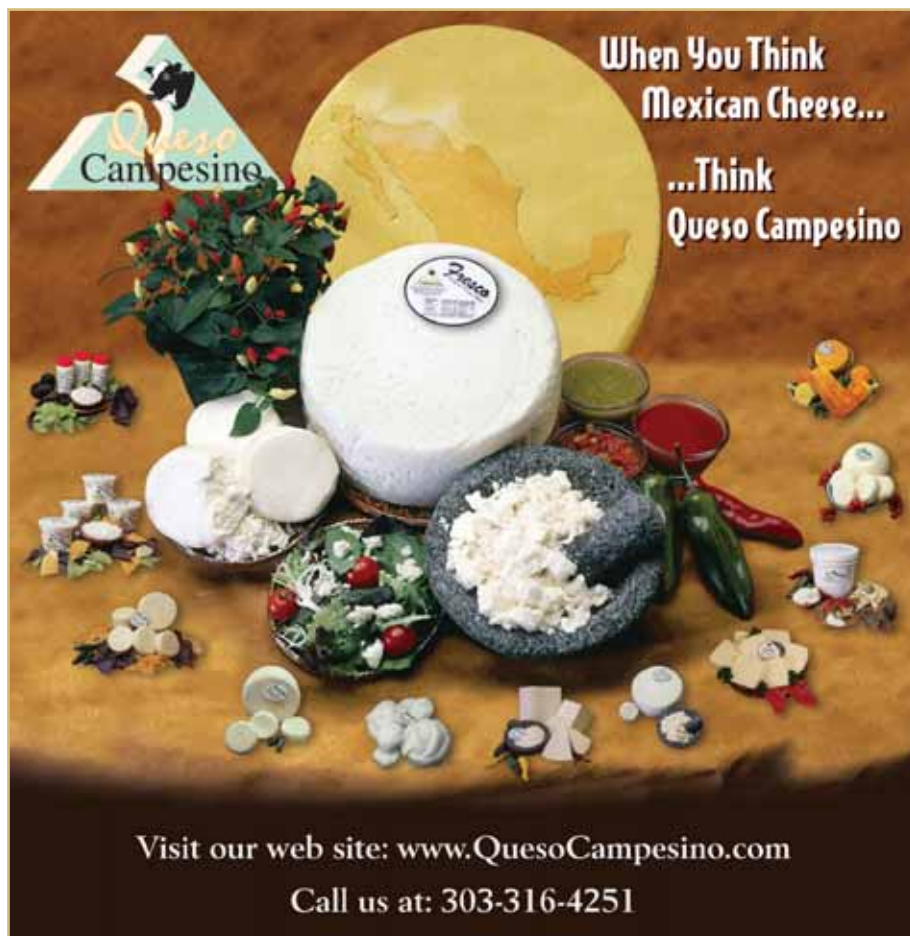
Mexican cheeses and other specialty foods present a merchandising challenge. "We suggest retailers start slowly and order only a couple of cheeses to begin. In Denver

they carry about five Mexican cheeses in a deli," Jensen says. The number of Mexican cheeses would be higher or lower, depending on a store's demographics.

Sampling is important in drawing new consumers to Mexican cheeses, as is in store education. "A specialty cheese table should have Hispanic cheeses along with cheeses from other parts of the world. Reference the Mexican cheeses to cheeses that people already know," suggests Vars Injijian, vice president for sales and marketing at Karoun Dairies Inc., which produces Queso Blanco and Queso Para Freir, based in Sun Valley, CA. Cotija, for example, is a grating and topping cheese, similar to Romano while Fresca is like a fresh farm cheese, he explains.

Attracting Hispanic customers to the deli is an important merchandising challenge. "Hispanics tend to gravitate toward the sections where there are a lot of cheeses behind the glass and they buy in bulk," Injijian says.

"It's going to take more than carrying Mexican cheese [to attract the customer seeking Authentic Mexican foods]. Mexican food is almost not a product line in the chain-store delis. The chains don't market well to the Latin market. It hasn't happened yet, but I'm going to try a few things," notes Los Altos' Finicle. **DB**



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Bowled Over

Hot-to-go or chilled and prepacked, deli soups provide a versatile, value-oriented meal solution

BY JOANNE FRIEDRICK

Considered one of the ultimate comfort foods, soup has long been a staple in the American diet. With the economy forcing more at-home dining upon a populace unable or unwilling to spend hours in the kitchen preparing foods from scratch, the deli has an opportunity to step in and provide a solution. The supermarket deli is the perfect venue to purchase hot soup to-go or pre-packed, refrigerated versions that can be microwaved or reheated in an office or home setting.

According to Todd Blount, president, Blount Seafood Corp., Fall River, MA, another important trend is the migration of soup from appetizer or meal accompaniment to center-of-the-plate status.

It could be the economy fostering this move, notes Blount, but whatever the reason, it is influencing the types of soups consumers are choosing. When looking for a filling option, soups with beans, lentils and other high-fiber ingredients are popular, he says, along with protein-based soups, such as beef chili, chicken tortilla and clam chowder.

In place of going out to eat, a shopper may seek instead an indulgent soup, such as a Maine lobster bisque or scallop and bacon chowder, which gives the feel of dining out at home, he adds.

Healthful, Organic Smaller Part Of The Mix

"Comfort food is still in," adds Jerry Shafir, founder and president, Kettle Cuisine, Chelsea, MA. And although there's talk about wanting more healthful choices, he cautions that just because consumers talk about eating healthfully doesn't mean they will make those selections when it comes time to buy.

Sodium has garnered attention for the soup category as some stores institute point-of-sale or star-based systems that rank products based on sodium levels and other health-



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related factors. “We’ve tried to get to the American Heart Association [recommended sodium] level,” Shafir says, “but it’s hard to do and retain flavor.”

“Better-for-you is a main driver,” notes Mark Sandridge, president, Sandridge Food Corp., a manufacturer of soups for retail and foodservice in Medina, OH. “Natural ingredients are important. Everyone I talk to refers to the items on the Whole Foods no-no list.” He describes these no-nos as shelf-life extenders, ingredients with lots of saturated fats and basically, anything with a long chemical name. “I thought it might just be for retail, but foodservice is talking the same game.

“Everybody talks ‘healthy’ but our cream-based soups are still strong,” he continues. “It’s a bit of a dilemma for us. Sales indicate better-for-you is not the strongest direction but buyers are asking for it.”

“For the last 10 or 15 years, there’s been a push away from cream-based soups,” comments Dennis Gavagan, corporate executive chef and global director of R&D, at Phillips Foods, Inc., Baltimore, MD. “If a soup is ‘cream,’ it’s now more of a purée, such as butternut squash soup. Or soups are broth-based. A retailer needs to have a balance. It’s like putting together a menu. In soup bars, there should always be a balance, usually $\frac{2}{3}$ broth-based and $\frac{1}{3}$ cream-based. There should be one chili of some sort and one signature soup, usually something local like cream of crab here in Maryland or a gumbo in Louisiana.”

The demographic of the deli shopper often determines what works best, says Blount. Blount Seafood offers low-sodium and regular versions of some soups, such as chicken noodle. “It’s important to have a popular soup choice be low sodium,” he adds.

That carries over into other emerging sub-categories in the hot-to-go and refrigerated soup sector. Blount believes having a variety of options — low sodium, high fiber, organic, gluten free, vegetarian — are helpful. Yet he concedes his company’s organic and wheat-free choices are in the bottom 30 percent of sales.

Wynnie Stein, who created the Moosewood brand 36 years ago with her Moosewood Restaurant in Ithaca, NY, and now develops Moosewood organic soups for its parent company, Blue Marble Brands, Edison, NJ, says organic is one of the key trends in foodservice soups, along with comfort food, ethnic and gourmet flavors.

“I try to assure people they can have one or two organic soups” among their offerings, says Stein. “It gives a nod to the trend of green and healthful.” Depending on the location and clientele, Stein says most stores will offer one or two organic selections, or as



PHOTO COURTESY OF PHILLIPS FOODS, INC.

many as three or four if the setting is a college campus or natural juice bar.

All Moosewood soups are organic and vegetarian, with some being vegan, wheat-free and dairy-free as well, such as Tuscan white bean and vegetable or Mediterranean tomato and rice soup.

As science catches up with what people are experiencing, such as allergic reactions to certain foods, the trend toward more options based on dietary needs will grow, she adds. Still, says Stein, “Our focus is on taste and flavor, no matter what the trend is.”

Doug Johnson, director of business development, Harry’s Fresh Foods, Portland, OR, believes that in these tough economic times, the higher price of organic products may make customers more cautious about such a purchase. “We recommend [stores] carry a wide variety of flavors — not necessarily organic — and rotate in seasonal items,” he explains, noting it’s good to include broth- and cream-based soups along with chili in the mix. Seasonal items can include butternut squash soup for the fall, for example.

Shafir of Kettle Cuisine also is skeptical about the need for organic soups in the deli. “We’re not sure the consumer is embracing it. We just don’t see organic taking off in the deli,” he comments.

As with some of the more healthful options that sound good but don’t garner sales, Johnson says soup served cold is

another sub-category that just hasn’t gone over well at foodservice.

International, Regional Flavors Abound

Soup manufacturers are seeing growth in ethnic and gourmet flavors. Soups such as Mexican meatball and Thai shrimp are doing well on the West Coast “where consumers are looking to experiment more,” says Blount. But he also sees regional preferences on the East Coast, such as Portuguese kale soup in New England and chicken potpie style in Pennsylvania.

Flavor trends seem to favor a twist on familiar foods from the Southwest, Latin America and Asia, according to Shafir, especially if they’ve taken off in restaurants first. Kettle Cuisine’s Global Adventures offerings include Thai Chicken Soup with Red Curry, Vietnamese Chicken Pho with Noodles, and Chicken Fajita Soup with Fire-Roasted Vegetables.

Phillips’ Gavagan relates Asian flavors continue to be strong. “As more cultures become accessible to consumers, there are more options. Take Vietnam, for example, and the popularity of pho and noodle bowls.

“I think the up-and-coming cuisines will be from South America — Peru especially,” he continues. “Peruvian food uses a lot of aji amarillo and panca peppers. The soups are broth-based with chiles or chile extract oil



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and seafood. The cuisine is based on chiles and herbs, not cream and butter. It has a lot of sweet and sour combinations."

Seasonal soups also resonate with some retailers, according to Shafir and Blount. Blount Seafood changes out three varieties seasonally from the eight to 10 formulas created for retailers.

"We're starting to see innovative retailers do more seasonal flavors" as well as instituting soup of the month or soup of the season options, relates Shafir. For fall, Kettle Cuisine will have a half-dozen new flavors that retailers can add to their private-label programs. "We abandoned the attempt to do branded in the deli because it's hard to compete with the store's private label."

According to Sandridge of Sandridge Food, "People are willing to branch out a little from their comfort zone. We have a new soup with curry in it — mulligatawny. We launched it in the spring and it's doing very well. Curry is not an everyday flavor profile you'd chase down, but as long as a flavor is not overwhelming, people are willing to try it."

Variety Breeds Success

Developing a successful deli soup program relies on a several factors: good variety, a combination of pre-packs and soup to-go, and promotion within the store. Branding seems to be less of a factor, with the majority of soups selling under a store's private label. About 90 percent of dollar sales are from private label, notes Harry's Johnson, with nearly all bulk products sold as the store brand.

Grocery stores are still private-label oriented, agrees Blount, whose company does formulations for different chains based on their location and demographics. Within the club store, however, Blount Seafood has been successful selling soup under the Legal Sea Foods and Panera Bread restaurant labels. The company licenses the brand names and recipes. "In the consumer's mind, it feels as if they are going out to eat but they are saving money by preparing it at home."

Blount Seafood also offers three seafood-based soups under its own label, which it launched in March at the Boston International Seafood Show. The 20-ounce frozen soups sell for \$5.99.

As for variety, the more choices available, the stronger the program will be. Offering fewer than four hot soups, notes Shafir, sends the wrong message. "The consumer concludes you aren't a soup destination." He says some stores, such as Whole Foods, offer up to 15 or more varieties and place them throughout the store.

Within the pre-pack section, Shafir recommends eight to 12 flavors of entrée-style and appetizer soups in multiple sizes. But, he



cautions, that does mean more inventory for the store and the need to keep a close eye on movement. He also advocates keeping hot soups and chilled products in close proximity to reinforce the message that the store has a complete program available.

Single servings are a niche, he adds, but in today's value economy, offering a 16-ounce container with a \$5 or less price point can generate interest. He notes 20- and 24-ounce sizes are also popular.

Retailers should have a minimum of six soups, according to Blount, so the menu can include staples such as chili, clam chowder and beef and chicken options. The key, he believes, is getting customers oriented to having a hot soup program. "We find if the deli can position it well and get support, it can handle eight to 10 or even 12 soups in the winter." Hot soup to-go works better on the East Coast, he adds, while pre-packed cups have sold more on the West Coast.

Having a specific soup line-up for a minimum of a week helps deal with the inventory issue, says Moosewood's Stein. Offering Moosewood's soup in both the hot program and the pre-pack case is "another way to advertise our brand," she adds. "It may not be for every store, but I think it will build busi-

ness. I think foodservice and retail build off each other."

Promotions Keep Soup Top Of Mind

Because Moosewood has other branded items such as frozen vegetarian entrées and cookbooks, Stein says stores can leverage the brand with cross-promotional events. A cookbook signing, health fair, harvest festival or cooking class, for example, is also an opportunity to sample the soup, provide recipe cards with serving or preparation ideas and hand out coupons.

Blount recommends soup and salad or soup and sandwich programs "because it's all right there." He says stores can offer soup, sandwich and salad for a special price if customers buy a combination of two or all three.

Shafir is also a proponent of the soup and sandwich, soup and salad combo. "If you merchandise in a reasonable area, you give customers the ability to mix and match. I think we're seeing more of that, taking a hint from the bakery café model."

Sampling can be a good way to build traffic for the soup section if the store has the space and staff to do so, he adds. "If you're just starting out [with a soup program], it's a good way to get attention."

Stop, Look And Read The Ingredient Info

Signage, even when soups are sold under the private label, gives consumers a quick snapshot of the ingredients and, in some cases, the breakdown of fat, sodium and calories.

According to Blount, most customers will make their choice based on "the excitement and passion for the flavor, then for the nutritional aspect." Because Blount Seafood does custom recipes, creating kettle cards with all the pertinent information is easy.

As part of Moosewood's branded or private-label program, retailers can receive the appropriate signage and the warmer from which to sell the soup, explains Stein. She believes having a total program makes it easier for stores to add an organic, vegetarian soup to the lineup. In addition to kettle signs, Stein says table tents can also carry the soup message into other parts of the store.

Shafir says some retailers want Kettle Cuisine to create and provide the signage, while others just want the information available so they can put it in their own format. "They want to show off the attributes that will resonate with their customers."

By giving hot and refrigerated soups a prominent spot in the deli and by offering a wide variety of choices to meet health and taste needs, retailers have an opportunity to achieve year-round success.

DB

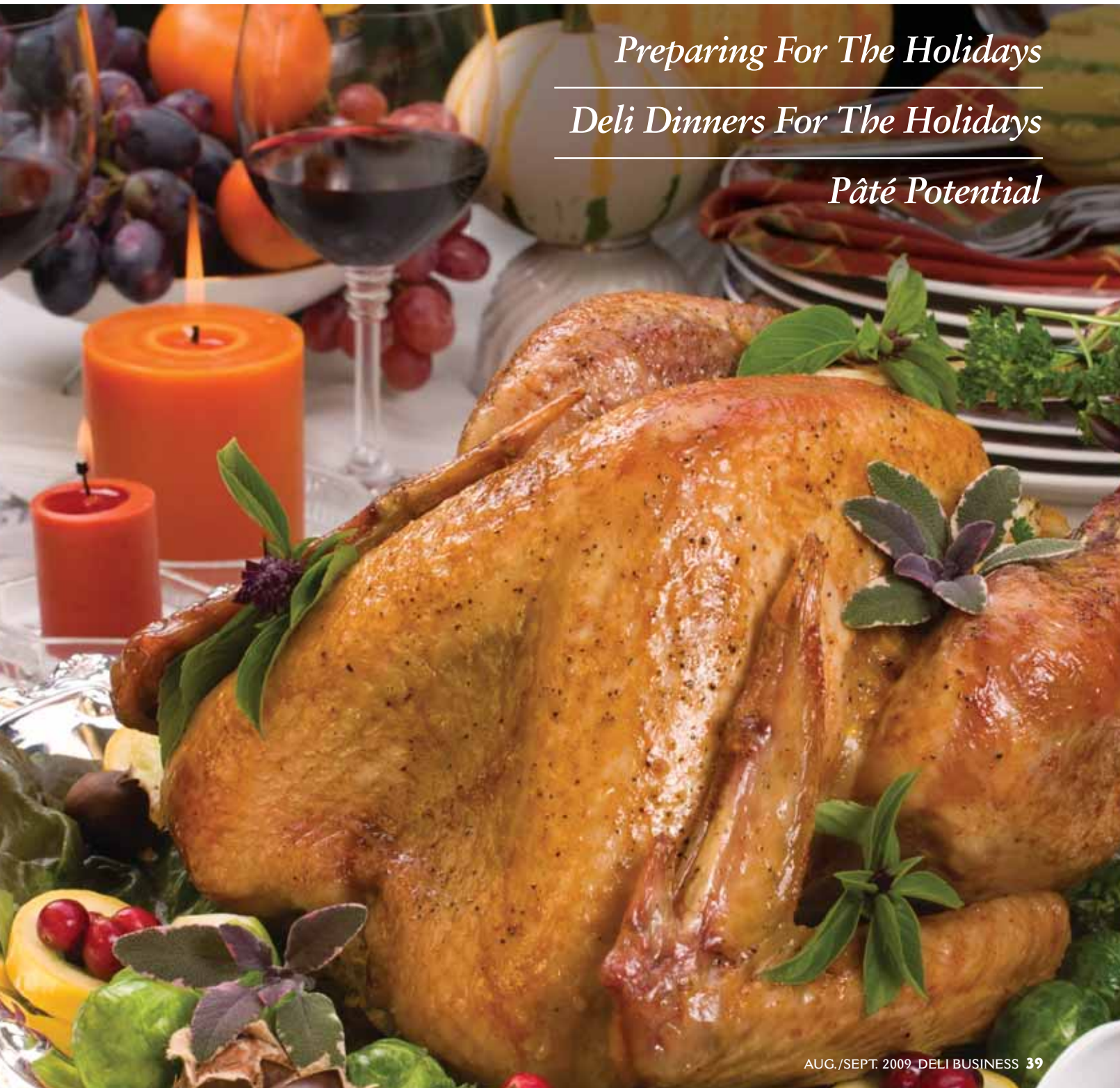
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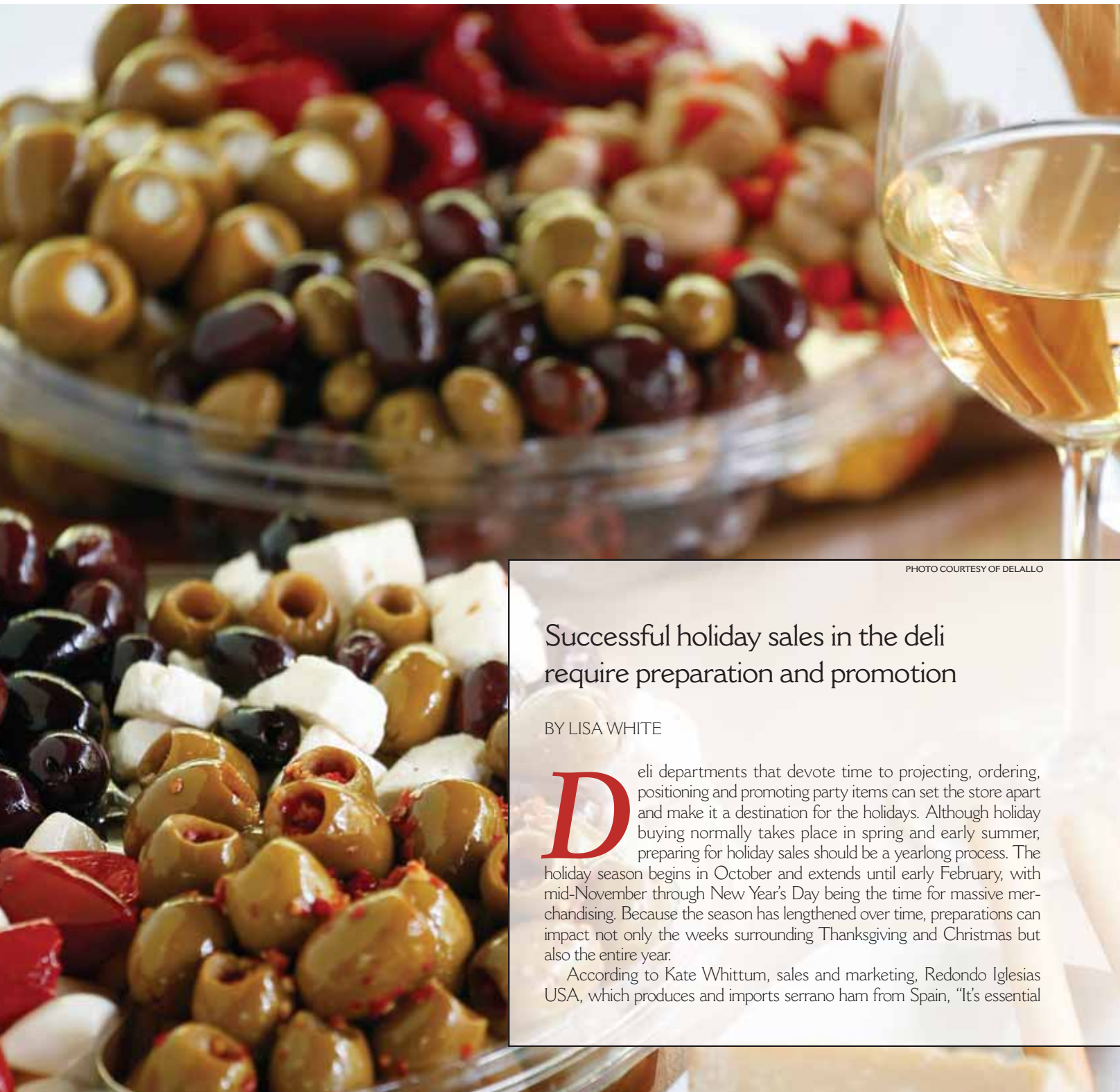


PHOTO COURTESY OF DELALLO

Successful holiday sales in the deli require preparation and promotion

BY LISA WHITE

Deli departments that devote time to projecting, ordering, positioning and promoting party items can set the store apart and make it a destination for the holidays. Although holiday buying normally takes place in spring and early summer, preparing for holiday sales should be a yearlong process. The holiday season begins in October and extends until early February, with mid-November through New Year's Day being the time for massive merchandising. Because the season has lengthened over time, preparations can impact not only the weeks surrounding Thanksgiving and Christmas but also the entire year.

According to Kate Whittum, sales and marketing, Redondo Iglesias USA, which produces and imports serrano ham from Spain, "It's essential

that buyers discuss their key holiday items with their suppliers well in advance of the season, even early summer, in order that producers can react and build stock. It doesn't do anyone any good to make plans for merchandising, themes and specials if a cheesemaker, for example, can't supply the demand. The logistics of having the product in-house well in advance of anticipated sales is the most critical element in maximizing holiday sales. Retailers should look at what will be the busiest sales days, then work backwards keeping in mind distributors' holiday delivery schedules and their own labor needs for extra production and floor staffing."

By positioning the deli as the go-to place for parties, stores can reap additional revenue. Offering a large assortment of party platters, appetizers, meal options and festive side dishes can give delis an edge.

However, suppliers warn about too much holiday-specific branding. Providing product that can still be sold after the holidays is key. "It's important to be flexible and have the right products in front of customers at the appropriate times," says Michael Blum, U.S. sales and marketing manager at Beemster, a Dutch producer of fine cheese. The U.S. office of Beemster is located in Jersey City, NJ. "By doing this, delis can help loosen consumers' pockets."

Offering unique products is another way to make the deli department a destination. "These days, people are looking for exciting products that offer exotic flavors," notes Davide Dukcevic, sales representative at Pascoag, RI-based Daniele Inc., a producer of Italian gourmet deli meats.

It's also essential to factor in how economic conditions are affecting consumers. "With the current economy, more people will be entertaining at home to save money," says Anthony DiPietro, vice president of George E. DeLallo Co., a producer of fine Italian-style antipasti and olives, based in Jeannette, PA. "Delis have to be as prepared as possible for the additional business."

Holiday sales need to be planned out, with case planograms focusing on holiday product executed on a weekly or monthly basis, he explains. DeLallo provides retailers with point-of-sale materials that include recipes and emphasize party planning. Its Website also showcases party ideas and holiday products.

Economic realities mean the focus has to be on value. Items that provoke nostalgia or whose flavors lend themselves well to the holidays should be given priority. Still, in this economy, many consumers are trading down. "We expect an additional credit crunch that will reflect on consumers," says Alberto Minardi, general manager and part-

ner at Principe Foods, a producer and importer of Italian hams, sausages and salami, based in Long Beach, CA. He believes that rather than focusing on high-end holiday products, shoppers will be looking for affordable options.

Executing On The Preparation

Deli managers must decide which holiday items will provide the greatest markup and then highlight the higher-margin items that bring in the most revenue. Which items get placed where is a significant issue during the holidays, when the focus is on loading the stores with product.

It's important to offer both grab-and-go and service items and to remain well stocked. An appearance of abundance, as long as it doesn't look as if merchandise isn't selling, sparks consumers to shop. Making it easy for them to negotiate the department is also pivotal. "Products should be grouped logically," contends Phil Meldrum, president, of New York, NY-based FoodMatch, a producer, importer and distributor of Mediterranean foods.

"There is only so much display space, and delis need to fulfill obligations to large suppliers at this time," says Michael Thompson, president of Venus Wafers, a cracker

supplier in Hingham, MA. He suggests extending the department with extra racks or display shippers. "There are a variety of ways to encourage customers to migrate to the deli department. Signage, placards and message boards are effective tools. If retailers think of the deli department as a billboard, it will help draw shoppers in."

"Starting as early as the end of August, retailers should begin to move holiday appropriate products to more prominent positions within the deli case and within the department," recommends Redondo's Whittum. "Freestanding floor displays are a good way to put dry add-on items directly in the path of the consumer. Anything that suggests entertaining — and items that might be considered luxurious splurges — should be put on special to allow customers to try them so they'll be added to the mental shopping list for the holidays well in advance. It's the best way to ensure interest in high-ticket items that can then be sold with minimal marketing at their full margin during the holiday season."

"Retailer flyer specials and distributor sales-force incentives are very effective, and during the holiday season itself, I would provide product for active demos," she continues. "It's also the time I most enjoy visiting retailers, to really gauge customer familiarity with my

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product. Since Redondo jamón serrano is a premium product, it is the holiday time, when people are more adventurous and willing to buy top of the line, that I get the most enthusiastic reception. Also since there is still a lack of familiarity with the product on the part of deli staff, I think an important support is to do trainings and samplings with staff."

Getting new or unfamiliar product into the consumer's mouth is step one in the buying process, so producers advise sampling whenever possible. "Conducting demos a week or two prior to the holidays allows people to sample products," relates Joe Carbonell, director of sales and marketing at New Britain, CT-based Norpaco Gourmet Foods, manufacturer of Italian-style specialty food products.

Cross-selling upscale items with products at a lower price point can help stimulate sales of higher-margin selections. "Today's consumers definitely have an appetite for experimenting and trying new things. Cross-merchandising encourages this," according to Daniele's Dukceovich.

Extending promotion periods is also effective for increasing holiday sales. This holiday season, Principe is increasing its promotion time from 60 to 90 days. "We don't want to load retailers with product they can't sell, so

we're assisting stores with promotions and providing [sampling] allowances," Principe's Minardi says.

It's important for delis to educate customers on the products available so the department becomes a one-stop holiday shop. "A simple way to accomplish this is with a flyer that highlights these items," advises Lindsay Gregory, marketing coordinator at Woolwich Dairy (USA), Inc., a producer of goat's milk cheeses, in Lancaster, WI.

Positioning point-of-sale material, recipe cards, sell sheets, newsletters and Websites in advance of a particular holiday gets customers thinking about entertaining. "A one-stop-shop idea ties in with becoming prepared for holiday sales," Gregory says. "It's especially important to educate consumers on how to utilize new items and inspire them with recipes and entertaining ideas."

Delis shouldn't neglect the opportunity to position themselves as a destination for last-minute entertainment. Stores that cater to consumers who find themselves without the time to prepare for guests can further increase holiday revenues.

FoodMatch's Easy Entertaining program trains retailers and deli staff how to present olive bars as an option for parties. "We've seen successful programs where retailers

provide empty tray packs and party trays for consumers to mix and match five or six items. These are priced by the pound," Meldrum explains.

With these programs, shoppers can choose from a variety of deli items, including meats, cheese, olives and other finger food. Staff is trained on making pairing suggestions. Because there is nothing to prepare, the emphasis is on presentation rather than

"ANYTHING THAT SUGGESTS ENTERTAINING — AND ITEMS THAT MIGHT BE CONSIDERED LUXURIOUS SPLURGES — SHOULD BE PUT ON SPECIAL TO ALLOW CUSTOMERS TO TRY THEM SO THEY'LL BE ADDED TO THE MENTAL SHOPPING LIST FOR THE HOLIDAYS WELL IN ADVANCE."

— KATE WHITTUM

REDONDO IGLESIAS USA

preparation. "The beauty with these programs is that everything is in one department," Meldrum adds.

Retailers can expand SKUs to include more varieties during the holidays. "Retailers that carry our lines may offer a couple of SKUs year-round and add more products during the holiday months to beef up their offerings," says Rick Etheim, president of Minneapolis, MN-based Parkers Farm. The company, which offers promotional allowances as well as point-of-sale material for its lines, produces cold-packed cheese spreads, salsas, dips and bagel spreads.

Presentation should be at the forefront of holiday sales, because deli shoppers buy with their eyes. "With increased in-home entertaining, the potential for delis in the fourth quarter is tremendous," DeLallo's DiPietro notes. "Retailers need to continue being proactive and aggressive, especially when it comes to holiday sales."

By successfully projecting, preparing and promoting for the holidays, delis will see increased sales during this lucrative time of the year.

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Deli Dinners For The Holidays



Delis can capitalize on holiday meals with effective merchandising and marketing

BY LISA WHITE

A recent pilot program conducted at nine Woodland, CA-based Nugget Market supermarkets in northern California proves there is much potential for holiday dinner programs in supermarket delis. The prepared Easter Leg of Lamb Dinner, a test program jointly funded by the El Dorado Hills, CA-based California Sheep Commission and the Denver, CO-based American Lamb Board in cooperation with Nugget Markets and Davis, CA-based Superior Farms, was deemed a success.

The California Sheep Commission worked with Nugget executive chef Rachel Levine, who identified a leg cut that would work well for a pre-



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUPERIOR FARMS

Stuffed leg of lamb is a good option for retailers seeking to offer outside-the-box holiday meals.

cooked Easter meal. She and her team developed a Greek-style dish with spinach, Kalamata olives and Feta cheese that was reheatable. Guests paid \$10 a head for a complete dinner.

"No one knew how the program would go, but it exceeded expectations and sold out," says Angela Gentry, Superior Farms marketing manager. "Pre-made meals in the deli are a growing trend."

Offering holiday meal components is much more prevalent in mainstream grocery than even five years ago. "The holiday meal business has grown steadily for supermarkets," notes Jeffrey Siegel, CEO of Farm Ridge Food, Commack, NY. "Now it's a big part of what delis are doing."

Holiday dinners in the deli have evolved from frozen dinners with accompaniments to elaborate gourmet meals. Priced anywhere from \$39 to over \$100, these packages are designed to appeal to many consumer demographics. "Holiday meals are very regional, since individuals have their own ideas as to what types of food their Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter meals should contain," explains Erik Waterkotte, director of marketing at John Morrell & Co., Cincinnati, OH. Traditional offerings have universal appeal. "If you over-complicate it, you'll limit the draw. Everyone has an opinion of what items they want with their holiday meal," he adds.

For this reason, simplicity is key with holiday meal programs. On these occasions, consumers aren't interested in trying new foods. Typical packages include a protein such as turkey or ham, along with two or three sides such as green bean casserole, mashed potatoes, stuffing, corn or rolls. Turkey sizes tend to be in the 8-, 10- and 12-pound range. Side dishes are sold by the pound, with between one and five pounds being most common.

Not everyone who looks to the deli for holiday meals is serving a large crowd. Many consumers want a prepared holiday meal for a small gathering, and retailers would do well not to neglect this growing trend. "Lately we've seen a trend toward smaller holiday meals for two to four people," notes Jen Ehresmann, director, marketing — deli, Jennie-O Turkey Store, Willmar, MN. "Retailers will pair a petite carving turkey breast — such as the Jennie-O Turkey Store VIP Turkey Breast — or 'store-baked' rotisserie turkey breast with their own signature side dishes creating a retailer-exclusive offering."

Value, Convenience And Quality

Even in today's economy, busy consumers are cooking less. Many don't want to take the time to prepare an entire holiday meal. While many consumers still want to cook their own turkey, they look to the deli

for sides, offering another approach to holiday meals.

"Holiday meal programs are an early version of the bundled meal concept, where people can feed a family of four for \$10," says David Lakey, vice president of marketing for Beaverton, OR-based Reser's Fine Foods, a provider of salads, side dishes and other prepared food items.

Reser's recommends retailers offer an assortment of sides around protein but narrow the choices, while providing open-stock merchandising. "It's up to the deli to make the value and convenience really obvious to consumers so they buy holiday meals in the deli," Lakey notes.

Stores can do this by offering small, economical portions. Suppliers such as Ham I Am in Dallas, TX, provide smaller ham sizes for times when a whole ham is not practical. "In today's economy, delis should be offering meal deals with smaller portions and provide suggestions for leftovers," says Meghan Meehan, vice president.

Along with value, the focus of holiday meals should be on convenience and quality. "Retailers need to take a look at what has worked in the past and what hasn't, while taking into account today's economy," advises Frank Sidari, vice president of business development for Sandridge Food Corp., headquartered in Medina, OH. It's best to plan these programs at least six months in advance to allow manufacturers to secure products and optimize procurement opportunities. Holidays offer opportunities to sell traditional and upscale products popular for dinners, such as wild rice dishes, sweet potato casseroles and gravies.

Sidari says smaller, progressive retailers with more flexibility are thinking outside of the box and offering more unusual holiday fare. Proteins such as beef tenderloin, lamb and brisket are options for retailers looking to get more creative.

Crab cakes are another protein that can be positioned as part of a holiday meal. Phillips Foods, Inc. offers four levels of crab cakes that depend on the size and quantity of the lump crab they contain, according to Dennis Gavagan, corporate executive chef and global director of R&D. The high-end gourmet option would fit the bill for a festive gathering. "We'll customize the meat blend and the labor profiles," he explains. "The crab cakes are available frozen for the deli department to thaw and heat. One version is uncooked and the other is pre-cooked three-quarters of the way."

Retailers that are invested in a holiday meal program should also offer choices at different price points. For example, one package may provide three sides, while another

may offer five add-ons plus dessert.

"Delis should look at what competitors are doing to help differentiate their departments," Sidari adds. "It's best to have a strategy in place as to the goal and the value/convenience proposition that needs to be communicated to consumers. Holiday meal programs are a big commitment that retailers should take seriously and make a large part of their sales plan."

Marketing And Merchandising

Delis need a top-level commitment to holiday meal programs, and that commitment should be the most obvious part of the department's merchandising.

Superior Farms worked with Nugget Farms to come up with a marketing program for the Easter Leg of Lamb Dinner. This included on-site tear-off coupons, flyers and newspaper ads in local publications. "The stores also promoted the dinner in electronic newsletters sent via e-mail to customers," Gentry says.

Reser's Lakey recommends stores pick a start date for marketing these dinners and then begin setting aside space in the deli cases. "Communication needs to be pervasive week after week with circular ads and signage. Stores need to get creative with merchandising, pricing and retail execution."

To gain sales in this tight time period, it's necessary to execute effectively at the store level. This includes providing products that sell. Out-of-stocks are not acceptable. Retailers can pre-book holiday dinners, which helps control inventory.

"Reser's offers a broad selection of side dishes for retailers that want to use as much open stock as possible," Lakey says. "Some stores find success by bundling packages into a box, but we've found that consumers want to see the meal components. Bundling prices is fine, but we don't recommend packaging in this manner."

The more delis communicate and develop awareness, the better the chance for success with holiday meal programs.

Stores that don't currently offer dinners may have more difficulty getting consumers in the mind-set to purchase meals from their deli departments during the holidays. "Holiday meals is a good segment to be in, but retailers need to realize that they can't switch it on and off by being a meal provider only during the holidays," according to John Morrell's Waterkotte. "For stores that already offer meal packages, it's just a matter of putting a program together and advertising it. Holiday meals are most successful when part of a yearlong program. Delis need to build up to being a holiday meal provider so customers are aware of the offerings."

Delis that provide signature items or become known for a particular side dish will be one step ahead of the game when the holidays roll around. Some manufacturers, such as Sandridge Food, will develop proprietary side dishes for retailers that provide a volume commitment. "We will help retailers coordinate communication with consumers a month before the holiday with in-store point-of-sale materials, brochures, holiday planners

and other vehicles," Sidari explains.

Delis that are dedicated to holiday meal offerings can use these programs to attract more consumers into the meal category all yearlong. "These programs are becoming more popular in this economy, but even when conditions improve, the popularity will remain," believes Ham I Am's Meehan. "Holiday meals are providing consumers with smarter options." **DB**

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Pâté Potential



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARCEL ET HENRI

As part of a holiday offering, pâté brings another dimension to the deli

BY LISA WHITE

Upscale without being pretentious, pâté is a delicacy that has filled a niche in delis over the years. A French word meaning 'paste', pâté originated in the Middle Ages as a pastry crust filling. In Europe, the term specifically refers to a meat paste containing chopped or emulsified liver, but the definition of pâté is more encompassing in the United States., where it may include other meats and vegetables.

Especially during the holidays, pâté can help set retailers apart. "Retailers need to make the commitment to this category for the holidays," according to Karen Mohr, national representative for Charcuterie La Tour Eiffel, a pâté supplier based in Quebec City, QC, Canada. "Our pâté sales

increase between 35 and 40 percent during this time period."

By expanding holiday offerings to include more pâté varieties, delis can capture a piece of specialty-store sales during the lucrative fourth quarter. "Consumers will see their supermarket is up on current trends," Mohr says, adding, "Although pâté should be a staple in delis during the holiday, it also sells well year-round."

BY EXPANDING HOLIDAY OFFERINGS TO INCLUDE MORE PÂTÉ VARIETIES, DELIS CAN CAPTURE A PIECE OF SPECIALTY-STORE SALES DURING THE LUCRATIVE FOURTH QUARTER.

When pâtés are cooked in a crust, they're traditionally called pâté en croûte; when cooked in a mold or some other dish, they're traditionally called pâté en terrine. Americans, however, tend to use the terms pâté and terrine interchangeably.

Today, pâté is produced from a wide range of ingredients and is available in mousse or loaf form. Its texture ranges from smooth to coarse. Probably the most well-known and controversial pâté type is foie gras. This smooth loaf is produced from at least 80 percent goose liver soaked overnight in milk, water or port and marinated in liquor and seasonings. The controversy arises from the practice of force-feeding geese to produce the foie gras.

Pâté also can be made from pork, venison, veal, duck, chicken and pheasant. Vegetarian versions include mushroom, artichoke and eggplant. Even seafood pâté, such as salmon, has become more widespread.

"During the holidays, we typically sell more of our richer pâté, such as Duck with

Cognac, Pheasant with Rosemary and Truffle Mousse," notes Laurie Cummins, president of Alexian Pâtés, Neptune, NJ.

Pâté de campagne, also called country pâté, includes a mixture of ground pork shoulder, pork fat and either pork or chicken liver, all of which is formed into a loaf. "The difference in the country version is a coarse grain, which makes it sliceable rather than spreadable," relates Elodie Jouannel, marketing manager for Brooklyn, NY-based Les

Trois Petits Cochons.

Mousse pâté, which typically includes cream, has a softer texture and is easily spreadable. "Mousse can be served in crocks and spread on crackers or bread," recommends Ariane Daguin, owner/CEO of Newark, NJ-based D'Artagnan. Vegetable and seafood terrines can also be spread on crackers or bread.

According to Yvette Etchepare, director of marketing at Marcel et Henri Charcuterie

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Pâté forestier, or wild mushroom pâté, is a blend of chicken liver, pork, wine and wild mushrooms.

Française, South San Francisco, CA, "Pâté holds up well to acids, so it can be served with salad and vinaigrette dressing."

Pâté is considered a value when compared with other specialty items, such as gourmet cheese. "A half-pound of pâté is

typically about \$5 to \$6 and serves four. It's a break from traditional chips and dip appetizers," Etchepare adds.

While Europeans typically serve pâté as a sandwich filling or part of a salad, Americans typically pair it with baguettes, crackers, gherkins and wine. Pâté's full flavor also complements beer and other bubbly beverages.

One recent trend in this segment is the addition of fruit topping. Last year, Charcuterie La Tour Eiffel introduced a pâté line with fruit coulis on top.

Preparing For The Holidays

Shelf life needs to be top of mind for this highly perishable product. Unopened pâté lasts about eight weeks, while shelf life is limited to between seven and 10 days for opened product. "Shelf life is a challenge, because this product is not a staple in the U.S.," says Sebastien Espinasse, vice president of sales at Fabrique Delices, Hayward, CA. "It's a niche market that is most prominent during the last quarter of the year."

Mohr of Charcuterie La Tour Eiffel recommends retailers check with pâté manufacturers about pre-ordering, since some specialties are produced only seasonally. She recommends inquiring in August and September for holiday availability.

"Before the holidays, delis should review their pâté lines and prepare to add three to four more SKUs," Alexian's Cummins suggests. "Just like cheeses, this category benefits from adding new selections during the fourth quarter."

The current economy may make projec-

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tions difficult, but charcuterie sales are a good indication of the potential for pâté in the deli. "Retailers need to leave as much space as possible for pâté," D'Artagnan's Daguin says. "They should be careful to assess not just what the demand will be over the holidays but the quality that is needed."

"BEFORE THE HOLIDAYS, DELIS SHOULD REVIEW THEIR PÂTÉ LINES AND PREPARE TO ADD THREE TO FOUR MORE SKUs. JUST LIKE CHEESES, THIS CATEGORY BENEFITS FROM ADDING NEW SELECTIONS DURING THE FOURTH QUARTER."

— LAURIE CUMMINS
ALEXIAN PÂTÉS

Holiday Merchandising

Many suppliers provide point-of sale materials and help train retailers to successfully market pâté lines. Staff should be trained on its use and the different varieties, as well as pairings and serving suggestions.

In-store demos are a great way to get consumers to try an item, especially if it is new or unfamiliar. If consumers are already comfortable with pâté, demos in conjunction with complementary foods can increase register rings.

"We recommend cross-merchandising pâté with cheese, bread, wine and cured meat," Espinasse of Fabrique Delices says.

Suppliers also recommend positioning pâté near other French items, such as Brie cheese. Or it can be cross-merchandised in the meat department. Mohr of Charcuterie La Tour Eiffel suggests advising consumers, "Foie gras can be used as a topping for meat, such as beef Wellington or filet mignon,

which are great holiday items."

Sliceable pâté can also be merchandised as part of a charcuterie plate that includes ham and cheese, or it can be cubed and served with fruit. "We advise delis to merchandise pâté in the deli case on a cutting board," adds Jouannel of Les Trois Petits Cochons.

It pays to keep in mind that pâté is an impulse item that benefits from added visibility. "If pâté isn't readily available and in view,

people generally won't ask for it," Marcel et Henri's Etchepare says. She recommends delis position it as an appetizer or first course for a holiday meal.

Alexian's Cummins believes the product or the signage should be highly noticeable so customers know pâté is available. "It should be placed at eye level or at the center of popular entertaining items such as cheese and exotic spreads." **DB**

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The Versatile Choice for Hard Times

Consumers are turning to turkey for health, convenience and economic reasons

BY BOB JOHNSON

Few items fit the bill for a healthful, inexpensive and convenient meal like a turkey sandwich. A traditional food that can thrive in hard times, turkey is relatively inexpensive and incredibly versatile. It's perfect for the ever-increasing number of consumers who are brown bagging it to work, sending their kids to school with homemade sandwiches or opting for sandwich-centric evening meals.

Sliced deli turkey has many strong and growing market opportunities. Even in tough times, there is a strong market for higher-end product that is healthful or more humanely raised. But convenient and economical sandwiches remain the single most important market for this family favorite.

"A ton of sandwiches are eaten at home. If you promote sliced turkey for sandwiches as a convenient and inexpensive meal, you should do all right," says Tony Rao, senior brand manager for Butterball LLC, Gardner, NC. Turkey is the No. 1 deli meat, accounting for 34 percent of all meat sold at the deli, he adds.

It's a sign of the times that more customers are looking to the deli for lower-cost alternatives for their meat-based meals. "Consumers are eating out less, brown-bagging more and spending more money on groceries. Sandwiches are the most popular lunch dish across men, women, and children and the most popular dinner entrée, too. Premium deli meats are still a value for meal solutions when compared to what's available in restaurants, so we don't believe economic conditions should greatly impact the premium category in a negative way," notes Paula Shikany, senior brand manager, Sara Lee Deli, Downers Grove, Ill.

"The Sara Lee Deli C.U.T.S. program is a way to help train deli counter employees to effectively merchandise products through suggestive selling and gives ways to make



the deli counter easier to navigate and more accessible to shop while highlighting certain products/brands at the same time. Deli C.U.T.S. stands for Consumer Understanding and Targeted Strategies," Shikany adds.

While there are still standard flavor profiles, variety and novelty are essential. "The key is to give the consumer a mix of the products they're looking for," notes Jim Reed, president of Hain Pure Protein Corp., New Oxford, PA. "Oven-roasted, smoked and honey-flavored are still the best sellers, but the consumer is looking for new products such as Buffalo flavored or herb flavored."

The deli counter may be one of the few places where consumers are not looking to economize, at least on some items. "Some retailers are lowering price to facilitate volume expectations that result in growth incentives from manufacturers. Others recognize that even in a down economy, consumers may be pulling back on durable goods, electronics and vacations, but they still want to serve their families the best product that they can afford – little luxuries, small indulgences," notes Paul Bulman, vice president for marketing at Creta Farms USA, Lansdale, PA.

"Provide menu and meal solutions that

"CONSUMERS MAY BE PULLING BACK ON DURABLE GOODS, ELECTRONICS AND VACATIONS, BUT THEY STILL WANT TO SERVE THEIR FAMILIES THE BEST PRODUCT THAT THEY CAN AFFORD – LITTLE LUXURIES, SMALL INDULGENCES."

— PAUL BULMAN
CRETA FARMS USA

help consumers 'live the lifestyle' they're actively trying to incorporate into their lives and the lives of their family. Communicate a clear and concise point of difference and brand promise, and why this is relevant to

consumer's everyday life," he advises.

According to Ashley Timmer, marketing manager for Michigan Turkey Producers, Grand Rapids, MI, "We're just starting to get into sliced turkey for delis and we're seeing a lot of demand for what I'd call mid-tier product. What we've seen most demand for is oven-roasted and smoked. The deli can put them to a wide range of uses."

And, while the economy is a major selling point for sliced turkey, natural or humanely raised product is the one bucking the low-price trend. She says the one upper-tier product that continues to grow is turkey raised without antibiotics.

Healthful, Humanely Raised Product Still Thrives

Numerous producers are finding demand for healthful or humanely raised product to be steady, or even growing.

In foodservice, turkey is popular because it's one of the more healthful sources of protein. "Schools, at every level, are incorporating deli programs that include panini bars. In addition, we've found more schools requesting deli meat that doesn't contain added nitrites, antibiotics and hormones. In general, as people become more educated about food



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and its source, their expectations become higher when it comes to the food they eat outside of their homes,” says Gina Asoudegan, communications manager at Applegate Farms, Bridgewater, NJ.

“Our turkey is doing especially well because it’s a more healthful choice, and the raised consciousness among consumers toward health and wellness applies to deli meat. Sliced turkey also sells particularly well to families with young children because it appeals to all ages, making it easy to pack one type of sandwich for everyone in the family,” Asoudegan says.

A large and growing segment of the population is deeply concerned about the humane treatment of animals. For many of these consumers, strong beliefs about treatment of animals trump price as a motivation. “People are really beginning to understand that high-quality food costs more, and they’re willing to pay the price. In regard to meat, our customers understand that it costs more to raise animals humanely and feed them a high-quality vegetarian diet. When customers feel strongly about these issues, they’re willing to pay a premium for meat that’s raised this way. As a result, their purchases are much more belief-driven than



price-driven, allowing for more price elasticity in the natural and organic meat category,” she adds.

Hain has enhanced its products to appeal even more strongly to consumers looking for a more natural product. “We’re at the top end of the turkey category with antibiotic-free

and vegetable-fed turkey,” Reed notes. “The movement of some of these products has slowed down a little bit. We’ve relaunched our product line; we’ve made it more upscale by taking more water out, adding the minimum ingredients and using the lowest salt level possible to give a traditional flavor. It’s



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Low sodium foods have become a multi-billion-dollar sector, and low sodium is a natural for naturally low-in-cholesterol turkey. “We’ve seen a broad interest in lower sodium foods with a growth for the entire category of 17 percent over past four years – \$11 billion for the entire food category with lower sodium. Our data show an increased number of consumers are looking to reduce sodium in their diets while not giving up taste, which is key to the lower-sodium platform. Our newest innovation for Sara Lee Deli is the Sara Lee Lower Sodium bulk deli meats,” Shikany says.

Private label has been steadily growing in the deli turkey category as a whole for 10 or 15 years and now accounts for 38 percent of all sales, according to Butterball’s Rao. But merchandising turkey as more natural or humanely raised is usually most effectively done through the name of a respected producer, rather than the name of the supermarket or deli.

“When consumers pay a premium price for a product with particular attributes such as gluten-free or humanely raised, they want



to trust the brand making these claims. Consumers want companies to be transparent from farm to fork and to know there are systems in place to ensure quality at every step of production. It’s difficult for a private label

to succeed with a product requiring a high level of trust, unless it’s co-branded with a brand that has already established a high level of consumer trust,” explains Applegate’s Asoudegan. **DB**





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Stimulus Package

Using American specialty cheeses to establish a buy-local position

BY JAN FIALKOW

Retailers in strong cheesemaking areas have a natural tie-in that allows them to differentiate their stores from the competition; they can climb on the buy-local bandwagon to become a destination for cheese lovers. Those outside the major production states — California, Wisconsin, Vermont, New York, Oregon — may not be able to strictly tout the buy-local angle, but they can still lay claim to the buy regional or buy American mantles.

“Buy-local is very important depending on where you are. I’m very fortunate to be here

in Wisconsin,” says Steve Ehlers, owner, Larry’s Brown Deer Market, Inc., a single-store operation in Brown Deer, WI. “It’s a great opportunity for me. I buy a lot of artisanal cheese directly from the cheesemakers.”

Even though he is located in one of the strongholds of U.S. cheesemaking, Gordon Edgar, cheese buyer, Rainbow Grocery Cooperative, a single-store operation in San Francisco, CA, has this take on buy-local. “Local cheese is almost anything made in the United States — it’s still closer than Europe. But local is not as simple as it sounds. Defin-

ing local is tricky, especially with cheese. The milk may not be local even if the company making the cheese is.” He cautions other retailers to understand their suppliers’ manufacturing processes.

“Buy-local plays according to where you are,” notes John Gruender, director of sales and marketing, Swiss-American, Inc., a packer, importer and distributor of cheese, based in St. Louis, MO. “Missouri, where we are, is middle-of-the-road in terms of production. We’re No. 10 in terms of dairy production.” He suggests retailers concentrate



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Now more than ever, consumers want solutions for at-home entertaining. Be sure your deli has what your consumers want – Kretschmar's New cut cheeses!



on regional positioning if they can't claim the local banner.

Retailers should take advantage of the strength of the U.S. specialty and artisanal cheese category. "American specialty cheese is a very hot category," claims David Grotenstein, director of operations and purchasing, Garden of Eden Gourmet Market, a 6-store chain based in New York, NY, and the chair of competition judging for the American Cheese Society (ACS), Louisville, KY. "For many consumers, it's a new food. With the number of cheeses emerging and the number of retailers carrying them, it's an exciting time for anyone interested in specialty foods.

"The fine-cheese experience has historically been classic European," he continues. "People visit somewhere, eat a great cheese and then want to find it when they come home. But they can't get the cheese because they had something local. We're coming close to replicating that experience in this country because of all the farmstead and original artisanal U.S. cheeses."

Consumers who appreciate artisanal cheeses look at the category differently than commodity cheese purchasers. "Most of our consumers are looking for local and regional cheeses but not necessarily for a specific category of cheese," Grotenstein explains. "Raw

milk cheeses are more sought after because once people are into artisanal cheese, they start looking for raw milk cheeses because they offer more nuanced flavors."

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ARTISANAL AND
FARMSTEAD
CHEESEMAKERS THAN
LARGE CHAINS.**

According to Tracy Plante-Darrimon, director of Meyenberg Goat Milk Products, Turlock, CA, it's natural for people to want to support where they live. "Consumers are

finding farmstead cheeses at farmers markets and local specialty shops. Local manufacturers can do more demos and that gives consumers a sense of ownership of what they consume."

Positioning Issues

Because they don't have to consider multiple stores in a many different locales, independents and regional chains have an easier time purchasing from artisanal and farmstead cheesemakers than large chains.

"Local is challenging for us because of our size," relates Tim Smith, category manager specialty cheese, The Kroger Co., the 3600-plus store chain based in Cincinnati, OH. "It becomes challenging to do a one-size-fits-all approach. I believe in artisan cheeses and want to take advantage of what they have to offer, but it's a question of scale. Out in the Pacific Northwest, we have a lot of Oregon cheeses. In the eastern part of the country, there are a few suppliers we can use. For the rest of the country, I focus more on American than local.

"We take a more artisan approach than a local approach," he adds. "Local is mostly with Wisconsin and some with Vermont. It depends on the region. Some local stores are carrying local artisan cheeses. One of the

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problems for smaller suppliers is our systems aren't particularly friendly to smaller providers. For us to do a buy-local program, there are two main challenges. The first is paperwork — although we have streamlined some of that. The second is there is an image issue for some small cheesemakers. They think because they can't supply the whole chain we aren't interested, but we're willing to work with them to supply a small number of stores."

Much could be done to help retailers connect with the cheesemakers, according to Jim Boyce, CEO, Marin French Cheese Co., Petaluma, CA. "All retailers, from small to major chains, have programs to deal with local products, but we're missing opportunities in a lot of retailers. Only one state — Wisconsin — assists its cheesemakers. It offers Wisconsin as a solution to the retailers. Local marketing boards could offer help but they aren't doing so."

He believes retailers also need to do their part. "Local retailers could offer products from the state, or if they're not in a cheese producing area, from the country. They should encourage manufacturers to do more demos. They could do ad slicks for just local products. Some state marketing groups have instant redeemable coupons that spur sales."



PHOTO COURTESY OF BEEHIVE CHEESE CO.

Boyce understands the retail terrain has shifted, "It's tough. In these times, retailers run a risk because consumers are pulling back. They have to be cautious. The number of varieties [of American specialty cheese] they carry depends on whether they're high-end specialty cheese stores, supermarkets or

club stores. I don't think we're going to see any jump-starts. Specialty cheese rode the wave when consumers were hitting credit lines to live better lifestyles. That kind of growth is probably over," he concludes.

Heather Fiscalini, co-owner of Fiscalini Cheese Company, Modesto, CA, certainly believes in buy-local, but she thinks retailers outside of the locale where a cheese is produced should not be positioning specialty cheese as regional. "We hurt ourselves when we regionalize in another area. People in California don't know if a cheese from Virginia, for example, is great. And people from Virginia many not know what the great cheeses from California are. America is producing great cheeses that have won many prizes nationally and internationally.

"We had a situation with our cheese," she continues. "Wegmans was carrying them and not doing as well as they had hoped because they had just included us with the California cheeses. I suggested that they use POS material to tout the awards we've won — and that made all the difference. Just saying a cheese comes from California doesn't mean anything — you have to know something about the cheese."

Sampling and demos are essential to selling artisanal and specialty cheeses, whether they're sold under a local, regional or national banner. Bill Boersma, owner of Bravo Farms in Visalia, CA, says, "Most people have their own comfort zone and won't buy anything they don't know. But sampling is a double-edged sword. Is the person doing the sampling a 'treat' lady or is it someone who has some emotion and knows the cheese?"

"I've tried to go out and sample locally, but the success depends on the traffic in the



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store," he continues. "Sometimes you have a demo set up and something happens in the world and people stay home and watch TV — like when Princess Diana died!"

Pricing Issues

Conventional wisdom would suggest specialty and artisanal cheeses made in this country should be less expensive than comparable cheeses made in Europe or other areas, but that's not always the case.

"The better U.S. cheeses can be a difficult sell because there are no price advantages over their European counterparts," explains Garden of Eden's Grotenstein. "Consumers think the American cheeses should be cheaper because they're not imported, but because they come from small farms and small cheesemakers rather than large European makers, the price advantage disappears. In addition, small U.S. makers control their milk source, which the large European makers may not do.

"Some small cheesemakers may have only 15 cows," he continues. "These cheeses present a unique experience and it's important for retailers to share these stories. Many of the 'small' European cheeses are no longer as good as they once were because increased demand for them has meant the cheesemak-



PHOTO COURTESY OF WISCONSIN MILK MARKETING BOARD

ers have had to increase their milk sources and now they don't have the kind of control they once had."

A mature European industry in contrast to a young American industry also con-

tributes to the price of U.S. cheese. "The hardest thing is explaining why U.S. product is more expensive than European," says Rainbow's Edgar. "The U.S. artisanal cheese movement is still in its infancy. The Euro-

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peans are not buying new land and building new facilities. A lot of what we consider European specialty cheese is considered commodity cheese over there." He notes that the weak dollar has been a big benefit to U.S. cheesemakers because it makes imported cheese more expensive; a strong dollar would make the price differential between U.S. and imported cheeses wider.

Marin's Boyce maintains there are many variables that make up the price/value proposition. "American specialty cheese is not a clear picture. There are a series of overlays that affect the economics. If the price points are lower [for an American equivalent] than for the European import, then the argument is to buy local. But if the buyer is looking for a certain category that's better supplied by European or other off-shore producers, that's the direction to go."

Telling the Story

When consumers are paying top dollar for a product, they want to know why that product demands the price. Retailers can use this as an opportunity to tell the story behind the cheese. The cheesemaker's background, the production process, the location of the dairy, the types of animals, the sustainability

of the operation are all topics that consumers find intriguing and that position the department as the place to go for specialty and artisanal cheese.

One way for retailers to get to American cheesemakers is through ACS. Larry's Ehlers, who has judged the ACS competition and co-chaired its conference, explains, "It's important for retailers to get involved with ACS and meet the makers. Consumers want to hear about the cheesemakers when they're paying top dollar. And being able to tell the story gives a retailer an edge.

"We're trying to get better communication between the retailers and the producers but it's not always feasible, so it's up to wholesalers and brokers to play a role. Independents can differentiate themselves by having this open communication, but a good broker or distributor can help the larger chains. European Imports in Chicago has folks who come to Wisconsin and meet the cheesemakers. They pass the information, the stories on and this helps the big retailers position themselves. Of course, the big chains then have to educate their own personnel."

Another important resource for retailers is the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board (WMMB), Madison, WI.

"The WMMB has a huge website with great stories about cheesemakers. The information is there for whoever wants it," Ehlers explains. "Someone has to dedicate time to find it and then pass it along. The Wisconsin Master Cheese Maker Program is another resource. Some of the folks who have participated in this are now producing large quantities of cheese. They can sell to the large chains that should be using their stories to sell their cheese."

Sharing the sustainability and environmental aspects of the production process also helps consumers choose which U.S. cheeses to buy. "Environmental and sustainability issues are a nice story if the retailer can communicate it," notes Swiss-American's Gruender. "Farmstead producers are definitely practitioners — they even use animal waste to power their plants."

According to Garden of Eden's Grotenstein, "Consumers in New York are more and more interested in sustainability and environmental issues, but I can't speak to the whole country. I don't know whether it enters into their thought process. But I do know that most farmsteads are sustainable by nature because they have to maintain their own herds."

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The Next Wave

What's new in the world of Italian cheeses

BY KAREN SILVERSTON

The term “new” Italian cheese is somewhat of a misnomer. Yes, totally new cheeses are being created in Italy, but Italy produces hundreds of cheeses that have not been available in the United States. When they are finally imported, we tend to think of them as new, even though many of them have a long and rich heritage.

“When we speak about what’s new in Italian cheese, we’re talking about cheeses now coming more readily to the American public. They have history and stories behind their names. We also have new cheeses that are the creation of someone with a passion to enhance something already special, bring it to a different level, and then bring it to the market,” says Lou Di Palo, co-owner of Di Palo’s Fine Foods, New York City, NY.

Southern Italy

Some of Di Palo’s newest cheeses come from Basilicata in southern Italy, where Caciocavallo is king. Caciocavallo Podolico is made from milk of the Podolico cow, a breed found only in southern Italy. It adapted long ago to Basilicata’s hills, extremes in temperature and wild pastures.

“Each of the 20 regions of Italy has its unique nature. The area, breed and climate will give different characteristics in milk and that gives a different taste to the cheese. We have Caciocavallo Silano DOP [Protected Denomination of Origin] as well as Caciocavallo Ragusano DOP available in the store, and they’re made with different milk from a different breed of cow,” says Di Palo.

Ricotta Dura Lucano is another new cheese from Basilicata. A cone-shaped dried ricotta made from sheep’s and goat’s milk, it can be shaved over pasta or sliced thin and accompanied by fruit preserves for serving as an appetizer. “The goat milk gives it a sweetness, making it different from other dried Ricottas,” adds Di Palo.

Savello USA, Wilkes Barre, PA, is importing an as-yet-unnamed new sheep’s milk cheese from Sicily. The small, fresh wheels are available plain or with peppercorns and



Blu di Bufala

PHOTO COURTESY OF FOREVER CHEESE

crushed red pepper. Mild and pleasant on the palate, they're eaten as a table cheese with extra virgin olive oil and perhaps anchovies or sun-dried tomatoes. The soft and creamy texture is similar to Caciotta. "People sometimes refer to a smaller-size sheep's milk cheese that is on the fresh side as a Caciotta because of its softness and size, not because of the type of milk," explains Cesare Gallo, Savello's president. Larger 15-pound wheels, aged from five months to more than a year, are available plain or with peppercorns.

At the toe of the boot lies the mountainous area of Calabria. "Cheeses from Calabria are not well-known here," notes Maria Woodley, senior marketing and promotions officer, Italian Trade Commission Food and Wine Center, New York, NY.

Pecorino Calabrese Riserva, aged up to two years, is a sheep's milk wheel weighing 11 pounds. It's taller, larger, and more intense than Pecorino Calabrese Classico, a buttery 3½-pound wheel aged five to eight months. Pecorino Monte Poro is slightly softer and aged four to five months. Pecorino Crotonese is slightly piquant and aged six to seven months. "They're made by one cooperative. They taste different because the milk comes from specific areas, unpolluted, in the wild. The cheese is moist and fragrant, different from Pecorino from anywhere," says Franco Gallo, president of Panorama International, San Francisco, CA.

Presenting cheese in context with the other foods of the region creates an impression of what is local and authentic. For example, a tasting at New York, NY-based Astor Center presented cheeses of Fattoria della Piana paired with red wines made from Calabria's Gaglioppo grape and with local delicacies such as hand-packed *Delizie di Calabria* vegetables *sott'olio* (preserved under oil), *Giacinto Callipo* tuna in olive oil, and *Viride* brand *Bruzio DOP* extra virgin olive oil imported by Savello USA. Calabrian sweets include jam, honey or a leaf-wrapped ball of baked caramelized figs.

From Puglia, at the heel of the boot, comes *Ricotta Bucottina Cone*, a dry ricotta cone made from buffalo milk, imported by Forever Cheese, Long Island City, NY.

Central Italy

In Lazio, small-scale production of *Cacio Fiore* revives a local tradition dating back to the first century. A 1-pound square with a white rind, *Cacio Fiore* is made from raw sheep's milk coagulated with thistle flower grown in the producer's garden. "Many people are familiar with cheeses from Spain and Portugal that are produced with thistle flower. This was the first time I had heard of one in Italy being made with it," explains



Lucifero

PHOTO COURTESY OF ANCO FINE CHEESE

Michele Buster, owner of Forever Cheese.

From Castel San Gimignano in Tuscany's Siena province, the Caseificio Pinzani line of cheese produced by Guido Pinzani since 1969 is becoming more available in this country. *Zafferano* is a 14-ounce buttery raw-milk Pecorino made with local saffron. "Italy has several areas that are very famous for saffron. One is in San Gimignano near Pinzani; the others are in Sardinia and Sicily," says Savello's Gallo.

"When people don't want cow's milk, we go to Spain's Manchego or Italy's Pecorino. What Pecorino has over Manchego is there are so many different sizes, flavor profiles and textures, it's impossible not to hit a hot spot for a customer," relates Michael Perlmeter, co-owner, Molto Formaggio, The Cheese Shop, Inc., Dallas, TX.

Campania Felix in Campania produces *Mozzarella Di Bufala DOP*. According to Enrico Parente, president, buffalo mozzarella is "made from milk that has been collected from a specific herd of buffalo, at least at Campania Felix. It is always from the same

herd, eating the same grass and being cared for by the same people. Buffalo milk is much richer and is significantly higher in protein and fat" than cow's milk. The company's newest cheese *Tartufella* — mozzarella with truffles — "has won three awards in the last three years at the World Cheese Awards. *Tartufella* won a gold medal in Dublin, Ireland, in 2008," he proclaims proudly.

Parente says retailers need to understand that fresh *Mozzarella Di Bufala* should not be eaten cold, and they need to pass that information along to their customers. It should be taken out of the refrigerator at least two hours before serving. Alternatively, the sealed bag can be placed in warm water for about 15 minutes before serving.

Northern Italy

Lagorai debuted in Trentino in November 2008 and at Edina, MN-based Lund's and Byerly's in May 2009. The soft-textured 30-pound wheel made from pasteurized milk has conspicuous, irregular holes throughout the paste and is aged 90 days. "*Lagorai* is a good

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example of what's new. It has depth of flavor without having a bite and has the softer texture Americans prefer for an eating cheese. It really hit the mark," says Dennis Panozzo, president of Chicago, IL-based Monti Trentini USA LLC, the importing subsidiary of Casearia Monti Trentini SpA, Grigno, Italy. Panozzo observes younger Italians and Americans have similar taste preferences. "They're not into the big sharp Provolone and piquant Gorgonzola. They prefer softer — in taste and texture."

Cheeses associated with a stagionatore-affinatore (cheese maturer) are beginning to show up in this country. "Stagionatori are people whose life is cheese," says Di Palo of Di Palo's Fine Foods. "In most cases, they don't make cheese, but they alter it. They might pack it in hay, put ash around it, encrust it with truffle or mushroom or wrap it in leaves — whether from the local forest areas or chestnut or walnut leaves — and then age it. They may borrow from a Veneto tradition — taking a cheese and maturing it longer than it was traditionally matured but under a special condition. I've met stagionatori in the German-speaking part of Italy who will wrap tea or seaweed around cheese."

In Treviso, Latteria Perenzin makes and ages Medieval Castel as it may have been done in the Middle Ages. Montasio DOP, aged 18 to 24 months, "has a nutty full flavor, with a balance as close to perfection as possible. Since this is aged longer than the fresh product and is a truly artisan cheese, it will be more expensive but still reasonable in today's market — and well worth it," notes

Parmigiano-Reggiano And Grana Padano

Parmigiano-Reggiano and Grana Padano can hardly be called new with 1,000 years and 800 years of history respectively, but new niches for these venerable cheeses are generating renewed excitement.

Only one or two wheels of Razza Bianca Modenese Parmigiano-Reggiano are made each day. The Bianca Modenese cow gives less milk than other breeds, but the milk is unusually rich. Each wheel is carefully handcrafted and matured for 30 months to develop its complex flavor profile of flowers and dry fruit undertones. By request, Anco Fine Cheese, Fairfield, NJ, will help create fall tasting events at store level, including bringing people in from Italy to educate consumers to understand the

value of the cheese. "Stores get the best results when you organize events to educate your customers," says Emmanuelle Hofer Louis, director of marketing.

Il Villaggio brand is making Parmigiano-Reggiano DOP available as Parmigiano-Reggiano Snacking Cubes and Parmigiano-Reggiano Shavings in resealable, eco-friendly, easy-to-open-and-close cups that marry convenience with superior quality and authenticity, says Hofer Louis.

Grana Padano Riserva DOP, aged 20 to 30 months, is new at Di Palo's Fine Foods New York, NY. Riserva is a new designation. Wheels may be individually retested at 20 months and those meeting requirements are branded Riserva by the Consorzio di Tutela Grana Padano **DB**

Margaret Cicogna, specialist in Italian cheese and consultant to Atalanta Corporation, Elizabeth, NJ.

The Piedmont-based Luigi Guffanti Company has a worldwide reputation. "Giovanni Fiori is a 5th generation stagionatore for every type of cheese and has been with us at the Fancy Food Show for the last seven or eight years. You'll see the label in Whole Foods. In northern Italy, top restaurants have 'Selection of cheeses by Guffanti' on the menu," explains John Ciano, president, Crystal Food Import Corporation, Lynn, MA.

Bruno and Alfio Gritti inaugurated their buffalo milk dairy in Bergamo, Lombardy, in 2006 and now produce more than 25 types of fresh, semi-ripened and ripened cheese. "Blu di Bufala has a milky sweetness, complexity and depth. Quadrello di Bufala is a washed rind buffalo-milk cheese produced in the same format and tradition of cheesemaking as Taleggio. Its rind is drier and has some deeper grooves. The flavor is rich, milky and irresistible," says Forever Cheese's Buster.

Also new from Bergamo province are goat milk cheeses. "Goat's milk is pretty hot for Italy in general. Our first goat's milk blue, VerdeCapra, is wonderfully creamy and pleasantly tangy — its well-balanced flavor makes it perfect for the cheese plate. The moisture level is similar to Dolce Gorgonzola, a deliciously soft texture," adds Buster. Stracapa is a washed rind goat cheese, creamy and sweet.

"VerdeCapra is one of the cheeses that

independent retailers and chefs we supply are excited about," says Todd Druhot, director of imports for Atlanta Foods International, Atlanta, GA.

According to Emmanuelle Hofer Louis, director of marketing, Anco Fine Cheese, Fairfield, NJ, Lucifero, an ultra-creamy 26.5-pound Gorgonzola wheel laced with hot peppers, is a cheese from Lombardy sure to delight holiday buyers. "Lucifero not only pleases the eye but also has a unique flavor profile. The hot peppers don't overwhelm — their spiciness complements the sweet and savory taste of the cheese," she explains.

"Fresh cheeses from Piedmont — the Robiolas, the Caprinos, La Tur, things of that ilk — have gained much more popularity. We're selling them on a par with French cheese," relates Molto Formaggio's Perlmeier.

Piedmont's new Roccaverano dairy added Reginella della Langhe, a small 2-milk square, to its line.

Also from Piedmont is Prataiola Mignon, a fresh, 100-gram cheese with an impeccable white mold coat, imported by Crystal Food from Caseificio Pezzana. Its small size and versatility have made it successful in Europe, where it's grilled, warmed in the oven or microwave, fried in a pan like a steak Milanese, or wrapped with prosciutto crudo or speck and then grilled or cooked.

"When grilling steak, grill the steak first, then put the cheese alongside and put them together before the Prataiola gets too soft," suggests Ciano. **DB**

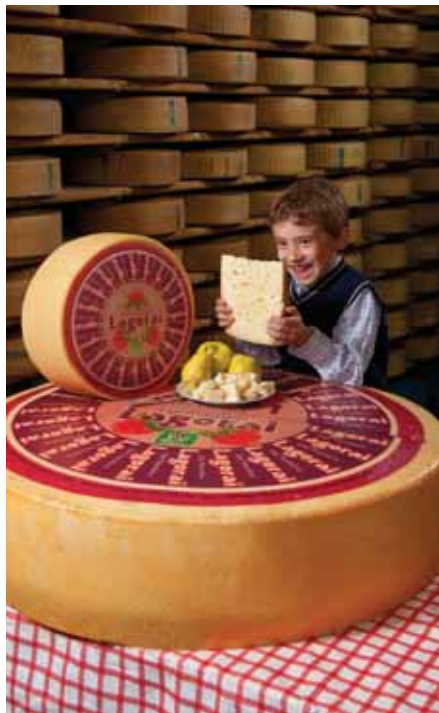


PHOTO COURTESY OF MONTI TRENTINI

Food Safety Enhancement Act Clears Hurdle

The Food Safety Enhancement Act of 2009 passed its first test in Congress, gaining approval from the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health by a voice vote on June 10. The legislation grants the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) expanded authority and resources to better ensure the safety of the nation's food supply.

The act imposes a \$500 annual registration fee on each food facility to increase funds for the FDA's food-safety operations and requires the food industry to make it easier for the FDA to track tainted products by keeping accurate records of a food's origin and where it is distributed. The \$1,000 fee found in earlier drafts of the bill was reduced; this change, in addition to a cap that ensures that no single company can be charged more than \$175,000, cleared the way for support from industry.

The bill's supporters also agreed to replace a sweeping record-keeping requirement with a provision that asks the FDA to study how industry should maintain its records.

"We're very encouraged by the progress that's being made with this bill," said Eileen Jarvis, director of federal affairs for the Grocery Manufacturers Association. "It's a bipartisan bill and it contains many food-safety proposals that we've advocated for years, such as the requirement that all food and beverage manufacturers conduct a food-safety risk analysis that identifies potential sources of contamination and means of control and documents them in a food-safety plan." Jarvis also lauded the provision that gives the FDA authority to establish safety standards for fresh fruits and vegetables.

Jarvis stressed that the registration fees should not be used to pay for inspections. "We agree with giving the FDA new resources, but we remain concerned about eroding consumer confidence by having the appearance that industry is paying for its own watchdog," she said.

A related Senate bill, S. 510, still awaits action.

Flaws In The Case Against BPA

30.jun.09

The New York Times

Gina Kolata

<http://tierneylab.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/30/flaws-in-the-case-against-bpa/?partner=rss&emc=rss>

The claims about the dangers of the chemical bisphenol-A, or BPA, get a skeptical look in a report by a nonpartisan, nonprofit group, STATS.

The chemical is in hard, clear plastic bottles and the liners of canned goods. There are claims that it has estrogen-like effects that might accelerate puberty, cause neurological damage, interfere with chemotherapy and increase the risk for heart disease, diabetes and cancer. Last year, the FDA's expert panel admonished the agency for assuring consumers the chemical was safe.

STATS has a different view:

Missing in this debate is that it's not just 'industry groups' that think BPA shouldn't be banned — or just industry-sponsored studies that say it's safe. Scientists, regulators, politicians in Europe, Australia, and Japan have all rejected the evidence that the chemical is harmful as methodologically flawed, badly conducted, or irrelevant — with some warning that banning it could actually endanger the public. Now that the National Institutes of Health has acknowledged that it funded a lot of poorly designed research on BPA — the very research that is touted as evidence that the chemical is deadly — it's time to ask whether America has been spun by clever marketing rather than clever science.



Martin Mitchell, technical director of the Refrigerated Foods Association (RFA) and president of Certified Laboratories, compiles *TechNews*.



The information has been compiled from press releases, news articles and government announcements and policy clarifications. Additional information may be obtained by contacting RFA by phone at 770-452-0660 or online at www.refrigeratedfoods.org.

Meeting on *Listeria monocytogenes* Risk Assessment

CFSAN Constituent Update
June 9, 2009

The FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition (FDA/CFSAN) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (USDA/FSIS) announced in the June 9 Federal Register (74 FR 27276 <<http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2009/E9-13378.htm>>) that they would hold a public meeting on Tuesday, June 23, in Washington, D.C., to inform stakeholders about issues concerning the recently initiated FDA-USDA interagency risk assessment of the foodborne pathogen *Listeria monocytogenes*.

The purpose of the interagency *Listeria monocytogenes* risk assessment is to determine the effect on public health of current industry practices and potential interventions to reduce or prevent *Listeria monocytogenes* contamination in some ready-to-eat foods that are sliced, prepared or packaged in retail facilities.

At the meeting, CFSAN and FSIS officials presented information on the background, approach, scope, and data needs for the assessment, as well as hear comments from interested parties.

FDA and FSIS invited interested individuals, organizations, and other stakeholders to participate in the meeting held from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the L'Enfant Plaza Hotel, 480 L'Enfant Plaza, SW., Washington, D.C.

FDA and FSIS also invited interested persons and organizations to submit comments on the risk assessment, regardless of whether or not they attend the June 23 meeting.

Blast From The Past



Fiscalini Cheese Company

The Fiscalini Cheese Company, Modesto, CA, began life as the Chorro Dairy, which was located in San Luis Obispo. This picture, taken about 1910, shows a dairy truck used to deliver milk to customers by Mateo Battista Fiscalini, who emigrated from Switzerland in approximately 1886. He was the great-grandfather of current owner John Fiscalini.

In 1912, Mateo's son John Battista Fiscalini moved to Modesto and began the dairy that is presently called Fiscalini Farms. Marie Fiscalini, 92-year-old mother of the current owner, is still living on the dairy, as are her son and his family. The company looks forward to celebrating its centennial in 2012.



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