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COVER STORY



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IN MEMORIAM



Donald John Tyson, known to everyone as "Don," son of Tyson Foods, Inc. founder John W. Tyson, and father of current company Chairman John H. Tyson, passed away Jan. 6, 2011, at the age of 80, after a brief illness. He was the former chairman of the board and CEO of Tyson Foods, Inc., which he led through phenomenal growth in the 1970s and 1980s.

Don had moved up progressively in the company leadership, being named president in 1966, and then becoming chairman and CEO in 1967 when his father and stepmother were both tragically killed in an automobile-train accident in Springdale. He continued to serve as chairman, president and CEO until 1983.

Don was known by all to work hard, but also to play hard. He was famous the world over for his "No Bad Days" outlook on life, and well known for telling everyone, "I don't have time to have a bad time." He was also well known for his active involvement in state and national politics, having been led by his father to believe it is a citizen's duty to take part in the political and electoral process.

Don also created and led the Tyson Family Foundation, which among other things provides scholarships for post secondary students from communities where Tyson Foods has operations. He was a well-known philanthropist in Arkansas and elsewhere, supporting countless causes, primarily in the fields of education, conservation and the arts.

COMING NEXT ISSUE IN APRIL/MAY 2011

COVER STORY
Eating Better

FEATURE STORIES
Hispanic Foods
Mediterranean Food

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Rotisserie

DELI MEAT
Artisan Meats
Turkey

MERCHANDISING REVIEWS
Pasta & Sauces
Sandwiches
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Transition



Maxx Sherman has been appointed president of Marin French Cheese Company, Petaluma, CA, with responsibility for sales, marketing, new product development and all operational activities. Sherman has 30 years of experience in the specialty food industry. When he joined Marin French in September 2004, he created the national sales and marketing department. Since then, sales have increased over 50 percent. During the past six years the company has secured strong positions in more than 30 states as well as numerous countries in Asia.

www.marinfrenchcheese.com

New Products



NEWLY DESIGNED HOT MEAL PACKAGING

BagcraftPapercon, Chicago, IL, has redesigned its Hot Meal ToGo! Deli Packaging product line that keeps food flavorful and crispy. The natural kraft paper is grease resistant. Ecocraft ToGo! Hot Meal Bags are made of 98.5 percent biomass paper, a renewable resource. The window is made from a thin anti-fog film that provides clarity under high-stress conditions. The window size and clarity are critical to ensure consumers will make the 'impulse' purchase.

www.bagcraft.com



ALL-NATURAL FETA SPREADS

Grecian Delight, Elk Grove Village, IL, announces a new line of all natural Feta Spreads. Available in four flavor varieties: Garden Feta, Creamy Feta, Zesty Feta and Sun-Dried Tomato Feta. Add excitement to any meal with these delicious, bold, and unique Feta Spreads. These on-trend restaurant quality dips/spreads are incredibly versatile and can be used in many recipes or by themselves. All are available in 8-ounce containers and packed 8 per case (retail).

www.greciandelight.com



HEALTHY CRACKERS

Partners, Kent, WA, introduces the Get Movin' Snack line, which specifically fills the void for healthier cracker options. The line launches with four savory flavors: Honey Wheat, Olive Oil & Sea Salt, Roasted Garlic & Rosemary, and 4 Cheese. Packed in convenient single-serving size bags. Retail and foodservice packs are available. Each serving contains only 70 to 90 calories. The crackers contain no preservatives or hydrogenated oils.

www.crackersrock.com

Announcement



NEW PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

The Westland Company, Huizen, The Netherlands, launched a key repositioning campaign focused on Old Amsterdam's irresistible taste in 2010. An all-in-one retail demo sampler kit, designed to assist consumers with an invaluable immediate understanding of this award-winning cheese at point-of-purchase has been used nationwide. In 2011 Old Amsterdam will launch new promotions and merchandising material again to encourage trial and drive sales again. Available in a case with two half wheels and exact weight. Imported by Norseland Inc.

www.oldamsterdam.com

New Products



NEW GOURMET DIPS

Robert Rothschild Farm, Urbana, OH, has added five new gourmet food items focusing on their popular dip category. The new dips are: Anna Mae's Wing Dip inspired by hot wings and tangy blue cheese; Blood Mary Dip, a blend of tomato, dill, lemon and Worcestershire; Blue Cheese & Chive Dip, the distinct, tangy flavor of blue cheese complemented by chives and black pepper; Mediterranean Dip, a blend of Kalamata olives, roasted red peppers, capers and spices; and Smoky Caesar Dip, made with garlic, peppercorns, Parmesan cheese, shallots and a hint of smoky flavor.

www.roberttrothschild.com



BONE-IN AND BONELESS WINGS

Tyson Foods, Inc., Springdale, AR, introduces Tyson Signature Ready Bone-in chicken wings and Tyson Red Label Boneless chicken wings. Tyson Signature Ready Bone-in wings allow operators to customize by freshly tossing wings in sauce. Wings come uncooked and fully cooked in varieties that can go straight from freezer to fryer or high-heat oven. Tyson Red Label Boneless wings deliver the best boneless wing attributes, based on extensive consumer insight and sales data. Tyson chicken wings are sure to satisfy customers' wing cravings with every serving.

www.tysonfoodservice.com/wings



NEW FLAVORS AND PACKAGING

Venus Wafers, Hingham, MA, has added Rosemary and Seeded Whole Grain flavors to its popular Nejames Lavasch line. The line's updated package design adds color, appetizing photography suggesting usage and serving suggestions. Nejames Lavasch are hearty and flavorful, crisp and crunchy flatbreads available in two sizes — a half-sheet Deli Style and a full-sheet Restaurant Style — in the following flavors: Multi-seed (Deli and Restaurant Style), Sesame (Deli and Restaurant Style), Rosemary (Deli Style) and Seeded Whole Grain (Restaurant Style).

www.venuswafers.com

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

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by Jim Prevor, Editor-in-Chief

Put Deli Back Into The Deli

By quirk of fate, I wound up living in a country club community built around numerous golf courses and tennis courts — though I play neither golf nor tennis. I do, however, frequent the six restaurants on site, and I write this column from the deli.

They served my matzo ball soup and I just went up to the sandwich bar where a man who actually knows how these things should be done cut me a voluminous sandwich from the tip of a hot tongue. It is, for me, a rare delicacy.

The management here is eagle-eyed with respect to the clientele. Unlike many equity country clubs, there is no requirement to spend a minimum amount of money in the restaurants or spa. This has created a culture where management feels obliged to offer the kind of food people here want and will actually buy.

Thus, my tongue sandwich.

Of course, this restaurant, filled to the brim and with a line out the door, would fail almost everywhere in America. Indeed, it will fail here in another decade or so as a new generation comes in.

The big daily special is the “scoop” salad — a mixed green salad topped with a choice of a scoop of chicken salad, tuna salad, shrimp salad, egg salad, whitefish salad, etc., with each day featuring one “low-cal” scoop. It’s the most popular thing on the menu, and I can vividly remember my grandmother dressing up to take me to lunch and it is, precisely, what she would order.

This place takes soup seriously as well. The management e-mails the monthly soup cycle to everyone in the community so you can time your visit to each restaurant to get your favorite soup. The concession to age: Many are now offered in low-sodium versions.

The menus sometimes promote specific brands. The hot dogs, the menu explains, are Nathan’s Famous, as are the crinkle cut french fries. The aficionados whisper among themselves that Nathan’s french fries are made from round white potatoes, which produce a moister, tastier fry than the long russet potato used in most fast-food places.

The menu includes breakfast for lunch, and it offers a full assortment of bagels and smoked fish, plus special preparations such as matzo brei.

When you sit down, they bring both a breadbasket filled with crackers and pretzel bread and a bowl of pickled treats. Half sour pickles, sour garlic dills, pickled green tomatoes, red peppers and more.

I love the food. It’s delicious; it’s moderately priced; the service is good, and for a Jewish boy born in Brooklyn and raised in Long Island, it brings back memories of going to Nathan’s with my family, standing on line in

Waldbaum’s or at an “appetizing” store to buy lox and nova, sturgeon, sable, baked salmon, white fish, blue fish and scallion cream cheese.

I remember when my grandparents retired to Florida that, almost every day for lunch, my grandmother would prepare my grandfather a Hebrew National salami sandwich on toasted rye bread with seeds and deli mustard, with a sour pickle on the side.

Now two things have happened. First, the generation that ate this way — and the culinary culture that was built around these foods — is passing. Second, when supermarkets took on full-service delis and decided to roll them out all across America, they brought the concept to places that never ate this way.

The great positive side of this is that the supermarket deli has proved to be remarkably versatile. In Texas, it may have a Mexican food bar and in California a sushi bar. All across the country, the deli is home for pizza and chicken programs — both fried and rotisserie.

As consumer health expectations and quality standards transformed, the deli changed as well. Rare today is the pimento loaf, and high-quality meats are common.

Sandwich programs across the land offer things that appeal to the contemporary shopper in that region and to that particular store’s demographic.

Today’s vast assortment of prepared foods provides a powerful reason to go to the supermarket deli rather than a restaurant when buying a family meal. Where else can you find everyone’s favorites in one place?

Yet, this very strength is also an enormous weakness. The traditional deli, whether Jewish or Italian, was actually a type of food — so there was something to promote much as one might promote pizza. Those who would promote it had a vested interest in building demand for that particular type of food.

The marketing challenge for the supermarket deli today is that it is so diverse it isn’t in the business of building demand for any particular food. So it either sells generic concepts, such as convenience or quality, or it subdivides and sells its pizza program or sandwich program as separate entities.

We have to work the situation and these are the best of the alternatives. But watching the happy folks order their favorite treats — pastrami on rye, a Reuben sandwich, a potato knish — is a reminder there’s something to be said for selling deli as deli. **DB**



James F. Prevor



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by Lee Smith, Publisher

Changing Patterns Of Healthy Eating

Wal-Mart recently announced a 5-year plan to make its packaged goods healthier by lowering unhealthy salts, fats and sugars, in addition to dropping its prices on fruits and vegetables. Personally, I think Wal-Mart has more power than any government agency and I'm glad to hear it's using that power for positive change. I'm just not sure that it's enough or that the timing is as aggressive as it should be.

What I do believe is the recession is going to have a long-lasting effect on the dining habits of many Americans. As a country we're eating out less and finding tremendous savings afforded by a little home cooking. People are finding out cooking doesn't take all that long and it's not as difficult as they imagined. For these reasons, retailers have a golden opportunity to regain market share while promoting healthier eating habits.

I say this from a position not of promoting sacrifice and pain but of relearning the joy of eating. I also say this from personal experience.

Let me explain. I was in terrific shape when I was younger. I never had a weight problem until I left the stores and started working in the office as a buyer. Ever since, weight control has been my nemesis and, quite frankly, I'd had it and wanted to end the battle. If I was going to be old and fat, so be it. Let's blame it on genes.

However, I still wanted to be healthy, so I decided to start eating healthier and focus on better food. Initially, I just got rid of everything that contained added trans fat. I cut back on red meat and started to eat more fresh fruit, vegetables and seafood. I started making a list of all the "good" powerhouse foods I should include every day — olive oil, olives, almonds, garlic, yogurt, blueberries, seafood, broccoli, spinach, whole grains, aged cheeses, beans, sweet potatoes, etc.

My shopping list morphed into something totally new, something that included organic yogurt, hummus, whole-grain breads, multigrain pita, rotisserie chicken, olives, stuffed grape leaves, whole-muscle turkey and roast beef, and fine cheeses. We increased the amount of fresh fruit and vegetables and seafood we ate. And, surprisingly, the grocery bill started to decline. Turns out all the really good stuff is much more satisfying so it costs less in the long run.

We also started to eat out less and, instead, found prepared food options. Rotisserie chicken was and still is a staple. So is hummus. Delis that had quality, in-house prepared foods became our new outlet for "restaurant" meals. The end result is that the weight started to slowly melt away — and I'm still losing. More important is that I did it without deprivation. I say this not as a

new diet mantra because I still have a long way to go and I'm not going to predict results. Rather I say this but because my own experience is that retail has the answers, if we want to pursue the options.

The greatest misconception in American food shopping is the belief that fine food and healthy eating cost more than unhealthy mediocre or bad food. Eating out costs more and cheap packaged foods cost more. Sugary cereal, snack cakes, chips and candy are some of the most expensive foods anyone can buy. Broccoli will fill you up faster than potato chips at half the price.

The other misconception is that healthy food doesn't taste good. The snack we had this evening was a small piece of Pleasant Ridge Reserve, blueberries and a pear. It was also our dessert and I didn't crave anything else the rest of the night, and it didn't cost more than sitting down and devouring a bag of pretzels.

There's no reason an in-store bakery should be carrying baked goods made with partially hydrogenated oils or blueberry muffins made with soy protein and blue dye #1. There's no reason a deli can't carry roasted beets and Brussel sprouts, baked sweet potatoes, stuffed acorn squash, and whole-grain salads. The use of partially hydrogenated fats in fryers is a tragedy.

Years ago, a kitchen in every deli department was necessary if a retailer wanted to sell fresh prepared foods. Today, manufacturers have the expertise and technical skills to do it for you. Distribution and packaging have improved to the point where short-shelf-life products are viable alternatives. Retailers just have to be willing to pay a little more and believe consumers will pay the difference for top quality offerings.

Deli and produce departments need to lead the way. For the most part, there will be few people like myself who can make the changes on their own. Guidance is needed and the choices have to taste good. Preaching is unnecessary but options are mandatory. **DB**



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From Everyday To Exceptional

Supermarket catering has untapped potential

BY SHARON OLSON

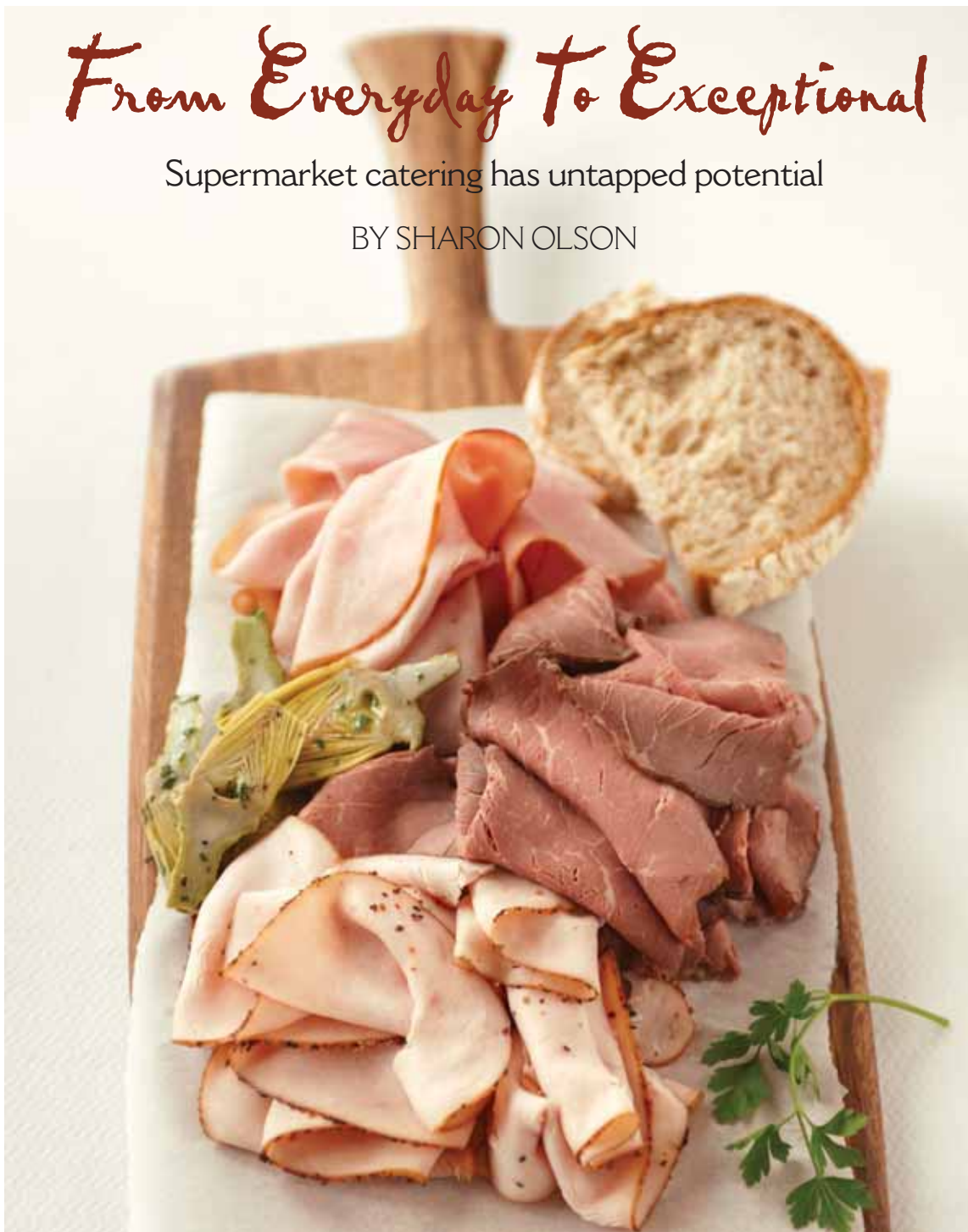


PHOTO COURTESY OF COLUMBUS

Catering has become the hot business-building topic across virtually every segment of the foodservice industry; consumers are increasingly dining at home but their dining desires are more varied and sophisticated than ever before.

When consumers are asked about their caterer choices and preferences for everyday events, they mention their supermarket deli more often than any other source. Yet they also mention quick-service and fast-casual restaurants and make note of some of the promotion practices that have encouraged them to try catering from other sources. Although many local supermarkets have been

offering “deli trays” for decades, this may be the right time to take a closer look at what consumers want in order to tap into greater potential sales.

When consumers are asked about catering, their first thought is often the caterer who did a recent wedding or special occasion — not something relevant to everyday real life. Today, catering is a lot more than the exquisite once-in-a-lifetime event. Celebrations are taking place every day at home and at work, and foodservice professionals from all segments of the food industry are trying to capture a slice of the catering pie.

In November 2010, the Culinary Visions Panel, a program led by Chicago-based Olson Communications, con-

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ducted a new study of over 200 consumers to learn more about their best experiences with real-life catering and what the natural opportunities might be for supermarket delis to build their business. The research explored where consumers are purchasing food for events and gained insight into the sources, successes and challenges related to ordering food for everyday events.

Best Experiences

It was no surprise that the most commonly mentioned characteristics of “best” experiences involved good food and good customer service. As one consumer put it, “Fast service, quality food [and] value for my money” turned a catered meal into a best experience. Also mentioned were convenient ordering options, variety, value and packaging.

It was surprising that few respondents (less than 5 percent) mentioned discounts as important to making an experience qualify as one of their best. Over 80 percent of respondents were immediately able to identify a best experience, significantly higher than the 59 percent who were able to identify a worst experience.

Among the best experiences, nice surprises and food beyond their expectations made the experience memorable. There were mentions of managers including something special that was not expected such as a dessert. Consumers noticed when there was no skimping on ingredients, noting “Good sandwiches with fresh buns and ample meat in every sandwich.”

Flawless execution also qualified for a best experience. One consumer simply stated, “The food was delivered on time; when it arrived the food was the perfect temperature.” Consumers offered these two classic examples where execution can make or break a catering experience. Regarding a Thanksgiving meal promotion, one consumer reported, “It was delicious and so easy. I was able to enjoy myself.” On the negative side, a consumer described the Thanksgiving experience this way: “It made me think less of the deli. The turkey was overcooked and dry, there was not enough gravy to save it and they shorted me on dinner rolls.”

Top Catering Occasions

Birthdays are the No. 1 occasion for celebrating at home and at work with 49 percent and 25 percent respectively saying they ordered food for more than six people to celebrate a birthday. Holidays in general followed birthdays as reasons for celebration at home and at work.

At work, a catering company supplied food more than any other source. Food for birthdays, on the other hand, was ordered

THE CULINARY VISIONS PANEL CONDUCTED A NEW STUDY OF OVER 200 CONSUMERS TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THEIR BEST EXPERIENCES WITH REAL-LIFE CATERING AND WHAT THE NATURAL OPPORTUNITIES MIGHT BE FOR SUPERMARKET DELIS TO BUILD THEIR BUSINESS.

from a wide range of sources other than a catering company. It was interesting to note that the birthday cake and the food were not necessarily from the same vendor. This speaks to a real opportunity for the supermarket to up the ante on convenience by offering the whole celebration package available from one source.

Staff meetings were almost as important a catering occasion at work as holiday parties, 19 percent and 21 percent respectively. Workplace meetings are so much a part of the workday that the chance to add variety and convenience is always welcome.

Food is an integral part of personal occasions and consumers offered many more occasions in the “other” category, suggesting additional opportunities. They cited a wide range of celebrations involving family, friends, school, religious and community organizations among the occasions that food was ordered for more than six people.

Generation X (24- to 43-year-olds) and Boomers (44- to 61-year-olds) were the most likely to have ordered from the supermarket deli, at 34 percent each. Millennials were the least likely to order from the supermarket deli, at 8 percent of our sample.

Catering Sources

Thirty-six percent of consumers indicated they ordered food from the supermarket deli for a special occasion. Of the consumers who had not ordered from the supermarket deli, 51 percent said they had considered it and chosen another source; 49 percent had not considered the deli.

More in-depth questioning of consumers who had not ordered from the deli found reasons ranging from lack of awareness that the deli was a source for catered food to the perception that offerings were limited, with little beyond platters. Limited promotion was

another reason consumers considered restaurants more often, noting coupons offering discounts or free food.

Whether respondents considered the deli or not, if they didn't order from the deli, they were most likely to order from (in order of preference) QSR, casual dining, fast casual, catering company, and in last place, the company cafeteria.

Catering Value Considerations

Quality of the food is the most important consideration when making a decision about where to order catered food; 86 percent of consumers rated it very or extremely important in their decision process. Approximately 70 percent of respondents rated five other factors as very or extremely important in their final decision: cost, reputation, convenient location, ease of ordering and variety of menu items.

For consumers who purchase catered food from the supermarket deli, the following criteria are the most important in their purchase decision: quality of food was paramount, followed by cost, reputation, convenient location and ease of ordering.

Consumers were asked what, if anything the supermarket deli could do to encourage them to order for a group occasion, and most responses centered around building their awareness of the deli as an option for catering. Many of the consumers' ideas related to in-store promotion to make them aware of offerings while they're doing their regular shopping — making menus available, providing samples, and setting up a promotion table at holiday time.

These findings were in line with the 23 percent of respondents who told us they just didn't think about the deli when deciding where to order food for their group occasion, some of whom were unaware they could order food for groups from the deli. As one consumer reported, “I think they could offer a discount coupon that prints at the check-out when your receipt prints. This would encourage and remind people that the deli can handle catering events.”

Consumers asked for coupons and discounts and noted they receive them with great frequency from restaurants. Although coupons will drive trial, the food quality and customer service create long-term value and repeat business. Consumers noted cost as a primary consideration in their choice for catered food; however, when they commented on best experience, none were based on best price.

Convenience was another factor consumers commented on, suggesting delivery and convenient ways to order that would assure accuracy in the final order. There was



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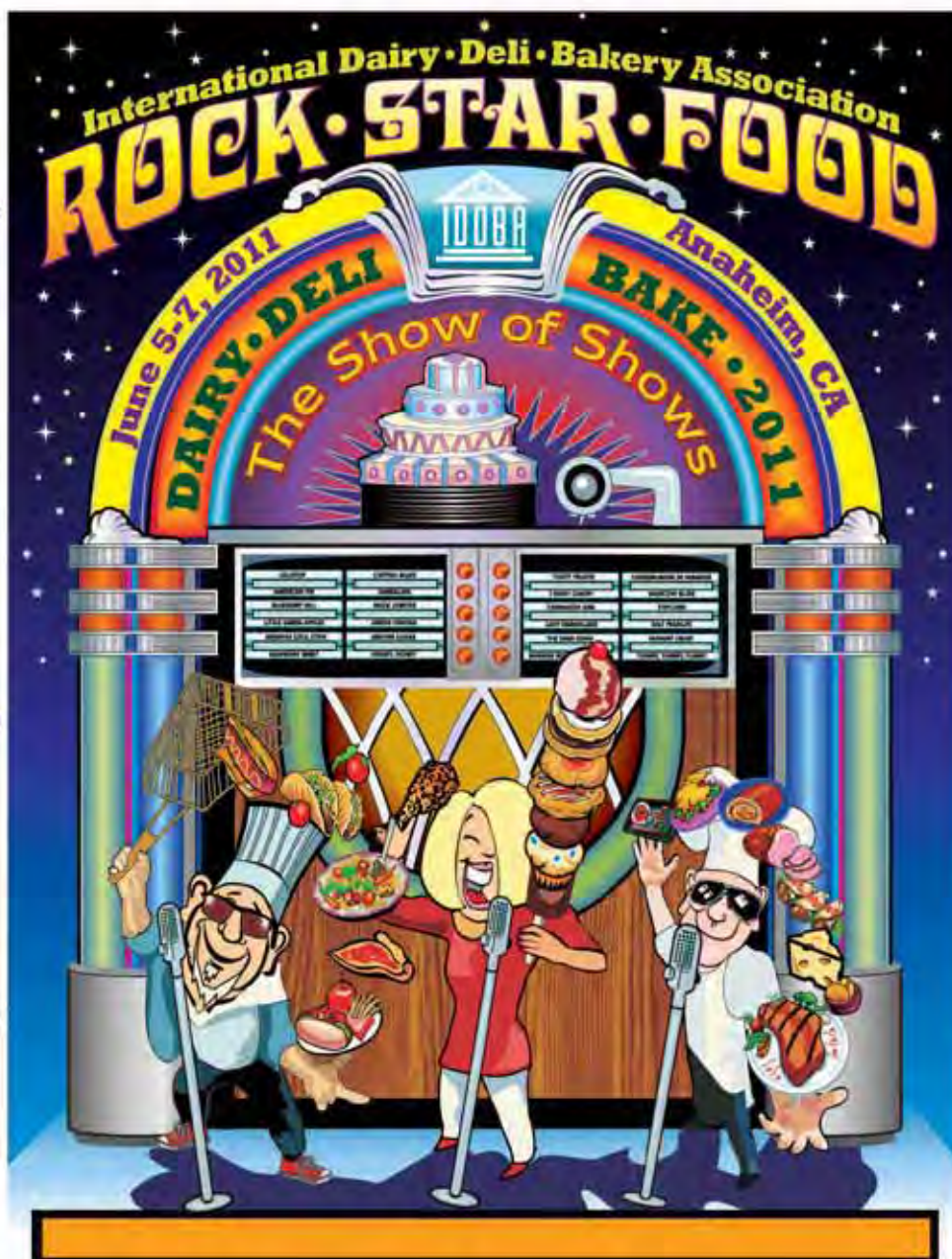
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plenty of disagreement among consumers who wanted a personal experience and those who wanted an on-line connection with no personal involvement at all.

Many noted menu variety because delis are often considered within a very limited range of offerings. One consumer said, "We choose more special dining options. The supermarket deli will never shake the aura of the ordinary. If we have a lot of people over for a more casual occasion that requires only snacks, then I'd consider it." The challenge is clearly breaking away from this perception.

Signature Service

One of the top value components was customer service, and consumers were more than willing to describe what they considered great customer service. A personal encounter with a particularly helpful staff person was often noted as a component of the experiences considered "best." Consumers also told us they appreciate suggestions and recommendations, especially when they included customer feedback on most popular items. Having everything in one place was another common request.

Delis with the flexibility to take special or customized orders may do well to promote this capability, since 27 percent of those who didn't consider the supermarket deli cited the type of food they wanted wouldn't be available in the deli.

Interviews with deli category managers at supermarkets gave us insight into retailers' approaches to catering. According to Maria Brous, spokesperson, Publix Supermarkets, based in Lakeland, FL, "We help our customers plan the perfect event with theme ideas, complete with produce, floral, meat, deli, seafood and bakery options, as well as wine selections. Our main goal is to make it as easy, convenient and fun as possible so our customers can enjoy their special occasions."

On The Catering Menu

Sandwiches are the most popular item, ordered by 59 percent of respondents who said they typically order sandwiches for their group occasions. Appetizers and entrées were also popular, ordered by 48 percent and 47 percent respectively. Desserts and side dishes other than soup were all ordered by more than one-third of respondents. Foodservice professionals noted challenges related to serving soup conveniently and at temperature.

Donna Howell, director of foodservice at Dorothy Lane Markets, based in Dayton, OH, says the company's most successful item for group occasions is the boxed lunch, which includes its famous sandwich featuring its own private-label turkey line and Provolone cheese on house-made artisan bread

made from scratch, served with store-brand natural potato chips.

On consumers' minds and on the menus of many caterers are mini foods, kids menus and gourmet desserts. According to Publix's Brous, Kid's Meal Platters with sweet and savory ingredients in a playful presentation were another successful introduction last year.

Destination Flavor

Half of respondents noted they consistently ordered food because they enjoyed the flavor. Successful deli operators told us how important it was to create a craving for a signature item available only from their store with a "secret formula" that was not easy to duplicate. Consumers often noted artisan breads as a specialty item that makes them loyal to a particular catering source.

At Dorothy Lane, Howell says, "It's our Killer Brownie that really sells the boxed lunch." The Killer Brownie is a multi-layered brownie whose ingredients are top secret.

Ethnic foods were also listed as house recipes that consumers crave. The big three ethnic flavors — Mediterranean, Latin and Asian — were well represented in this list with items such as lasagna, empanadas and curry chicken. There was also a healthy representation of regional American favorites such as brisket and ribs, pulled pork, barbecue and pizza.

Michael Hannigan, category manager at Food Lion, based in Salisbury, NC, told us the chain's most successful hot-food items are rotisserie chicken and fried chicken. New platters introduced last year included barbecue rotisserie chicken, grilled chicken and Gwaltney brand meats and cheeses, as well as newly designed cakes and desserts.

Supermarket deli shoppers reported the lowest incidence of loyalty to particular selections that satisfy a craving for a certain recipe or preparation. All other venues from which food was ordered for a group occasion had the majority of consumers mention they consistently order specific items because they enjoy the flavor — except for the supermarket deli, which had more consumers say they did not consistently order a particular item. One consumer noted, "I never gave a supermarket deli serious consideration." Another said, "Supermarkets don't generally offer authentic ethnic cuisine."

Brous says Publix has introduced a new Mediterranean Platter with marinated olives, hummus, baba ganoush, olive tapenade, tabbouleh, and eggplant caponata.

Implications

Platter Innovation — Delis are known for platters, which can be the perfect platform for innovation that goes well beyond meat



and cheese.

Destination Flavor — Distinctive foods that are not easily duplicated can create loyal customers following their cravings.

Customized Service — Some customers appreciate personalized service and others prefer on-line efficiency without human interaction; success is understanding the service needs of your customers.

Deliver The Goods — Consumers expect convenience in all aspects of the ordering process. Partnering with a delivery service may be an option for supermarkets without an in-house service.

Menu Flexibility — Occasions are rarely one-size-fits-all, and the more flexibility you can offer within reason can build more customers and positive word of mouth.

Targeted Promotion — Make your deli a catering destination by letting your customers know about your menu and seasonal specials and give them an incentive to try it. Target your communications differently for personal occasions and business occasions to assure you're top of mind as the right choice for each occasion you serve.

Breakaway from The Aura of Ordinary — Offer enticing and affordable menu variety and distinctive items to your customers. Whether your customers crave innovation or comfort, satisfying it can make your deli the catering destination in your neighborhood. **DB**

About the Culinary Visions Panel

The Culinary Visions Panel includes an annual roundtable discussion with food industry leaders from retail, foodservice and culinary education disciplines. Thought-leader insights are used to craft a series of consumer surveys on emerging issues throughout the year. The Culinary Visions Panel is a signature service of Olson Communications, a Chicago, IL-based food marketing firm that specializes in trend spotting in the food business.

Pack It Up

Eco-friendly packaging serves the deli's needs
while shepherding the earth's resources

BY CHRISTINA ROBERTS

DISPOSABLE PACKAGING PRODUCTS HAVE BECOME A HOT TOPIC. AWARENESS OF WHERE THAT PACKAGING MATERIAL ENDS UP AFTER IT'S SERVED ITS PURPOSE IS NOW PART OF MAINSTREAM AMERICA'S CONSCIOUSNESS, INCREASING DEMAND FOR ECO-FRIENDLY YET PRACTICAL MATERIALS AND RECYCLING SYSTEMS. YET EVEN THOUGH CONSUMERS WANT TO FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEIR GARBAGE, PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS STILL PULL MOST OF THE PURSE STRINGS.

When eco-friendly products first entered the marketplace, they were more expensive than traditional products. As more companies offer more products to meet the concerns of an increasingly educated public, that conflict is working itself out with lower prices and additional alternatives to meet definitions of eco-friendly.

Other dynamics have tempered fears the economic recession would inevitably reduce the interest in eco-friendly packaging amid cost concerns. The recession has, in fact, helped grocery stores overall. "People are eating at home more and dining out less," says Jeff Lucash, sales manager, Madison WI-based Placon, a manufacturer of thermoformed packaging products. "Green initiatives along with healthy eating choices are driving higher quality and healthier food to be packaged in food containers.

This has benefited the food packaging industry and helped them to move into eco-friendly materials, as we are now noticing less OPS [oriented polystyrene](non-recyclable materials) and more PET (recycled) and PLA (renewable) in stores."

According to Steven J. Eck, marketing manager, Anchor Packaging, a St. Louis, MO-based packaging manufacturer, "The recession, surprisingly, does not seem to have reduced the focus on environmentally friendly packaging." However, he adds, "Neither retailers nor consumers are willing to pay more for these items than for the existing items."

Price Difference Debate

Ron Blitzer, CEO of Be Green Packaging, a Santa Barbara, CA-based manufacturer of packaging made from tree-free renewable fiber, believes major misperceptions about price differences between 'green' and 'non-green' packaging exist in the marketplace. "As plastic and paper companies have announced quarterly price increases, we raised prices only one time in 2010. The perception



PHOTO COURTESY OF ANCHOR PACKAGING

of the marketplace is that green fiber is more expensive." He believes the price differential is in the bio-plastics realm. To begin with, he says, "Potential customers have a wrong perception about price. Our green fiber products are competitive with every kind of foodservice packaging with the exception of foam. I would challenge anyone to show me a plastic foodservice container or a paper-board container or plate that is not equal to our tree-free fiber food package."

Blitzer points to the success of a recent new product offered by Be Green. "One of our most successful new items in 2010 was the introduction and success we and our customers, such as Kikka Sushi, had with our fiber sushi trays. Not only was the price neutral when Kikka switched to fiber sushi trays, but if you also look at prices of polystyrene today compared to fiber, we're probably more competitive."

According to Blitzer, the recession didn't affect those companies that wanted to make a change. He cites several that got creative and made the move into greener products. Wal-Mart, the low-cost leader, has chosen to become a leader in sustainability, composting and recycling. "They're demanding their vendors meet certain new scorecard



requirements," he states. "And Whole Foods is on a mission to ban all foam from the meat and poultry departments. Even Safeway is looking to make changes. The green community is responding with new products, innovation and competitive prices. It was,

and is, not a choice of dollars. It is all a matter of distribution and education.

"Distributors such as Alliance in Chicago have a whole line of green goods and are expanding. Dade Paper calls it Be Green," he continues. "Pollack Paper in Texas is finding

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Defining Eco-Friendly Continues

Eco-friendly can mean different things to companies and consumers. "It could be renewable materials or recyclable materials," Lucash points out. Placon has put its efforts into recycling what is already out there, such as curb-side collected water bottles, by making packaging from recycled PET plastic. The company is building a recycling facility to wash, grind and process its own materials in-house, making the cost of using recycled material comparable to virgin material. "Using recycled PET is Placon's way of reducing what's going to landfills and offering a cost competitive alternative," he says.

"There are many valid points along the eco-friendly scale," according to Dave Fosse, of Lindar Corporation, a Baxter, MN-based plastics thermoforming company specializing in food packaging. "First off, we need to determine to what extent an organization



PHOTOS COURTESY OF LINDAR CORPORATION

wants to define eco-friendly." Products on the marketplace include packaging composed of virgin raw material from non-renewable or renewable resources, post-industrial recycled raw material from non-renewable or renewable resources, and post-consumer recycled

raw material from non-renewable resource or renewable resource. "Each of them has a different eco-friendly footprint," Fosse explains.

"Another component of eco-friendly packaging is, what is the overall 30,000-foot impact — the high-level view of eco-friendly packaging not getting into the fine details of all the different variants — of the packaging. Sustainable, biodegradable, compostable, recyclable, renewable resource or reusable, to name a few. You have two different perspectives; one is the organization will make the decision to move forward with the higher-cost eco-friendly packaging because it sees this is the correct decision because of the organization's overall out-of-the-box thinking environment. The other is mostly influenced by cost; even though they want the eco-friendly packaging, they will wait for the critical mass of the eco-friendly packaging to be reached so the cost is much closer to the current choices," Fosse says.

Product Performance

Measuring the practicality of using one type of packaging over another is a challenge. Consumers are becoming more 'green-literate,' as well as more 'green-confused,'" says Anchor's Eck. "All the bio-based packaging

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has performance deficiencies versus their traditional counterparts. This includes intolerance to heat, lack of product visibility in the package, moisture absorbance by the package." He believes most consumers realize products that are only compostable in a commercial composting facility are, for all practical purpose, not biodegradable. Recently, the FTC has begun actions against companies making broad claims of biodegradability and eco-friendly. "Reusable containers continue to distinguish themselves as products with all of the performance functionality, while being the most energy-responsible," Eck says.

From the retail perspective, Byron Hanson, director of deli, bakery and foodservice for Edina, MN-headquartered Lund's Food Holdings, Inc., a chain of upscale supermarkets in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, notes, "This is a topic that on the surface seems to be easy to address; however, when digging deeper into the subject there is much diversity of opinion as to what the public perceives as being more eco-friendly and the true carbon footprint of the packaging." For example, he questions whether the true cost to environment has been taken into consideration if eco-packing from China has been



PHOTOS COURTESY OF BE GREEN PACKAGING

shipped across the Pacific Ocean on a diesel-powered ship.

"There's a lag between the availability of the compostable packaging and the ability of communities to provide the proper facilities to handle the recycled, compostable packag-



ing," Hanson explains. "Compostable packaging is now available, however, when the refuse is put into plastic bags that are then put into lined landfills, the compostable factor is lost."

Another factor is the appearance of the food in eco-friendly containers. "It's been said that as much as 70 percent of deli purchases are impulse, and packaging can determine the success or failure of a product. It's more challenging to find eco-friendly packaging that gives foods the appearance that non-eco-friendly packaging lends to a product, particularly in the grab-and-go sections of the business," adds Hanson.

Consumers are demanding sustainable packaging that performs as well as non-eco-friendly packaging. Hanson says it's a challenge to find solutions for foods that are high in liquid content. "We've made significant changes in packaging many of our foods in corn-based clear containers as well as eco-friendly containers for eat-in or takeout diners. We've also eliminated all Styrofoam containers and have changed from disposable plastic flatware to corn-based compostable flatware, all of which have been well received by our customers," he notes.

When evaluating the performance quality of environmentally friendly products compared with the established foodservice stalwarts, Be Green's Blitzzer cautions, "The best packaging on the planet for price, cost, performance is expanded polystyrene; it's unequal in cost and performance. No one can compete with foam. Not even Mother



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Retailers need to understand the limits both up and down of the various materials. "Bio plastic vs. PET? Costs and benefits are many. If PLA does poorly in heat, then try fiber. If fiber has issues with moisture, then use a fiber product coated with PET or PLA. There are many, many options," Be Green's Blitzler contends.

The development curve for new eco-friendly packaging variations is moving forward. "This has also been the case with traditional packaging materials from a historical perspective," says Lindar's Fosse. "While there are limitations for all packaging materials, many different eco-friendly materials can handle many different processing, distribution, holding and merchandising characteristics that the package needs to meet."

Pricing, Again

When considering how the market for packaging products has already shifted, Placon's Lucash notes people are becoming more knowledgeable about the options for packaging and making their choice. "Many want an eco-friendly choice for their packaging at the same cost of a traditional package, but they know a premium does have to be paid for some types of packaging."

At Lund's, says Byron, "Eco-packaging remains more expensive than non-eco-friendly packaging but the industry is making progress in closing the cost difference."

According to Fosse, in general, traditional packaging prices have come up while the eco-friendly prices have been stable over the past few years, thus reducing the spread between them.

With options increasing, the question of when prices might drop is important to bottom-line concerns. "With regards to sustainability, the technology isn't all there yet so there's a gap between sustainable and recyclable packaging costs," says Placon's Lucash. "Material costs are based on market conditions and those factors drive the final pricing in both categories. As demand for both types of packaging increases, the feasibility of packaging costs going down increases."

Demand for products that are recyclable, biodegradable and made from post-consumer recycle is expected to rise, notes Anchor's Eck. "Manufacturing efficiencies

will drive some costs lower. However, other costs are rising. For example, competing demand for some resources, such as corn, drive other costs higher." He cites the areas of higher costs as packaging because PLA is made from corn; food because animal feeds and high-fructose corn syrup are made from corn; and transportation and energy because ethanol is made from corn. In fact, he adds. "Recycled resins are actually selling for higher prices than virgin resin, due to high

demand and a limited supply."

Blitzler notes the market is shifting. "Absolutely shifting and shifting very, very fast. Buyers and consumers are demanding changes across all kinds of market segments. Companies are paying attention to what their customers are asking for. But companies are also asking for the ability to be price competitive, and when you see the growth in green packaging, the volumes and numbers are staggering," he says.

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Grab-And-Go Is The New Fine Dining

Consumers want to put together meals with minimum fuss and maximum flavor

BY BOB JOHNSON

The economy has added one more reason to expand the convenient option of grab-and-go foods. From the retailer's perspective, it's a way to cut labor costs in hard economic times.

"Everyone is going to more prepackaged products. It takes very little labor, and whenever people need to cut costs, the first place they look is labor," says Bill Neider, director of special markets for McCain Foods USA, Oak Creek, WI. He dates the beginning of greater use of labor-saving prepackaged products to the beginning of the economic downturn around two years ago.

According to Maria Brous, director of media and community relations at Publix Super Markets, Inc., based in Lakeland, FL, "As grab-and-go continues to grow, productivity obviously increases. Bulk products requiring service give way to optimized production and expanded self-service. Labor is reallocated for other tasks and better service for customers who are looking for one-on-one with an associate."

From the customer's perspective grab-and-go can offer a fine dining experience at a reasonable price. "Before the economy went bad, people were eating out. Some of them three or four times a week. It wasn't sustainable, but it altered people's expectations of food," explains Tom Quinn, vice president for operations at Nuovo Pasta Productions, Ltd, Stratford, CT. "Where we're seeing an uptick the last two-and-a-half or three years is people shifting their food consumption from out of the home to in the home."

Nuovo, which makes a variety of high-end pasta products, is having success at the deli with its prosciutto and provolone tortellini; prosciutto, pea and provolone ravioli; and portabella mushroom and fontina ravioli.

The people who, until a few years ago, were going out for dinner several times a



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Food Bars Are Growing Up

The food bars that began with salads and olives now include an increasing variety of self-service food choices. “We have seen an evolution of the olive bar to include and encompass more antipasti items as well as salads that incorporate olives and/or vegetables with cheeses that pair well with them,” says Anthony DiPietro, vice president of George E. DeLallo Co. Inc., Philadelphia, PA. “With antipasti in mind, adding such items as Roman-style artichokes, cipolline, dolmas [grape leaves], and numerous assortments of vegetable salads are important to provide both variety and incremental sales.”

According to Mary Caldwell, marketing director, FoodMatch Inc. New York, NY, “The trend that olive bars and salad bars sparked was ease and convenience to healthy, flavorful foods. With their popularity, the demand for more variety and complex dishes arose, yet providing the same ease and convenience.”

Food bars offer an opportunity to reduce labor costs and increase profits. “Retailers are looking for quality products with little labor and an extended shelf life,” notes Ann Dressler, manager for service deli in the food service division of Mezzetta Fine foods, Corona, CA.

Some retailers are using combinations bars to offer more products in less space. “I’ve seen a general trend the last year or so toward combination bars. They might combine a hot bar, a soup bar and chicken all on one bar. It’s a way to offer the same number of items with less real estate,” says Jeff Enderle, national account manager for Columbus, OH-based Amtekco, which makes food-bar fixtures and equipment.

Food bars offer consumers both convenience and a chance to sample new foods in small portions. “You have control over portions, which is especially important if you’re trying something new,” notes Jim Daskaleas, vice president for product development at Walker’s Food Products Co., North



PHOTO COURTESY OF GEORGE E. DELALLO CO. INC.

Kansas City, MO.

And food bars fit with the need to get more done in less time. “Customers simply don’t have time to wait in line at the service counter,” says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations at Publix Super Markets, Inc., Lakeland, FL.

Some progressive retailers are expanding the food bar concept. “A lot of delis are going with a salsa bar. When you go to a good Mexican restaurant, you see a lot of different salsas – tomato, verde, pico de gallo or guacamole. You’re probably hitting at

least a dozen dips to have an impact, and different kinds of fried tortilla. It’s not big in Kansas City but I’ve noticed it in Oklahoma and Texas the last two years,” Daskaleas adds.

He also sees the number of Mediterranean options expanding. “You can try Mediterranean pasta with a Greek yogurt at the salad bar. Mediterranean is hot, and so is Hispanic, but Oriental hasn’t crossed over. I see the more interesting delis adding hummus dips, baba ganoush, pita breads and pita chips. I think Mediterranean is still evolving.”

Judy Page, director of business

week are now going to the deli for components they can take home and turn into a fine meal in just a few minutes. “If you go to a Raley’s Market between 5:00 and 6:30 pm and stand by the specialty section next

to the deli, you’ll see a lot of people deciding what to have for dinner. The restaurant industry is still down but people still have to eat,” according to Quinn.

Santina Stankevich, media relations

representative for ShopRite Supermarkets, headquartered in Edison, NJ, reports, “We’ve seen an increase in the demand for quality, convenient food. We try to create a one-stop shopping experience; many of

development at Vaughan Foods Inc., Moore, OK, notes, "In the dip category, hummus and other dips are being added. Several retailers are getting into salsa-and-dip bars and hot-food bars. The most important new hot foods are comfort foods, ethnic foods and healthier-for-you options. I see requests for more grains and couscous varieties as well as luscious desserts."

"Incorporating Mediterranean foods as ingredients throughout the food bar is a great way to meet the demand for healthy, flavorful Mediterranean diet-based dishes and also create variety," explains Caldwell. "For example, a cold pasta salad that uses a base of pulled rotisserie chicken and blanched vegetables can be varied often and simply with different combinations of Mediterranean ingredients. Our Divina Chickpeas in Mediterranean Marinade has a dill and cumin combination and provides one flavor profile. Changing that to Gigandes in Vinaigrette the next week offers a different flavor profile."

While new categories are showing up, familiar categories are growing up. "Olives are the staple of Mediterranean cuisine," says Patty Echevarria, marketing manager for Castella Imports, Hauppauge, NY, but 'Mediterranean Madness' has exploded into colorful and flavorful verities such as marinated mushrooms, marinated garlic cloves with hot peppers, marinated artichokes, marinated onions, red peppers, sweet peppers, dolmas, bruschettas, pestos and much more.

"Stuffed olives are a must-have for the bar," she continues. "Just about any stuffed olive will dress up a martini. Olives stuffed with cheese — such as Blue, Feta, Gorgonzola and Provolone — are the most common stuffed olives. They're ideal for any tossed salad as well as an excellent appetizer. In-style stuffed olives such as almond, garlic, jalapeño and sun-dried tomato are sure to deliver a memorable experience."

Another interesting new option is olives infused with a complementary

wine. "Setting the trend in olives is done by adding creativity with extreme benefits. We've infused the humble olives with wine straight from Napa Valley. Castella's Vineyard collection consists of Chardonnay, Pinot Grigio, Sauvignon and Merlot. The wine-infused olives are a must-have when entertaining," Echevarria relates.

A new green olive with a nutty flavor is also appearing at many olive bars. "The introduction of the Castelvetro olive — a very nutty, creamy tasting olive — has been a nice addition. Also, the antipasto that can be a mixture of olives, peppers and garlic add to the Mediterranean experience in the food bar," adds Dressler.

There are also crossover options that combine the olive bar and the salad bar. "The salads we offer that pair cheeses with olives and antipasti have had great success and provide great entertaining options to consumers," DiPietro says.

The salad bar continues to evolve in interesting new directions. "A greater interest in seasonality is driving selection on cold bars. Products that are conserved when at their natural peak ripeness are in high demand. FoodMatch sells a number of such products, for example our Divina Roasted Red Tomatoes are especially popular because they are harvested when vine-ripe, delivering a consistent summertime tomato flavor throughout the year," Caldwell says.

With all the food-bar options, the trick is to keep offering new and different products. "Variety is key, but it can be challenging for supermarkets to execute. Shoppers may not want to eat the same thing every day, but they do want to be able to rely on a consistent selection. Variety can be used as a strategy for stores to differentiate from competition and increase frequency of visits. Dedicating pans that can be used for specials/ feature selections create interest and excitement among shoppers. Incorporating best-selling ingredients from component bars will encourage trial when shoppers see



PHOTO COURTESY OF GEORGE E. DELALLO CO. INC.

ingredients they already enjoy used in prepared selections," Caldwell explains.

But there is a cautionary note — the area must be kept clean and the food safe. "The downside to the self-service bar is the sanitary factor. You have to assign it to the people who take care of the salad bar," Daskaleas notes. **DB**

our customers do their shopping and also need something for dinner that night." She says the newer ShopRite stores have facilities that allow the deli to prepare a wider range of grab-and-go items.

"We're seeing demand for a lot more 'participation' food," notes Nuovo's Quinn. "People want to take the elements of a gourmet meal home. You can boil for four to five minutes out of the package and you

have a gourmet pasta meal. If you also take home a jar of sauce from the market, you can have a meal in ten minutes."

The desire to put a fine meal together at home from grab-and-go items of the deli

opens up opportunities to sell a wide range of products on the fringes of the deli. According to Jerry Shafir, CEO of Kettle Cuisine Inc., Chelsea, MA, there's more interest in sauces and marinades that add the final touch to high-quality meals consumers put together at home. "People want high-quality food at home and they aren't going out to restaurants," Shafir explains.

Publix is adding a new wrinkle with

grab-and-go options designed specifically for children. "We continue to evaluate what options customers are looking for to supplement their meal planning. Our recent introduction of a Kid's Meals program is an example of our efforts to provide convenient, healthier options for grab-and-go," Brous says. The Kid's Meals include a ready-to-eat entrée, two sides and a drink for \$3.99.

The increased demand for convenient,

affordable and high quality foods has also reached the lunch hour. "We're focusing on the lunch daypart with special emphasis on items that can be brought to work and easily reheated in a microwave," relates Alan Hamer, vice president for sales and marketing at Stefano Foods, headquartered in Charlotte, NC. "Consumers are looking to save lunch money so dollars that used to go to restaurants are available to the deli, if the items are right."

The key is to offer foods that hold up well when they go from cold to hot quickly. "Certainly grab-and-go eases labor requirements. The challenge for the deli is to find items that benefit by reheating after emerging from refrigeration — which typically maintains better bread and filling quality — and are clearly differentiated from frozen foods or meat department items, such as Stefano's pizza, calzones, stromboli and new Tuscanni handheld pizza," Hamer adds.

Much of the demand for convenient, high-quality grab-and-go options began with the growing interest in gourmet cheese. This has led to merchandising options with complementary items on the borders of the deli. "As retailers have expanded their gourmet cheese sections, the consumers' understanding of gourmet products has expanded. You'll see artisan breads or virgin olive oils displayed next to the pastas at the deli. The number of choices has expanded exponentially. You used to have two or three or four choices of take-home meals at the deli. Now it's 11 or 12. And they're selling at a reasonable markup for the retailer," Nuovo's Quinn says.

After a brief period of indecision, a great many deli retailers have responded with an ever increasing number of grab-and-go options. According to Kettle Cuisine's Shafir, "When the economy went south, there was a paralysis for a while, but the retail deli is getting bolder in prepared foods. We're seeing more interest in sides; there are more elaborate side options out there."

The bottom line is that progressive delis are offering more grab-and-go options because consumers want restaurant quality meals at deli prices and fast-food convenience. "There's a real push toward home meal replacements. Supermarkets are offering more quality take-home meals. There's more variety in the take-home items," says Jeff Enderle, national account manager for Amtekco, Columbus, OH.

The Healthy Side of Dinner

Among the great challenges and oppor-



tunities created by the growing market of consumers who want to take home the elements of a fine dinner is coming up with healthy side dishes.

"Healthy, nutrient-dense options are in high demand today. Increasingly, shoppers are more informed about health and nutrition, yet they still need convenience," explains Mary Caldwell, marketing director at FoodMatch Inc., New York, NY. "They go to fast-food restaurants for specific foods. When they shop at their supermarket, consumers expect more wholesome options of higher quality, better ingredients, integrity and variety."

One option is to introduce new side-dish alternatives. "There needs to be an alternative to the staple deli starches, which are mashed potatoes, fries and macaroni and cheese. We're doing different rice options, such as a multigrain pilaf," relates Jim Daskaleas, vice president for product development at Walker's Food Products Co., North Kansas City, MO.

Another option is to serve potatoes prepared in a healthier way. Last October McCain introduced a 1-pound tray pack of roasted red potatoes as an alternative to its fried potato side dishes. According to Neider, the new product has been

"FOLKS ARE LOOKING FOR INGREDIENTS THEY CAN UNDERSTAND. THE BETTER-FOR-YOU TREND STARTED THREE OR FOUR YEARS AGO. THE DELIS ARE LOOKING FOR PACKERS WHO CAN GIVE THEM HEALTHIER PRODUCTS."

— *BILL NEIDER*
MCCAIN FOODS USA

embraced by major supermarkets, including Safeway and Ralph's. "It has a clean label. Folks are looking for ingredients they

can understand. The better-for-you trend started three or four years ago. The delis are looking for packers who can give them healthier products," he adds.

The success of the roasted red potato pack has McCain looking into packs of sweet potatoes and packs of roasted vegetables. "Everybody sells a ton of rotisserie chicken but there are very few side dishes to go with them. We're trying to give them something that will help them sell the rotisserie chickens — and something to go with them," Neider adds.

The demand for healthier side dishes has also reached the soup category. "In terms of the soup category, there is some interest in health and wellness soups. There's also an interest in clean labels," Shafir says. One of Kettle Cuisines regular retail customers has developed an all-natural label in addition to its standard label.

A growing number of consumers want to be comfortable with the information on the labels. "People are looking at ingredients more. Women do most of the purchasing and they're looking at labels. But while they're buying more healthy soups, they're still buying the indulgence soups. The consumer is complicated," Shafir concludes.

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Hummus, Hummus Everywhere

It's convenient, healthy and delicious — an unbeatable combination

BY LAUREN KATIMS

Hummus is moving up — in terms of supermarket real estate, that is. Demand for hummus has skyrocketed, necessitating ever-increasing space. As a result, hummus is getting upgraded looks, textures and flavor profiles.

Its appeal is simple — it's healthy, tasty and convenient. Celebrity endorsements have added to its glamour — Natalie Portman recently told *Vogue* magazine she eats her weight daily in hummus — and its availability in restaurants has added to the cachet. Manufacturers are experimenting with a variety of legumes other than chickpeas to create distinct varieties. Yet even with its popularity, hummus has much room for growth, and companies are taking advantage of this opportunity — and hummus' versatility — experimenting with flavors, textures and package sizes to cater to a variety of age groups and demographics.

In The Beginning

"I sometimes tell customers hummus may date back to the Bible," says Dominick Frocione, vice president of sales for Cedars Mediterranean Foods, Ward Hill, MA. Hummus has been connected to Egypt for more than 7,000 years and is still the staple of the Middle Eastern diet. "Hummus is served as a part of most every meal in the Middle East, kind of like how Americans serve potatoes with almost everything here."

Traditionally, hummus is made from mashed, cooked chickpeas, tahini, garlic, lemon juice and olive oil. Its creamy, thick texture and distinct flavor are perfect for dipping pita bread or vegetables, which is how it was originally marketed to grocery stores in the 1990s. "When it first came to the United States, people were using it in the very traditional dip setting," says Sabrina Kautz, associate brand manager, Sabra Dipping Company, White Plains, NY. She notes it was difficult to find it in grocery stores back then. "It was more of an ethnic item and people would have to look for it in specialty sections. Now that the Mediterranean diet





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has taken off in the last two to three years, people have been looking for it and the category has really taken off."

According to Cedars' Frocione, in the 1990s, hummus brought in \$25 million a year; by 2005 sales jumped to \$100 million a year, and in 2010 it topped \$400 million — that doesn't include Whole Foods or club stores.

"The pace of hummus is now growing at a faster rate than dips," reports Leslie Gordon, director of marketing, Summer Fresh Salads, Woodbridge, ON. She says it's what people want in a food: It's high in protein and fiber and low in trans fats, saturated fats and cholesterol. Plus, she adds, it's versatile and has a great flavor — it can go with anything.

Health-conscious consumers are pairing hummus with Crunchmaster all-natural crackers, says Jim Garsow, director of marketing, TH Foods, Inc., Loves Park, IL. All Crunchmaster crackers are baked and made with whole-grain brown rice so they're gluten-free. The four-seed variety, which contains sesame, quinoa, amaranth and flax, is a particularly good match with hummus because the sesame in the cracker combines with the sesame in the tahini "to create an explosion of flavor," he explains. "Consumers are naturally combining healthy crackers with healthy dips. They're a great natural alternative to processed wheat products."

Line Extensions

The health benefits may be what got people interested in hummus in the first place, but the flavors keep consumers intrigued. "Additives such as roasted red peppers, garlic, scallions and Kalamata olives slightly change the flavor profile," notes Demetrios Haralambatos, chef for Kontos Culinary, Annapolis, MD. As the demand for hummus grows, companies are experimenting with flavor profiles and ingredients to appeal to a wider audience, he says.

While original, red pepper, garlic and spicy are the most popular flavors, sales of more exotic flavors are catching up. Summer Fresh, which has 13 flavor options, recently began experimenting with unique combinations such as sweet potato hummus. Gordon says it's gaining popularity because sweet potatoes are considered a super food. The company recently introduced a light hummus line with less oil than the regular version but with a similar taste.

Avocado, another super food, has become a popular hummus add-in. Yucatan Foods, Los Angeles, CA, offers a half-avocado/half-hummus blend, which the company works into Mexican recipes. "The unique combination of avocado and hummus makes it a perfect ingredient for Mediterranean- or Latin-inspired recipes and dishes,"



explains Kristyn Lawson, vice president of sales. "It's a beautiful texture provided by the avocado blended with hummus."

Artichoke/spinach is a hot new flavor for Cedars, and lemon, tomato/basil and chili pepper are gaining market share as well, says Frocione. The company is currently looking at a sweeter version of hummus as a replacement for bagel spread.

Want Hummus With Your Burger?

Not only have the flavor profiles expanded, but the ways to use hummus have also grown. In general, hummus is still thought of as mainly a dipping food, but its use as a condiment replacement — most notably for mayonnaise, sour cream and even ranch dressing — is growing. "We're trying to expand people's horizons as to how they can use hummus," says Sabra's Kautz, who recommends using it in place of the mayo in tuna fish.

"A lot of people are using it as a sandwich spread," reports Rita Takvorian, owner, Haig's Delicacies, San Francisco, CA. "It's a great way to replace fatty spreads." Vegetarians discovered this secret decades ago, but now carnivores are using it on deli meats, burgers and sandwiches to add flavor and reduce calories added by oil-based spreads. And because it packs so much protein, it can be used as a meat substitute. "There are more opportunities still out there for the hummus industry," she adds.

Hummus is also being used as a main ingredient in recipes. Haralambatos uses it as a base for a Mediterranean-style pizza with sun-cured olives, feta cheese and thinly sliced red onion. Yucatan Foods uses it in burritos.

Haralambatos predicts experimentation with hummus will continue, including using different legumes as the base. He often makes hummus with great northern white beans instead of chickpeas, which, he says, gives the hummus a completely different taste and feel. He has even seen hummus made from boiled

peanuts but thinks it will be some time before these more adventurous versions make their way to the grocery stores.

I'll Take That To Go

Besides its health benefits and great taste, hummus has become a convenient grab-and-go food. Various package sizes and different presentations appeal to all age groups.

"What we hear over and over again is finding a healthy snack for kids and being able to vary that from day to day are a challenge, so we put the hummus in a 2-ounce container, so moms can throw it in the kids' lunch and then the kids can dip vegetables and crackers in it," reports Gordon. Summer Fresh will be releasing a hummus squeeze bottle in the near future to further push the convenience aspect.

Other companies have added a single-serving size, geared predominately toward busy moms with kids. Sabra offers a 3.5-ounce grab-and-go pack with pretzels on top and a 4-pack of 2-ounce containers. "Kids really like it," says Kautz. She says children are more apt to eat their vegetables if they're dipped in hummus.

Cedars initially offered only round 8-ounce containers but expanded into 12-, 16-, 20- and 32-ounce packages as demand grew. Frocione sees two trends — one toward a smoother texture and one toward hummus with toppings in upscale packaging.

Topped hummus, where the majority of the addition, such as roasted red pepper, sits in the center of the hummus, offers an impressive presentation and gives the customer the option of stirring in as much of the topping as desired, says Gordon. "They're a great entertaining option," she says.

Originally, hummus was targeted toward the health-conscious woman "but now we see everyone as a potential customer," adds Frocione. Because hummus is so convenient and reasonably priced, it's particularly popular among college students.

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Thinking Inside And Outside The Pizza Box

America's love affair with pizza shows no signs of slowing down

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Cravings, convenience and cost drive consumers to purchase pizza. Sixty-two percent of those polled for the *Pizza Consumer Trend Report*, released by Chicago, IL-based Technomic Inc. on April 14, 2010, said their most recent away-from-home pizza purchase was driven by a craving. Twenty-five percent reported it was more convenient to buy out than cook in; 20 percent mentioned price, coupons and promotions as their primary motivator.

The challenge, says Alan Hamer, vice president of sales and marketing for Stefano Foods, Charlotte, NC, "is to maintain consumers' focus on the advantages of the refrigerated deli offering through product innovation, merchandising and promotion."

National pizza chains are cashing in on consumer's cravings by featuring specialty and signature pizzas. For example, Papa John's expanded its gourmet pizza offerings to include a six-cheese double-bacon pizza as a limited time offer. On the retail front, Central Market in Plano, TX, one of eight gourmet groceries owned by the San Antonio, TX-based H.E.B. Grocery Company, includes a spinach-bacon-goat-cheese pizza on its menu in addition to a classic cheese, pepperoni and spicy Italian sausage.

Research backs this marketing method up. According to the *Pizza Consumer Trend Report*, 17 percent of consumers say new items influence where they buy pizza; this was strongest among 18- to 24-year-olds.

Fortunately, consumer desire for something new doesn't come at the expense of the tried-and-true. According to Giacomo Fallucca, president and CEO, Palermo Villa Inc., Milwaukee, WI, "Just like the best-selling ice cream flavors are chocolate, vanilla and strawberry, so are cheese, pepperoni and supreme the traditional top sellers in the pizza category — and it's going to stay that way. That said, the American palate has become more sophisticated and barriers to trying new flavors have greatly diminished."

This theme plays out in each of pizza's prime components. Peter Smith, national



marketing manager, Champion Foods, New Boston, MI, notes, "Traditional Midwest-style crusts continue to be our most popular. We also offer multiple types of flatbread crusts and while they are popular, they're more a niche product that's more popular on the East and West Coasts."

Likewise, he adds, "Mozzarella cheese continues to be popular but we also offer a four cheese pizza that's a combination of Mozzarella, Asiago, Parmesan and Romano."

To reach out to the customer craving something new, adds Smith, "We offer a line of artisan-style flatbread pizzas topped with barbecue chicken, Buffalo chicken, spinach and Feta, and Margherita."

In meats, the best-selling toppings remain pepperoni and Italian sausage, relates Liz Hertz, marketing director, Burke Corporation, Nevada, IA. "An operation that builds its reputation on speed and value may offer just the basics — pepperoni, hot sausage, mild sausage plus a few locally popular items, such as bacon or Canadian bacon. A more

upscale operation, with a more extensive menu, may want to offer a better selection, including chicken strips, and some specialty items such as chorizo or Andouille."

Consumers today aren't looking for a cookie-cutter experience. Rather, they crave something unique. As a result, says Hamer, "We've seen recent growth in hybrid programs, where par-baked cheese pizzas are topped at store level. The retailer has to stock only a single SKU and can create a wide range of finished products, like a Margherita using fresh basil leaves, which would not be possible to execute in a fully finished previously frozen product."

A program such as this can easily parlay into one where delis create a customized pizza promotion. "Delis can offer a variety of ingredients behind the glass that customers can choose to top their pizza," explains Fallucca. "This can range from chopped vegetables as you would find on a salad bar to more creative toppings such as fire-roasted vegetables or barbecue chicken or chicken with a fajita

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Better-For-You Pizza

Better-for-you, which encompasses a number of trends — health, gluten-free, local, natural/organic and sustainability — and ethnic foods are two key trends, says Burke's Hertz. "In response, some operations are offering natural or organically grown meat or poultry toppings and locally made sausage products. Chicken breast strips work well for both of these trends; they're lower in fat and work well with a variety of ethnic cuisines. Some other pizza ingredients are critical to fulfilling those trends — adding more vegetables — and even fruit — offering whole grain or gluten-free crusts, and finding local sources for produce and cheese."

Another way to appeal to health conscious consumers is through portion size. Patty Phillips, president of Patty's Presto Pizza, Inc., Marina del Rey, CA, observes, "Small-sized pizzas are not just for children. One of our Lil Dev's pizzas is only 7 points on Weight Watchers."

Small pizzas can also provide an attractive price point. For example, in January, Price Chopper, a 119-store chain based in Schenectady, NY, promoted its foodservice department's in-house branded Bella Roma North Shore Style 6-cut take-and-bake pizza for only \$5. The pizzas are perfectly sized for two to three people.

Convenience Sells

Pizza sales are on the rise in spite of the downturn in the economy. According to Perishables Group FreshFacts Powered by The Nielsen Company for the 52-weeks ending June 26, 2010, as published in the Madison, WI-based International Deli-Dairy-Bakery Association's (IDDBA), *What's In Store 2011*, while pizza contributes only 1.5 percent of deli department dollars, its share of deli prepared food sales has increased 8 percent over the previous year; this is second only to deli dips/spreads/toppings which were up 10.2 percent. However, recent strategic pricing options in the foodservice arena such as Pizza Hut's \$10 for any size, any crust and any topping stand to take a bite out of deli sales.

One push back against the chains, says Lauri Gritten, vice president of sales and marketing for Pizza Blends, Inc., Bellevue, WA, "is for delis to emphasize convenience. Take-and-bake programs, for example, allow customers to control when they heat and eat their pizza and it's fresher because of this, not cold and old. Delis can also emphasize quality, and this can be in the choice of high-quality toppings such as meats, cheeses and vegetables. A relevant price point is crucial, too."

"TAKE-AND-BAKE PROGRAMS, FOR EXAMPLE, ALLOW CUSTOMERS TO CONTROL WHEN THEY HEAT AND EAT THEIR PIZZA AND IT'S FRESHER BECAUSE OF THIS, NOT COLD AND OLD."

—LAURI GRITTEN
PIZZA BLENDS, INC.

According to Champion's Smith, "We see continued growth in take-and-bake as more consumers and delis alike embrace this concept. However, we have customers that do offer a bake-in-store service with our take-and-bake products. They'll offer to bake a pizza while customers shop and then they can take home a hot pizza for dinner."

There's a big opportunity for delis to offer pizzas in three forms, says Burke's Hertz, "ready-to-eat by the slice, ready-to-eat pizzas for carry-out and take-and-bake pizzas."

No matter how it's sold, notes Smith, "Our most successful deli customers heavily merchandise their pizza programs and make them a prominent part of their deli."

According to Technomic's *Pizza Consumer Trend Report*, a majority of consumers (93 percent) eat pizza at least once a month, and the average consumer eats pizza nearly three times per month.

Pizza delivery/carry-out is a nearly \$36 billion industry, notes Palermo's Fallucca, "with frozen a fraction of this and deli sales a fraction of frozen. To grow deli sales is to tap into the take-out foodservice business. One way to do this is price promotion and another is in-store demo. This generates trial and exposes customers to how good a deli's pizza is and puts in consumers' mind another option in terms of price/value benefit the next time they want a pizza."

Some delis offer services similar to delivery/carry-out. The Whole Foods Market in La Jolla, CA, one of 270-plus stores in this Austin, TX-based natural foods chain, has a dedicated pizza station and telephone number where customers can order ahead seven days a week between 7 AM and 10 PM. In addition to traditional pizza items, the menu also offers breakfast selections and dessert

pizzas topped with fresh seasonal fruits.

"Our most successful customers offer a meal deal in their delis," relates Smith. "Example would be buy a pizza, get a 2-liter drink and salad kit free or buy a pizza and get a breadstick free."

Bashas', a 165-plus-store chain based in Chandler, AZ, uses social media to pull customers into the deli for pizza. For example, a Twitter tweet in November read, "Monday's Pizza Special from the Deli includes a Large 16" Pepperoni Pizza, 1 lb of Boneless Wingz & a 2-liter bottle of Coke for only \$9.99."

Sporting events offer slam dunk opportunities to sell pizza. Harris-Teeter Fresh Foods Market, a 201-store chain headquartered in Matthews, NC, ran a special promotion during the first week of April 2009 in which 16-inch New York-style pizzas with a choice of seven toppings, including steak 'n cheese, barbecue chicken and pepperoni classic, sold for \$7.99 each. Party platters such as a garden-er's choice vegetable tray and cookie platter were also merchandised in the chef-prepared meal solution area to round out the meal and prompt incremental sales.

Some retailers have created a pizza night, often Fridays, during which pizza is on sale, says Stefano's Hamer. "Given the 7-day refrigerated shelf life of deli pizza, brisk sales on a once-per-week basis will positively impact shrink."

Beyond Pizza

Pizza chains are expanding their menus. Pizza Hut introduced its Tuscani pasta and Domino's now offers oven-baked sandwiches. Similarly on the retail front, panini — meats and cheeses between two slices of toasted ciabatta bread — is now offered in the prepared foods grab-and-go section at Giant Eagle, Inc., a 225-store chain headquartered in O'Hara Township, PA.

"Many of our customers like to carry a deli take-and-bake breadstick as it is a traditional complement to pizzas," notes Smith.

According to Hamer, "Some retailers have extended the halo of the pizza section to include additional Italian specialties such as calzones and stromboli with resulting sales and profit growth. Development of an Italian foods section with calzones, stromboli and mini calzones is a great way to differentiate the deli from other sources of pizza."

In addition, Stefano recently launched a distinctive single serve handheld pizza called Tuscani. "Based upon a product found in Italy, the Tuscani offers consumers an exceptional eating experience in a portable format. It's been formulated for reheating in a microwave or conventional oven. The Tuscani is sold with a marinara dipping sauce," Hamer concludes,

DB

The Dish That Became A Category

Barbecue represents an opportunity for continued sales growth

BY BOB JOHNSON

Barbecue has grown in popularity to the point that it's no longer a dish or a recipe — it's a category. And progressive retailers should find room for a breadth of products, promotions and services to help this growing category reach its full potential.

"Don't just sell ribs. The one mistake I see supermarket delis making is that they're all selling ribs and nothing else in their barbecue program. They have to realize that barbecue is a category — it's not just ribs," says Terry Hyer, chief operating officer at Zarda Bar-B-Q & Sauce, Blue Springs, MO.

A barbecue program may begin with the ribs, but it doesn't end there. "The ribs are the romance. They're the lure. They're the leader of the category. But smart operators are going to realize they have consumers out there who have been watching the Food Network and they can expand to sell brisket, pulled pork, baked beans and cole slaw," Hyer adds.

He mentions Price Chopper and Hy-Vee in Kansas City as stores that have been innovative in their barbecue merchandising. Both offered a special promotion before last year's Super Bowl with special pricing on a slab of ribs and on a meal deal that included ribs and a pound each of baked beans and potato salad. "All through the Midwest there are chains doing ribs and bean combo packages, and doing it very well," he adds.

Delis can go the extra mile by offering consumers the convenience of cooked meat along with the service of custom slicing as a point of differentiation. "I would suggest delis merchandise a full brisket that can be sliced to the customers' specifications, with or without sauce," advises Greg Klein, vice president for marketing at Sadler's Smokehouse, Henderson, TX. "You can walk up and say you need six slices of brisket for dinner and watch them slice it. The meat is ready to go, but it's sliced right in front of you."

Brookshire's market in Tyler, TX, offers this consumer-friendly approach to barbecue in the deli, Klein continues, noting the con-



PHOTO COURTESY OF PLUMROSE

sumer-friendly service is working. "It's moving more product for us."

The Local Touch

There are as many barbecue flavor profiles as there are areas of the country that cook barbecue. "Barbecue items reflect local flavors, depending on what part of the coun-

try you're from. Some prefer a smoky flavor while others prefer a bold sweetness. Some even prefer a barbecue sauce with heat," says Michael Dentico executive vice president at La Nova Wings, Inc., Buffalo, NY.

According to Gene Pritchett, national sales manager for Southern Pride, Marion, IL, "If you're located in an area where barbe-

cue is defined, you'd need to offer what would be expected from your customer base in that area. For example, if you're in Texas, beef brisket would be expected from your local customers, because Texas is known for its brisket. Likewise, in Memphis pulled pork would be expected." The distinctive regional barbecue flavor profiles are well defined and well known among the aficionados.

"It seems barbecue does have a lot of local flair," according to Philip Burger, vice president of Burger's Smokehouse, California, MO. "We use a Kansas City-style sauce that's sweet and moderately spicy. Memphis seems to have a slightly stronger flavor to sauces. The East Coast can have a mustard/vinegar flavor."

In areas where barbecue is a staple, it might make sense to team up with a producer to create a proprietary recipe. "Proprietary recipes can help — especially if they're from a well-known source. They can help drive sales. Also, if you wanted to create a signature item and promote a brand name," Pritchett says.

Recipes have to reflect the local barbecue preferences. "Proprietary recipes can help because deli operators service the public from their local area. They most likely are from the

area themselves so the local preferred flavor is known and served to keep the customers happy," Denticio reports.

It helps to add a little local folklore to strike a familiar chord with consumers. "Proprietary recipes can help, especially if they're attached with a great story," says Tiffany Bomer, marketing director at Triple T Specialty Meats, Ackley, IA.

Houston, TX-based Holmes Smokehouse, for example, uses an award-winning, generations-old family recipe that was served at George W. Bush's inauguration. "Our family's original recipe that brought our grandparents to the dance over 40 years ago keeps winning awards for us year after year," proclaims Randy Pauly, business development manager. "Like being the official sausage selected for George Bush's presidential inauguration and winning best sausage at the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo.

"Every week we're put to the test as we're cutting against the toughest competition to win the right to be served in establishments, restaurants, and grocery store chains," he continues. "In fact, in many cases it's because of our ability to create and also replicate recipes that we're awarded private-label business to package new and existing brands of sausage across the sausage industry."

Expanding Horizons

The other side of the coin is that consumers are frequently willing to experiment with flavors from other regions. Even barbecue aficionados who are fiercely attached to local preferences in meats, cooking methods and sauces or rubs have shown a growing willingness to try barbecue from other areas.

According to Bomer, "Today people are looking for new flavors from different regions and different ethnic groups, breaking away from same old recipes. Trial-and-error is always the best way to discover what customers want. And remember to think outside of the box. People like to buy products that are versatile, so a deli should point out different ways of preparing barbecue through pictures or recipe cards. For example, you can use shredded barbecue pork for a traditional sandwich or you can use it to make nachos or as a pizza topping."

The key is the product has to be quality if it is to cross over. "High-quality barbecue items will sell anywhere if they're marketed properly. For example you can promote and sell a Texas-style beef brisket even if you aren't in Texas. This gives people an opportunity to experience other types of barbecue and you can build a following because the bottom line is, it's just great food," Southern Pride's Pritchett says.

Some local barbecue flavor profiles have

already gained acceptance far beyond their home region. "Barbecue is just great food," he continues. "Great food will sell anywhere if it's high quality and marketed properly. For example, Texas-style beef brisket has had a tremendous impact on barbecue in Chicago. Memphis-style pulled pork and St. Louis ribs have been proven to be popular coast to coast."

Here's The Rub

Many producers supply rubs or sauces that can be used to enhance the barbecue served at the deli or as a stand-alone product in itself.

"Sauces and seasonings, or rubs, are what make the dish! Seasonings have little to no calories or carbs and, for little cost, add tremendous flavor value," explains John McBride, vice president for sales at Magic Seasoning Blends, New Orleans, LA. "By nature, most seasoning blends are versatile, including Barbeque Magic, and will enhance whatever protein they combine with. However, Chef Paul's philosophy is that there are certain seasoning blend mixes that maximize flavor in certain proteins. As a result, we offer Poultry Magic for chicken or turkey, Pork & Veal Magic for pork, veal and lamb, Blackened Steak for grilling or blackening and Meat Magic for any protein. The deli can switch out proteins on their offerings with distinctly different flavors offered on a rotating basis."

Sauces and rubs can help add the local stamp. "Rubs and sauces are extremely important to items such as brisket, chicken, ribs and pulled pork. What you rub that piece of meat with prior to cooking and what kind of sauce you finish with will reflect a unique taste profile. But when it comes to sausage, it's all about the ingredients you use especially when it comes to the course ground sausage we produce. Luvine Holmes said it best. 'You can't make a good sausage cheap, and you can't make a cheap sausage good,'" Holmes' Pauly says.

The importance of rubs and sauces also differs by region. "Rubs are big in certain parts of the country," according to La Nova's Denticio. "It all depends on if you're looking for a dry 'cleaner' product or one you sink your teeth into and slather your face in delicious barbecue sauce. Personal preference I guess."

The general consensus is that no rub or sauce is good enough to replace quality meat or disguise poor quality meat, but the importance of rubs or seasonings does depend to a great degree on the cut of meat and style of cooking. Triple T's Bomer believes, "Leaner cuts typically need more flavor enhancers like a rub or a sauce. Fattier cuts are naturally moist and delicious with only their own natural juice."

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Roast Beef Maintains Its Top-Of-The-Heap Position

Even in a tough economy, consumers are willing to spend more for quality

BY KRISTINE HANSEN

Despite the fact that many new meat trends have been introduced over the last few decades — and continue to roll out each month — one thing has not changed: Roast beef is still considered supreme. Tucked into crusty slices of bread, it's a popular sandwich choice, whether it's New York-style (cold-cut roast beef on rye) or open-faced (on crusty baguette). Even with a struggling economy, consumers' appetite for roast beef is still strong. It continues to be recognized as a premium cut of meat and worth paying a little more for.

Bruce Belack, vice president of sales and marketing for Vincent Giordano Corp., based in Philadelphia, PA, estimates that roast beef is one of the top five most popular deli items. "The main flavors offered nationally are salt/pepper, London broil and premium beef with garlic. Regional favorites are Italian, Cajun and mesquite," he adds. In addition to roast beef, the company offers pastrami, corned beef, Philly steak and specialty items such as Italian-style meatballs and home-style meat loaf.

E.W. Grobbel Sons Inc., based in Detroit, MI, has taken a different approach; it has resisted adding flavors and seasonings to the product it's been making since 1883. According to Jason Grobbel, the fourth-generation owner and great-grandson of founder Emil Grobbel, consistency has been key to the company's success as a roast-beef producer. "It just boils down to good old-fashioned product and sticking with what you know is right. The best way to keep the product top of line with customers is to deliver great, natural roast beef."

The company has chosen to expand its product line by adding different cuts of meat. It now offers two top-round cuts, Chateaubriand and London broil. "It's something that people can relate to. It's a dish that's offered in fine-dining restaurants," says Grobbel.





“IN THE RETAIL ARENA, SPECIFIC ADVERTISING FOR DELI ROAST BEEF ITEMS PLAY A LARGE ROLE IN INCREASING SALES, ESPECIALLY HOT SALES THAT HIT A NICE RETAIL POINT TO GET THE CUSTOMER’S ATTENTION.”

—BRUCE BELACK
VINCENT GIORDANO CORP

“Prices [for roast beef] are high. They’re the highest they’ve ever been in our industry,” notes Robert Dickman, who serves as co-CEO of Los Angeles, CA-based Charlie’s Pride Meats with his brother Jim. Their father Charlie founded the company in 1969.

In response, manufacturers have had to implement creative marketing strategies. For Charlie’s Pride, the solution was to add an incentive. When consumers at the deli purchase a pound of roast beef, they receive a packet of au jus dipping sauce. The sauce, available in four different flavors — beef, Italian, Cajun and pastrami — was offered for the first time in 2010. Plans are to resume the special periodically — each special will last about three months — during 2011.

“It really stimulated sales,” says Dickman. “It pushes the customer from a quarter-pound to a full pound. And with the au jus, it’s a meal. It’s a tough year for everybody, especially consumers, and what we did is give it free to the retailer; what they did was pass it on to the customer at no cost.”

One way to differentiate the deli department is to present the consumer with ideas about how to incorporate the product into

home meals. “We have a corporate chef in Atlanta,” says Dickman. Eric Stein, who graduated from the Culinary Institute of America and has worked as an executive chef at many restaurants, brings a deep appreciation to how the product can be consumed at home.

Traditional marketing techniques should not be ignored when promoting roast beef — or any deli item. “In the retail arena, specific advertising for deli roast beef items play a large role in increasing sales,” says Giordano’s Belack, “especially hot sales that hit a nice retail point to get the customer’s attention. Either ads or cross-merchandising specials are helpful in getting consumers excited about the purchase.”

Quality Matters

High quality roast beef is minimally processed, a trait growing in consumer popularity. Manufacturers are quick to point out that roast beef of poor quality is usually heavily processed. “I think people may consider roast beef less processed [than other meats] but it’s not necessarily true,” explains Grobbel of E.W. Grobbel. “A range of prod-

ucts is available.

“People really want a less processed roast beef, but that’s very expensive. If they want something more processed, they’ll move into ham, salami or bologna,” he adds. “Anything ‘natural’ is going to carry a higher price point — and it’s not always marketed very clearly at the delis.”

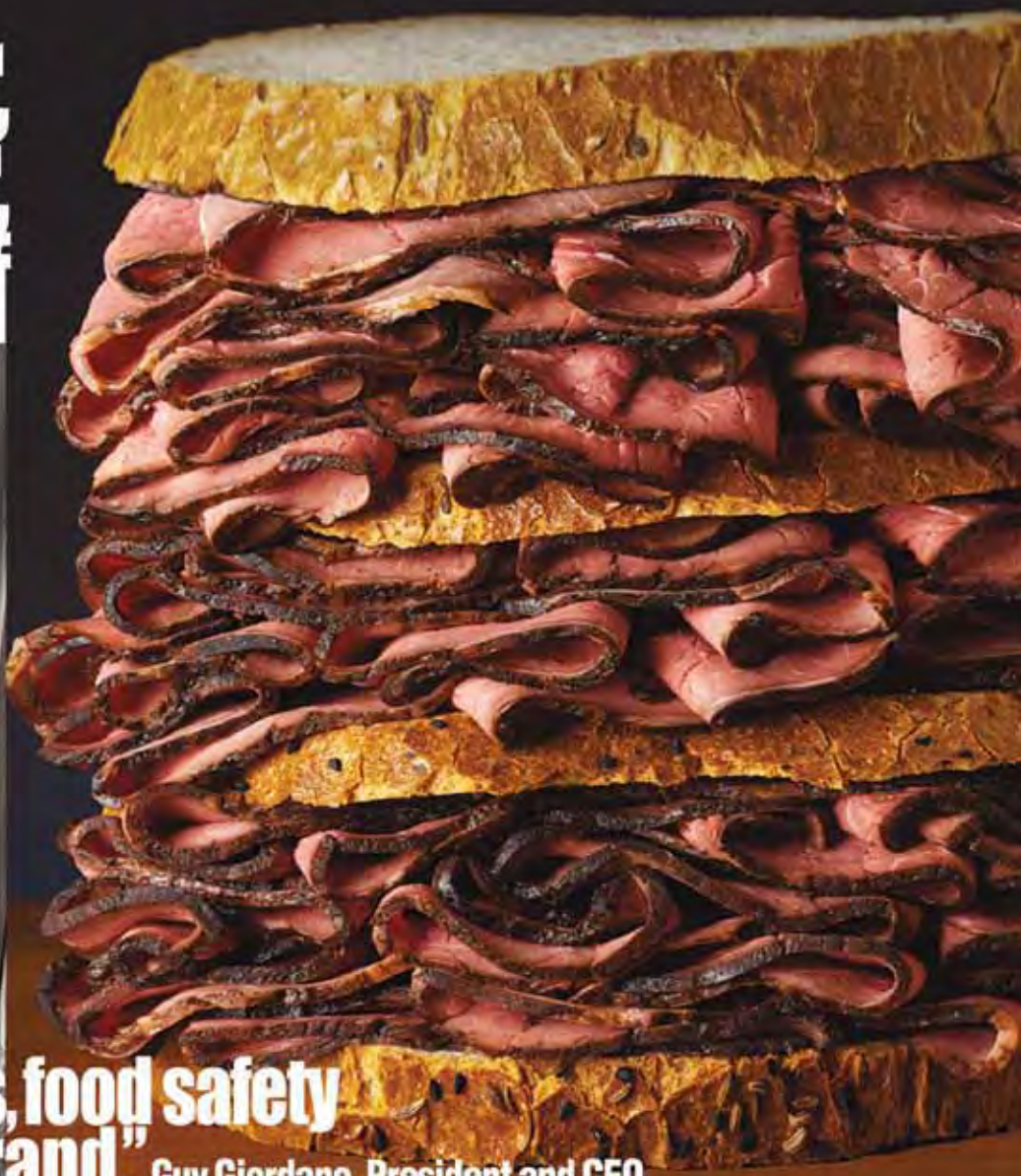
According to Belack, high-quality roast beef is a whole-muscle meat. “As long as the marination level is low and minimizes the added chemicals, roast beef may be considered a more natural product. As long as ingredients are minus the preservatives and added chemicals, then it will be considered good quality.”

Roast beef “is not an item you should cheapen,” explains Grobbel. “There’s just no reason to go cheap. There’s no really inexpensive way to do that, although people try. Does Godiva change the way they make chocolates during the recession?”

When a consumer walks into a deli and spots roast beef in the display case, there may not be any visible packaging. This means that any details about how and where the meat was processed are hidden. “There’s a tremendous disconnect,” says Grobbel, “which puts the onus on the deli. That’s the challenge today and what separates deli owners.”

What’s ahead for roast beef? Dickman predicts a need for healthier options. Charlie’s Pride has been developing lower-sodium items to appeal to the growing market segment looking for this type of product. But it’s difficult to replicate the taste of a full-salt roast beef. “They’re good on paper but in reality they aren’t very good,” he concedes. **DB**

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Affordable Indulgence

Salami brings a touch of class to any dining occasion

BY JULIE COOK RAMIREZ

Unable to justify going out to dinner as often as they did during the boom years, consumers are finding new ways to make eating — and entertaining — at home into the ultimate dining experience. They've opened themselves up to trying new things and experimenting with different flavor profiles. They're devouring cooking shows and cookbooks in search of their next gastronomic conquest. Enrollment in culinary schools has even seen an uptick.

As consumers seek out ways to indulge at home, many categories of food and beverage have enjoyed a surge in popularity, including salami. Looking to replicate the charcuterie experience, consumers are increasingly turning to salami to serve their guests or enjoy as part of a quiet night at home.

"Through travel and The Food Network and the Internet, people are learning more about foods," says Dave Brandow, director, sales and marketing, corporate foodservice and export, Piller Sausages & Delicatessens Ltd., Waterloo, ON, Canada. "They're exploring and want to experience flavor adventures. That bodes well for salami."

Artisan salami has experienced a particularly strong surge in demand, as consumers seek out a little bit of indulgence at home. Consequently, a recognition of the old-world methods of making salami, including natural casings and hand-tied, paper-wrapped product, has emerged, according to Paul Bertolli, founder and curemaster, Fra' Mani Handcrafted Salumi, Berkeley, CA.

"There's been a surge of interest in artisan foods in general and in the category of salami or charcuterie that's been promulgated not only by restaurants but also by the food media," he says. "A tremendous amount of interest has trickled down from the restaurants and the foodie community to the mainstream."

Even while people are breaking out of their comfort zones and trying new things, regional preferences remain, with Midwestern consumers choosing hard, smoked salami typically made of pork and beef or just beef alone, while West Coast consumers opt



for dry Italian salamis and East Coast consumers gravitate toward Genoa or Sopressata, according to Michael Cruz, director of marketing, Columbus Foods LLC, Hayward, CA. Still many consumers don't realize such differences exist.

"If you talk to consumers, they think all salamis are the same," says Cruz. "Not only are there different varieties of salami, but there are also different qualities of salami — from everyday salami you would use on a sandwich to something you'd be proud to slice and serve to guests."

That attitude is starting to change, as people take the time to educate themselves about the foods they're trying. Increasingly, consumers are inquiring about particular types of salami or looking to try salamis connected to their family's heritage, according to

Chris Bowler, president, Creminelli Fine Meats, Springville, UT.

"People are looking to try international specialties in salami and figure out which ones they like the best," says Bowler. "Do they like French saucisson sec the best? Do they like Southern Italian-style spicy salami? We see a lot of that."

Despite the trend toward upscale artisan product, salami shouldn't be considered an acquired taste or a "snob appeal" food, notes Lorenza Passetti, president, Volpi Foods, St. Louis, MO. "Our customers range from firemen all the way to corporate executives," she says. "It really doesn't have any socioeconomic classification attached to it."

Salami is a wise choice for the cost-conscious consumer, says Passetti, because "a little goes a long way." It gives people the

opportunity to enjoy something upscale and delicious without breaking the bank.

The Ambassadors

Because the deli offers a uniquely one-on-one experience with the consumer, deli associates are well positioned to make suggestions and educate consumers about the attributes or flavor profiles of different types of salami.

"They're really the ambassadors of our products," says Fra' Mani's Bertolli. "Their role is to know the product, know how it's produced, and know the differences between one or the other, whether it be the meat, the seasoning, or the manner of handling it."

It's difficult to get out and train each and every deli staffer who will be handling your product, concedes Bertolli. Still, there are salami makers who try. Creminelli spends "tons of times" in stores behind deli counters educating staff about their product, according to Bowler. Piller also works closely with delis, providing in-person introductions to its product line and training staff on the myriad ways consumers can use it.

Deli staff can also play a key role in dispelling some of the myths that surround salami, such as the mold on the outside of the product. They can also explain that the fermentation process renders a raw meat product safe. "That's where the education on the part of the operator is really important," says Bertolli. "It's a fairly complicated subject which is not easy to explain."

It's important for the deli staff to have actually tried the products they're selling, adds Volpi's Passetti. Only then can they provide true counsel on what a particular salami tastes like or advise consumers on which salami would pair best with a particular wine or cheese, for example.

Sampling also plays a major role, particularly when it comes to introducing the uninitiated to artisan salami, according to Sonja Elmauer, director, marketing and communications, Freybe Gourmet Foods Ltd., Langley, BC, Canada. Only through trial are consumers able to discover subtle differences in texture and flavors.

When someone tries artisan salami for the first time, they typically say, "This is different from any other salami I've ever tasted," notes Creminelli's Bowler. That's due to the types of meat used and the fact that it breaks down more slowly in the mouth. "They don't leave grease in your mouth, they're a lot less acidic, and the flavors are a little more delicate," he adds. "It's hard to explain those things until somebody puts it in their mouth."

Once consumers have tried different salamis and discovered which ones strike

their fancy, they can continue relying on the deli staff to slice salami for them or opt to take it home in increasingly popular grab-and-go packages. "The more convenient the package you can produce, the better off you'll be and the more easily you'll get a non-user to try your product," explains Passetti.

Piller recently transitioned its salami from strictly deli offerings to pre-sliced packages in chub formats. The company also responded to consumer demand for reduced sodium offerings with D'Amour, a heart-shaped

product with 40 percent less sodium than regular salami.

Columbus is also exploring ways to meet modern demands for salami that doesn't carry the "unhealthy" label that has long plagued the category. "There are things you can do from a nitrites standpoint, from a fat content and sodium standpoint, more functional types of attributes that are going to become more important," reports Cruz. "They're going to be influencing how manufacturers make their products." **DB**

Shape Up Your Deli

The advertisement features four large, distinct shapes of salami: a flower, a circle, a diamond, and a heart. Below these, a plate shows several smaller, irregularly shaped slices. The Black Kassel Pillers logo is prominently displayed, featuring the text "Black Kassel" in a stylized font with "The art of good taste" underneath, and "Pillers" in a blue oval. A testimonial from a customer is included, praising the taste and quality of the products. At the bottom, contact information for Pillers Sausages & Delicatessens Ltd. is provided.

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Award-Winning American Cheddars

Fabulous Cheddars come from all over the country

BY KAREN SILVERSTON

“Cheddars have, like all cheeses in the U.S., evolved, especially recently,” says Kurt Dammeier, president, Beecher’s Handmade Cheese, Seattle, WA. “There’s a burst of energy happening in the category.”

American cheesemakers have created captivating Cheddars that reflect both local subtleties and their own values — and consumers are ready for them. Aged handmade block, expertly flavored and creative non-traditional styles are essential Cheddar categories. Although considered esoteric until a few years ago, Bandaged Cheddar is now coveted, too. When Fiscalini Bandaged Wrapped Cheddar received the Wyke Farms Trophy for Extra Mature Traditional Cheddar, it was the first time this trophy ever left the United Kingdom. Without a doubt, American Cheddar is world class.

“An award can be a buying tool. If it’s multiple awards in multiple competitions over years, it’s that much more weighted,” says Dave Leonhardi, director of education and events for the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board (WMMB), Madison, WI.

Wisconsin And The Midwest

Carr Valley Cheese, LaValle, WI, makes 4 Year Aged Cheddar, a big, fruity, floral cheese with a 3-minute finish. “It’s hard to sell an artisan Cheddar because everybody thinks commodity when they see the name Cheddar,” says Sid Cook, Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker and Carr Valley owner. “The way we make the cheese is far from what the commodity makers are making. Maybe commodity Cheddar should be called something else. Although it meets the standards of identity, it isn’t made traditionally. It’s all about speed, fast cultures, price and what people can afford. It’s not necessarily about flavor and how long it is going to age.”

Carr Valley Bandaged Billy is a 12-pound cheddared and milled goat’s milk cheese. “We run the moistures a little higher on Bandaged Billy than on the Snow White Goat Cheddar. You’ll get a cheese with less shelf life, but it



PHOTO COURTESY OF FISCALINI CHEESE COMPANY

has a creamier texture whereas the Snow White is a little drier. If it meets the standard of identity, we can call it Cheddar. If it doesn’t, we shouldn’t call it Cheddar,” says Cook.

According to Kerry Henning, Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker and co-owner of Henning’s Cheese, Kiel, WI, “In a small plant, milk comes from your locale. The No. 1 differentiator is soil conditions, which influence the milk flavors, which influence the cheese flavor. We could do everything the same as we’re doing here in another place — England, Vermont, California — and we would have a completely different product because of the milk. But you have control over the cultures you use. Culture has a lot to do with flavor profile. That’s where some of the artistry is. The problem with Cheddar cheesemaking is if you want something two to three years old and you’re going for a certain flavor profile, it takes a long time to see if it’s good or not good.”

In Henning’s Peppercorn Cheddar, the peppercorn aroma is subtly absorbed into the

cheese. You taste Cheddar, peppercorns and a balanced third flavor. “There’s no such thing as a perfect cheese but it’s always our goal to get one. It boils down to you have to satisfy yourself as a cheesemaker; do well in contests and your peers think it’s good.”

Temperature and environment play a huge role in flavor development. “There are all kinds of nice Cheddars produced in different ways,” notes Joe Widmer, Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker and president of Widmer’s Cheese Cellars, Theresa, WI. “There’s a lot of variation in flavor because of the way people are curing. Some cure at 55° open to the air, some cure it inside a barrier bag and some cure in wax. The longer you age Cheddars, the more there’s a chance of variation from batch to batch. It’s harder to control flavor variations when aging in open air.”

Widmer’s 8 Year Aged Cheddar and 10 Year Aged Cheddar are deep, dense and crunchier than the 6 Year Aged. The 10 Year Aged finishes with a caramel note. “Buyers do watch the awards. This year when I won



PHOTO COURTESY OF MEISTER CHEESE COMPANY



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PHOTO COURTESY OF MILTON CREAMERY



PHOTO COURTESY OF GREAT LAKES CHEESE

for the 8 Year, my 8 and 10 Year sales went way up. It started to shorten my supply," says Widmer.

Meister Cheese Company, Muscoda, WI, makes Eagle Cave Reserve. "My sister and I wanted to create an artisan cheese to represent our generation and looked to Cheddar to honor our grandfather, who made Cheddar for years," explains Scott Meister, president. They chose an English truckle style and then validated numerous details including type of fabric, the size of the cheese, aging, amount of rind, flavor hints and texture. The firm and earthy milled-

curd, bandaged white Cheddar is 8 inches tall and weighs 6 pounds.

"Entering the cave-aged category is taking a huge chance. There's labor, ingredient cost and a lot of time. The time element just for aging this cheese is better than eight or nine months. The care and handling along the way are all part of the flavor profile," says WMMB's Leonhardi.

Prairie Breeze from Milton Creamery, Milton, IA, is sweet, balanced and creamy, with a crunch and a tasty finish. "It's higher end and has wide appeal," says Rufus Musser, owner. "The cultures and aging are different

from our Cheddar. We're cheddaring and milling, but there's definitely a difference in this cheese." Milk is sourced from small local family farms. "The complexities — all those nuances, depths, layers of flavors in the milk differ — over the year. Right now we feel it has to age nine to 12 months to reach its optimum." Musser's son, cheesemaker Galen Musser, participates in an evaluation system to maintain the flavor profile.

Vermont

Vermont is known for its Cheddars, which can differ greatly from cheesemaker

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to cheesemaker and even within each individual operation.

Maple Smoked Cheddar from Grafton Village Cheese, Grafton, VT, starts with the same recipe the company uses for Grafton Cheddar, aged one to four years. Cold-smoked over maple wood chips, this smooth, sweet, subtle specialty is slightly younger than the core aged Cheddars. "Grafton does not pasteurize the milk," says Meri Spicer, director of marketing. "That's a key difference that will have an impact on the flavor profile. In the eyes of the FDA, it is raw milk, an important distinction, and therefore it does have to age at a temperature of not less than 35° F for at least 60 days. That requirement is not an issue, as aged Cheddar is our primary product."

Cabot Creamery Cooperative, Montpelier, VT, makes Cabot Clothbound Cheddar from pasteurized milk and ages it at the Cellars at Jasper Hill in Greensboro, VT. "Clothbound starts with a different set of cultures than our traditional Cheddar, and ripening it at the Cellars of Jasper Hill contributes to its creamy, nutty flavor," says Amy Levine, director of marketing. Private Stock, a classic Cabot Cheddar, is aged for 18 months and has a strong flavor profile. "There's more propensity for stronger profiles

on the East Coast and desire for milder as you go west. But we've seen shifts as we've moved into new markets," says Levine.

Shelburne Farms, Shelburne, VT, drew inspiration from the English tradition of making farmhouse Cheddar from a single herd of cows raised on the farm. "A raw-milk cheese is an important part of that," explains Nat Bacon, head cheesemaker. "The cheese I personally like eating has a balance, both the creamy richness of the milk and the nice distinctiveness of a sharp Cheddar that lingers on your tongue. We're striving for both of those in one cheese. Farmhouse cheddar is quite versatile — we sell to both smaller specialty shops and larger grocery stores. We found a scale we're comfortable with and try to make good food and good cheese without stressing our land, our cows and our people."

New York

Yancey's Fancy, Corfu, NY, makes Cheddar from New York milk sourced within 50 miles. Jalapeño and Peppadew Cheddar is spicy and sweet. "It's very eye appealing with the red and the green coming through the cream colored cheese. The jalapeño gives you heat to balance with the sweet peppadew," says Jodi Stahl, marketing manager. "More and more consumers are looking for an American-made 'good' Cheddar. They'll come up to me at demos and ask, 'Where is this produced?' Even on the West Coast or in Wisconsin, they're familiar with our Buffalo locale."

Great Lakes Cheese, Hiram, OH, opened a completely rebuilt plant in Adams, NY, more than doubling its original production capacity, the biggest new plant for making Cheddar east of the Mississippi in the last 25 years. Adams Reserve is one of only a few remaining major manufacturers of New York Cheddar Cheese. "Adams Reserve New York Extra Sharp Cheddar is naturally aged and its unique New York flavor begins peaking after about 12 months," says Erin Shirkey, brand manager. She views the awards won by the cheese as validation, using them as a gauge to make sure the products coming out of the plant are still top in the market.

The West

Beehive Cheese Company, Uintah, UT, makes Promontory from pasteurized milk and Full Moon from raw milk, with a singular recipe developed at Utah State University in Logan, UT. The company uses Jersey cow's milk from Wadeland South Dairy, 10 miles away. "The sweetness of our cheese is what people love," relates Patrick Ford, co-owner and co-founder. "Tasted next to Promontory, Full Moon tastes completely different." Both



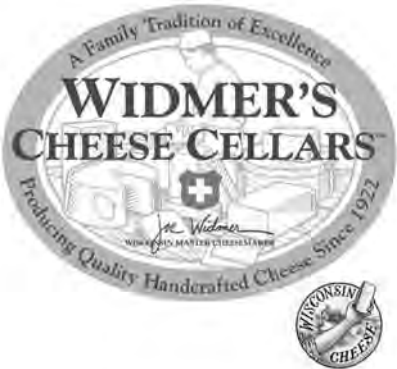
Tim Welsh of Beehive Cheese

are notably creamy with the slightly fruity notes Ford and cheesemaker Tim Welsh are aiming for, a result of the recipe's combination of cultures. Against international competition in the same class, both won bronze medals, a testament to the company's care and skill.

Ballard Family Dairy & Cheese, Gooding, ID, has combined its Jersey cow's milk Idaho White Cheddar recipe with Ritrovo Casina Rossa Truffle & Salt. "We want the milk up front without pushing a lot of cultures and flavor into it, so the subtle flavors come through and you're still enjoying the cheese at the same time," notes Steve Ballard, co-owner. "It has the flavor of younger Cheddar, because mature Cheddar could overpower it. Anything you change in the cheese make can change the profile. To have three different flavors score as high as ours shows the quality we're turning out. Each flavor is a different make."

"When you start talking about characteristics people like in artisanal Cheddar, you really are going off the grid of the traditional Cheddar," says Beecher's Dammeier. "We decided not to call Flagship 'Cheddar' because we wanted to expand the horizons. We wanted a different taste — a creamy, nutty finish rather than the traditional finish, so we use a different culture set than most Cheddars and always do well in competitions on taste." Dammeier also wanted a cheese he could cook with, so Flagship has a lower acidity than traditional Cheddar.

Traditional Cheddar made by cheesemaker Mariano Gonzalez is the specialty of Fiscalini Cheese Company, Modesto, CA. "We're truly trying to make Cheddar the way it was made 200 years ago," says John Fiscalini, president. "We're not trying to get the highest yield from our milk. We're trying to get the most flavor from our cheese. Cheddar has been considered a generic, but the best Cheddars are extraordinary." **DB**



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Going Dutch Never Felt So Good

Americans are finding their love of Dutch cheeses

BY GABRIELLE HARRADINE

The Dutch have been mastering their cheesemaking skills since around 400 CE with the first organized dairy farming emerging about 1200 CE. The result is a cheese culture surrounded by centuries of tradition. In recent years, American consumers have found that Dutch cheeses are consistent, delicious and very affordable. The complexity of Dutch cheeses ranges from the mild to complex and includes cow, ewe and goat milk cheeses.

"More than half of the Dutch landscape was under the sea at one time, but thanks to the intricate system of canals and dykes designed by the Romans, the rich sea land has been reclaimed," explains Ruth Anne Flore, brand manager for Westland's Old Amsterdam, based in Stamford, CT. This reclaimed land offers superior grazing, which creates delicious cheeses.

Although Holland produces many types of cheese, the main focus is on Gouda and Edam, with Gouda accounting for 50 percent of the cheese produced and Edam 27 percent. Maasdammer, the most famous of which are the Leerdammer and Maasdam brands, is the next most widely produced cheese. These three may be the most popular but they certainly aren't the only ones produced by this great cheese country.

In September 2010, the European Union granted the Netherlands Protected Geographical Status for Gouda and Edam. Only Gouda and Edam may be labeled Gouda Holland and Edam Holland.

"Gouda cheese has flavors of butterscotch and caramel with a long-lasting mouthfeel, yet it isn't ridiculously expensive," explains Todd Druhot, cheese specialist of Atlanta Foods International, Atlanta, GA. "It's a great way to get lasting flavor for your dollar, and consumers are no doubt realizing that."

A major determiner for its creamy mouth feel and long-lasting taste is the amount of milk fat in a cheese. Traditional Gouda is made from whole milk, which means it tops the scale in its milk fat content. But like wine, cheese is a complex creation, and many fac-



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tors affect the final product.

"The Beemster region was reclaimed from the ocean in 1612, and people quickly realized the milk from this area was much creamier [than from other areas]," notes Michael Blum, sales and marketing director for Beemster USA, Jersey City, NJ. "This also makes the cheese taste better as it ages. We don't need to use as much salt as traditional Gouda-style cheeses, and because of this a fuller cheese taste is enjoyed by the consumer." Beemster cheese is dependent on its terroir; all the milk must come from the Beemster region.

Another important factor is the cheese culture, a mix of lactic acid bacteria added to the milk during the production process. The culture plays a key role in creating taste and texture. Every cheesemaker has its own culture, thereby making the taste of each cheese distinct. "After years of experimentation, the Westland family found the starter culture

that gives Old Amsterdam its constant quality," explains Flore. "Rich and robust with just the right amount of ripening crystals, yet at the same time smooth, creamy, and unlike most aged Goudas, easily sliceable."

In general, aging intensifies the flavor and texture of cheese, but age alone doesn't ensure a particular taste. Wheel size is another consideration when determining the effect of aging.

"The size of the wheel also determines the way the cheese ages," explains Steven Margarites, president of Best Cheese Corp., based in Mount Kisco, NY. "The smaller the wheel, the faster it will age. For example, if a 9-pound and a 22-pound wheel are both aged 18 months, the results will be much different. The smaller wheel will have the hardness of Parmigiano Reggiano and can be crumbled, while the larger wheel will be only semi-hard and won't crumble." The flavor will be much different as well, he adds. "The 9-

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pound wheel will be crystalized and very sharp, while the 22-pound wheel will have a smoother flavor."

Best Cheese Dutch imports include Uniekaas Vintage Three Year Gouda, which has a rich milky tang and hazelnut taste, and Uniekaas Vintage Five Year Gouda, which is dense with a butterscotch and salt taste. Best also imports Uniekaas Hollandse Chèvre, a goat milk cheese with a rich tangy flavor and smooth creamy texture resembling a classic Dutch Gouda. According to Tara Kirch, marketing manager, "This chèvre is very versatile and can be used in just about anything."

"It was discovered that if an aged Gouda was stored longer and at just the right temperature and humidity and turned frequently, it became the opposite of its younger version and delivered an intense aroma," says Flore. Westland's Old Amsterdam cheese is a result of this combination and has a blend of flavors that are sweet and sharp at the same time.

Aging plays an important role in the development of Dutch cheeses. Legally, a cheese is not a cheese until it's 15 days old and Dutch masters often buy their soon-to-be cheeses at a very early age. Therefore, the aging of the cheeses as well as where they're aged play an important role.

Beemster aging occurs in historic warehouses dating back to the 1500s. "The natural conditions and hand-turning and -polishing create a better end product," explains Blum.

Atlanta Foods imports Reypenaer made by Wijngaard Kaas. These cheeses are ripened in an old warehouse where shutters are used to control the climate in warmer months and heat is used in the colder months. The story of how the cheese is made and the use of historical aging methods has been a great selling point for the Reypenaer products, says Druhot.

Taste Profiles

Fanatical about clean milk and sanitation, the Dutch marry modern operations with Old World artistry. Always trying new favors and taste profiles, the Dutch are emerging as taste leaders.

"Smoking is a hot flavor trend right now," says Kristy Klug, marketing communications specialist, DCI Cheese Company, Richfield, WI. "Gouda melds with this trend especially well because its rich, full flavor and smooth finish are so nicely offset by the smoky, edible, brown rind that develops during the smoking process."

Spice, another top flavor profile, works especially well in cheese with a mild flavor profile such as Edam. The lower milk fat content leaves Edam with a mild flavor that's a perfect base for adding hot elements such as chiles and peppers. Jana Foods offers a spicy Edam under the Orange Windmill label. **DB**

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By
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Consumers are unrelenting in their pursuit of convenience and efficiency in every aspect of their daily lives. They're looking for ways to cope with ever-increasing demands on their time and to minimize the stress and anxiety that comes with their hectic lifestyles. When it comes to meal planning, they're looking to food retailers and restaurateurs to streamline the ways in which they purchase, prepare and consume foods at home.

Realizing that today's busy schedules leave very little time to prepare or cook, it's easy to see that help is needed, not only for daily meals but also for home entertaining and catering of special events.

Remember, catering is not limited to fancy parties such as weddings, anniversaries, graduations, and birthdays. Catering opportunities can also be casual, calling for light snacks, finger foods, sandwiches and other easy-to-serve treats for informal gatherings such as televised sports, pool parties, play groups, etc.

Restaurants and fast-food operators have responded to this dynamic with party packs, online ordering, curbside pickup and home delivery. So where does this leave food retailers? With many catering needs that supermarkets can satisfy simply and inexpensively, especially when considering the broad scope of ready-to-serve products available within deli departments.

From sliced meats and cheeses to olives, pickles and salads, the snack and/or meal combinations that can be prepared as catering solutions are numerous. For larger deli departments configured with on-premise cooking, baking and prep, the possibilities become extensive.

Success relies on motivated deli managers willing to invest the time necessary to evaluate, plan and effectively communicate these catering options to customers. Here are a few tips to help you get started:

CREATE AN ANNUAL CALENDAR: Pull out the calendar and make a list of public holidays. Then brainstorm all of the daily life events you can think of that could require meal planning. While birthdays and football games are no-brainers, dig deeper. Events such as little league, working late, home movie night, scout meetings and study groups are all perfect occasions to offer satisfying meal solutions.

GENERATE AWARENESS: Quick-service restaurants and fast-food chains may have larger advertising budgets, but you can reach out to customers every time they visit your store. If you can't take advantage of store circulars or

impose special signage on front windows, use the specials boards, price markers and other display materials already on hand. Display messages such as *We Cater - Events Large and Small* or *Ask Us About Party Planning* as ways to prompt conversation while filling orders. Alternatively, it's easy and inexpensive to print special aprons, buttons and hats with conversation provoking messages. All of this will contribute to inquiry, awareness and, eventually, orders.

CHANGE HABITS: For customers who do not yet view the deli department as a catering resource, you'll have to break well-established buying habits. Start planting seeds with focused messages such as *Game tonight? We'll cater* or *Unexpected guests? Let us cook*. Ultimately, you'll want to change the ways your customers think about meal planning and catering — getting them to recognize your deli department, rather than pizza delivery, fast-food

and family restaurants, as a viable resource.

SHOW AND TELL: Customers may not be able to visualize what your department can do to satisfy their catering needs. Extensive inventories of prepared party plates may not be feasible, but you can make samples "for display only" to stimulate thinking. Be sure they're clearly labeled and describe how they align with a particular event and/or catering need.

You can also prepare catering menus labeled for specific catering events and display them as you would recipe cards. The more you show and tell, the easier it will be for customers to understand and, most importantly, recall when it's time to make decisions.

PROVIDE CATERING SUPPORT: Some stores, especially in the weeks leading up to major public holidays, set up customer service tables to assist with catering. Even if you don't have the ability to set up a catering desk, make sure your counter staff know how to suggest catering solutions. Just as McDonald's asks if you'd like fries with your order and the US Post Office asks if you need stamps before concluding a transaction, make sure your team asks if there are any events on the horizon you can cater.

The keys to successful catering programs are identifying ways you can help your customers with meal solutions, clearly communicating these options and presenting them regularly throughout the year. Make sure to deliver this information in an emotionally appealing and memorable fashion. The more you create meaningful and regular connections with your customers, the more likely they are to seek out your services.

DB

Blast From The Past

Widmer's Cheese Cellars

These photos are part of a series taken on a single day in the 1940s in Theresa, WI, at Widmer's Cheese Cellars, by an *Encyclopedia Britannica* photographer documenting the making of Cheddar cheese. Joe Widmer, Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker, is the third-generation owner of the company started by his grandfather, John O. Widmer.

Joe uses the old recipes and traditional methods demonstrated in these photos of his grandfather. In the picture on the left, John is checking the temperature of the milk to start the Cheddar making process. In the picture on the right, he is milling the curds.

In 1905, at the age of 17, John came to Wisconsin from Switzerland to work as apprentice in a cheese factory. In 1922, when a cheese factory in Teresa came up for sale, he bought it and began the company now known as Widmer's Cheese Cellars.



Blast From The Past is a regular feature of DELI BUSINESS. We welcome submissions of your old photos, labels or advertisements along with a brief description of the photo. Please send material to: Editor, DELI BUSINESS, P.O. Box 810217, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0217 or e-mail DeliBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com. For more information contact us at (561)994-1118

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