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**BUSINESS**

MARKETING MERCHANDISING MANAGEMENT PROCUREMENT

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# Cheese Regulations Come Under Debate

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## NEW \$12M FACILITY OPENS AT THIEL CHEESE



LEFT TO RIGHT: CHIEF ANDREW HUNTER TALKS TO MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE, FOOD & MARINE SIMON COVENEY, IRISH DAIRY BOARD CEO KEVIN LANE AND NEIL COX, VP IRISH DAIRY BOARD FOOD INGREDIENTS U.S.

As part of the Irish Dairy Board's \$80 million expansion of their U.S. Food Ingredients business, a new \$12 million facility recently opened at Thiel Cheese & Ingredients in Hilbert, WI.

The investment expands the production capability by more than 40 percent and continues to support 135 local jobs.

"We are excited to open this state-of-the-art facility at Thiel Cheese & Ingredients in Wisconsin," says Neil Cox, president of IDB's U.S. Food Ingredients. "Wisconsin, like Ireland, has a proud tradition of producing some of the best dairy products in the world and has developed into a hub of innovation for cheese production."

IDB acquired the Thiel business in 2011 and, since then, the business has grown strongly with sales rising to \$80 million in 2013, up 13 percent. Thiel supplies cheese and cheese-based ingredients to some of America's largest food companies.

IDB is Ireland's largest exporter of dairy products. Founded more than 50 years ago, IDB is best known for its Kerrygold and Dubliner brands.

The Irish Dairy Board (IDB) is an agri-food commercial co-operative, which markets and sells dairy products on behalf of its members, Ireland's dairy processors and the Irish dairy farmer.

## COMING NEXT ISSUE IN OCT/NOV

**COVER STORY**  
Going Green

**FEATURE STORIES**  
Hummus

**MERCHANDISING REVIEWS**  
Fried Chicken  
Potatoes

**PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES**  
Cooking Oils

**PREPARED FOODS**  
Pizza

**DELI MEATS**  
Holiday Meat Guide

**CHEESES**  
Gruyere  
Affinage

### COMING IN DEC/JAN

DELI BUSINESS will feature a proprietary report on retail trends, a must read for deli executives looking for business intelligence.

### SUBSCRIPTION & READER SERVICE INFO

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COMING NEXT

# There are two ways to keep antibiotic-free deli meat customers in your store.



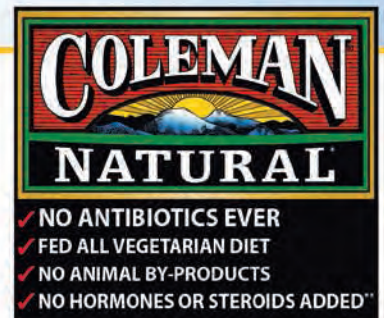
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## Announcements



### MICROBAC ADOPTS INVISIBLE SENTINEL TECHNOLOGY

Microbac Laboratories, Inc., Pittsburgh, PA, announced the company has adopted Invisible Sentinel Inc.'s Veriflow diagnostic technology for detection of bacterial pathogens in food. The assays were validated for various environmental surfaces and food products, including specialized foods such as confectionary products. The Veriflow product line has been approved by the AOAC International, a global standardization organization, to detect bacterial contamination in a wide variety of food types and on various environmental surfaces.

[www.microbac.com](http://www.microbac.com)

## New Products



### VALUE-ADDED ENHANCEMENTS

Saputo Cheese, Richfield, WI, has launched seven new specialty cheese items. Additionally, a variety of value added enhancements are being unveiled under the Nikos brand of domestically-produced feta cheeses. The Stella brand's three most recent additions, Mediterranean Parmesan, Rosemary Medium Asiago and Black Pepper Romano are available in half wheels that have been hand-rubbed with an array of herbs and spices. The Black Creek cheese line now offers a Double Smoked Cheddar and Cheddar Jam Tray featuring a three-year Cheddar cheese with Orange Marmalade and Raspberry Preserves.

[www.SaputoSpecialty.com](http://www.SaputoSpecialty.com)



### CHEESE IS REVAMPED

Kitchen Table Bakers, Syosset, NY, has launched Parm Crisps, a revamped miniature variety of aged parmesan crisps. The line, which is baked entirely of aged Parmesan cheese, is naturally gluten, wheat and sugar-free. The Parm Crisps are available in a 1.75-ounce resealable pouch and have a suggested retail price starting at \$3.99. The company offers 11 other flavors, including Chia Seed, Caraway Seed and Flax Seed.

[www.kitchentablebakers.com](http://www.kitchentablebakers.com)



### GLUTEN FREE WRAP

Toufayan Bakeries, Ridgefield, NJ, is expanding its current line of gluten free baked goods to meet the growing demand for gluten free products. The company's new Gluten Free Wraps now include Spinach, Garden Vegetable and Savory Tomato flavored varieties, which join the Original Gluten Free wrap introduced last year. All are 100 percent gluten free. The Toufayan family has cooked up gluten free wraps that are as moist and with the same quality as the company's regular wraps.

[www.toufayan.com](http://www.toufayan.com)



### FLATBREAD LAUNCHES

Kontos Foods, Inc., Paterson NJ, has announced the launch of Greek Lifestyle Flatbread formulated to provide similar benefits to that of Greek Yogurt. The dietary traditions of Greece and the Mediterranean have long been proven to promote better health, nutrition and longevity. Available in 12/10-ounce packages, the product offers twice the protein, half the carbohydrates, and less sugar and calories compared with traditional flatbreads. The line is certified Kosher and Halal and available for retail and food-service.

[www.kontos.com](http://www.kontos.com)



### UNIQUE PITAS

Mediterranean Majestic Foods, Woodmere, NY, imports sour dough and artisanal pita breads. The all-natural, non GMO line has various unique shapes and sizes. The products are made with no sugar, coloring, oil, starch or preservatives. The pitas are baked in stone ovens and flash frozen, resulting in a 15-month frozen shelf life. All varieties are available in regular wheat, whole grain, and whole wheat. The whole wheat has 40 percent fewer calories than regular pita and is higher in fiber. The line is available in six-piece retail packaging and foodservice packaging.

[www.mediterraneanmajesticfoods.com](http://www.mediterraneanmajesticfoods.com)



### SUMMER OF SALSA

Sabra, White Plains, NY, has relaunched its eight refrigerated salsas. The brand is featuring in-field farmers singing to vine-ripening tomatoes in its first salsa advertising campaign. Salsa fans are invited to join in by way of social media with the hashtag #Salsa-Love. Sabra's line of refrigerated salsas includes Homestyle Medium, Homestyle Mild, Mango Peach, Restaurant Style, Roasted Garlic, Pico de Gallo, Southwestern and Garden Style. The newly relaunched recipes feature more crisp vegetables for a fresher, chunkier salsa.

[www.sabra.com](http://www.sabra.com)



### GRAIN SALADS DEBUT

Don's Food Products, Schwenksville, PA, has introduced six new grain salads focusing on convenience and quality. Varieties include Ancient Grain, Curry Grain, Edamame with Corn, Farro with Peperonata, Island Grain with Beans and Wild Rice Medley. The salads are healthy food for consumers on the go. These convenient meal options provide taste and quality. The company offers more than 150 products in seven different categories.

[www.donssalads.com](http://www.donssalads.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](mailto:DeliBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com)



## SARVECCHIO PARMESAN

The most decorated domestic parmesan—winner of three consecutive golds at the U.S. Championship Cheese Contest and Best Foreign Cheese at the Global Cheese Awards.

by Jim Prevor, Editor-in-Chief

## FDA's Zero-Tolerance Food Safety Policy Stymies Cheese-Making Creativity

**M**ax McCalman is a world-renowned expert on cheese and a good friend of both *DELI BUSINESS* and its sister publication, *CHEESE CONNOISSEUR*. In this issue (page 14), he writes a thoughtful piece regarding the current state of the food safety rules regarding the cheese industry. He substantively questions whether the FDA understands cheese and whether anticipated food safety protocols might help or hurt the situation.

Unfortunately, the issue goes beyond mere technical competence at the FDA. The real problem is that, in fact, the FDA has a *de facto* zero-tolerance policy on food safety. This is a shame, because it discourages people in the industry from actually talking about their problems in producing, storing, shipping and selling food and so slows the communal search for solutions.

Other approaches to federal guidelines are known to be much more productive. For example, the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB) and its successor, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), have had a series of five-year plans, with each plan focused on improving airline safety. As a result the airline industry, plane makers, engine makers, air traffic controllers, etc., have all worked collaboratively to improve the system. Today, commercial airline travel is enormously safe. If you look at the statistics, the very few fatalities attributed to commercial aviation are typically oddball things, such as a worker on the tarmac driving a cart and getting into an accident.

The cheese industry is going to have quite a battle. I know this because our company, which also publishes *PRODUCE BUSINESS* and *PerishablePundit.com*, has been at the epicenter of produce industry discussions regarding food safety. In the produce industry, farmers have pleaded with the FDA to define clear standards that would eliminate liability if farmers comply. Yet the FDA will never issue a food safety rule that says "a fence around the farm must be five feet tall" because if it turns out that an animal jumps six feet, enters the field and causes a food safety problem, the FDA doesn't want to be at fault. So the FDA tends to issue vague direction, such as admonishing farmers to be mindful of animal intrusion.

When the FDA is specific, it typically locks in existing technology and thus discourages a search for alternatives.

The truth is the American food supply is enormously safe; even the "high risk" items are very safe. Food safety incidents today are "black swan" events and so not easily amenable to any food safety fix. Go into a spinach field, do a random selection of 100 samples, test the samples, and they all could come out clean. If you repeat two minutes later you may get a positive; two minutes later, they are all negative again. What caused it? Who knows? Maybe a bird dropping? Nobody knows and nobody, including

the FDA, has a viable plan to ensure there is never a food safety problem.

Of course, this is a bizarre standard. We don't ban cars because we know there will be accidents; we don't even demand that cars be as safe as possible, because such heavy things are called tanks and wouldn't be economically feasible. We recognize that although safety is a value, it is not the only value. This really comes down to whether, as a society, we are going to look to government to be a nanny that stops us from doing anything that might cause us harm or whether we are going to respect the autonomy of the individual and allow people to make trade-offs that make their lives their own.

The food industry is conflicted on this. Retailers like the idea that consumers have faith the government will protect the food supply and the retailers don't have to take on that burden. Manufacturers like that consumers feel any product sold is safe, by definition.

Yet very possibly this is part of the food safety problem. If consumers feel everything is safe, it discourages investment in food safety by all sectors of the chain. Producers don't feel it will give them a competitive edge, retailers don't think it will give them a competitive edge, and if everything is safe it would be a big waste of time for consumers to invest in either vetting retailers who vet food well or vetting manufacturers.

In fact, if the FDA acknowledged its own limitations and urged consumers to take responsibility for what they ate, it would lead to more investment of both time and money in food safety and thus safer food.

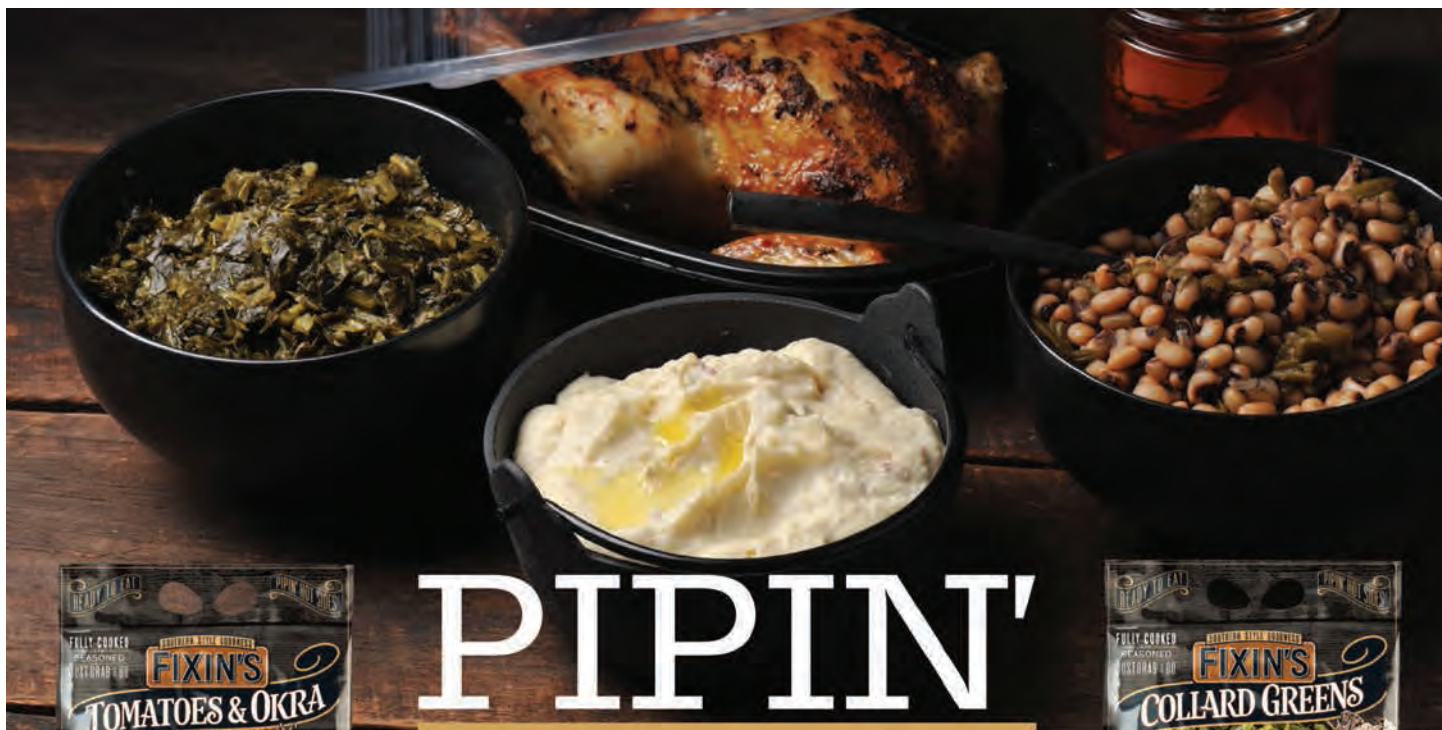
For this author, having just returned from New Zealand, I was excited to try a raw-milk Aroha Organic Goat cheese, one of the very few raw milk cheeses the Kiwis have started producing since a law in 2011 relaxed restrictions. There was a risk. But it was slight, and I don't have a compromised immune system, so if I did get sick, there is a good chance I would recover, and there are beneficial bacteria that might even boost my health.

Besides, in eating the cheese I experienced, just for a moment, the subtle complexity of the terror in which the goats that made the milk were fed. I tasted something I had never tasted before. To me that made my life richer. On what basis is my government to deny me that opportunity?

There is a big movement now for consumers to "know their farmer," and it just as well could be applied to mean "know your cheesemaker." **DB**



*James F. Prevor*



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by Lee Smith, Publisher

# Pursuing Natural Ingredients

It is very rare DELI BUSINESS features an article about an individual company's new product but, occasionally, there is a product or technology that has the potential to change the way business is conducted.

Just prior to leaving for the IDDBA's Dairy-Deli-Bake 2014 in Denver, CO, I received an email from Sunsweet asking if I would stop by their booth to talk about prunes.

I have to admit that I didn't see how the business of prunes would be of much interest to DELI BUSINESS readers — although I personally love prunes. Growing up just across the river from New York City, my favorite breakfast was a prune Danish from the local bakery.

My initial thought after receiving the email was that prunes were going to be a new trend and I could expect to see more prune-based something or other, although I couldn't imagine what it would be. I was very surprised, however, when informed Sunsweet wanted to speak with me about prunes as a preservative and flavor enhancer.

What I didn't realize was that Sunsweet had been researching the use of prunes to replace phosphates in deli meats and cooked sausages, and it was now ready to work with manufacturers interested in producing a natural product with a clean label. The implication for organic deli meats is obvious.

Deli meats and cooked sausages have long been a problem for meat manufacturers looking to produce a product with a clean label, yet safe enough to have a shelf life long enough to make it through traditional distribution channels, retail sell-through and customer abuse.

The challenges meat manufacturers face to keep harmful pathogens at bay are more difficult to manage than with most other foods. Rather than frozen, deli meats are shipped fresh and sold fresh, often sliced-to-order.

The type of pathogens meat, poultry and seafood are subject to are the pathogens that make many people ill and sick enough to die, so consequently food safety protocols with multiple barriers to prevent contamination are mandatory.

Strange as it seems, and it certainly sounded very strange to me — plum and prune derivatives could be the answer. Or, at the very least, they could be part of the answer. What equally sur-

prised me during my Sunsweet booth visit was just how delicious the fresh, fully cooked sausages tasted and how the prune flavoring wasn't apparent.

There is no question that at least some of today's consumers are looking for meat products free of chemicals and antibiotics. They are also concerned with added salt and preservatives. Obviously, it doesn't apply to all customers, but the number with concerns about how food is being processed is growing.

Quite frankly, several concerns about additives that were considered safe just five years ago are coming into question. Science is evolving and many decisions made years ago are no longer supported.

As an example, when I was around 12-years-old, my father had a heart attack and doctors told him never to eat butter again. My mother switched to margarine. Today, we know trans-fats are far more dangerous than butter and dairy products. There are also concerns about GMO's, arsenic-laden chicken feed, caramel color, phosphates, nitrites, and artificial sweeteners.

Whether the concern is justified almost seems irrelevant. Clearly if customers are concerned and reduce spending, it is a problem that needs to be addressed. And, it is for this reason that an article about a new, natural technology from one company was deemed worthy and found its way to the pages of DELI BUSINESS.

Obviously, there is not one solution and many questions remain. I certainly don't have all the answers. However, I do believe less is better when it comes to food labels. I also believe every manufacturer, producer and processor, as well as every retailer has as an objective goal to make our food supply as safe as possible. Sometimes, these beliefs are contradictory in application.

I, for one, had never heard of or imagined the possibilities of prune derivatives for deli meats, but I must say I have been fascinated by the possibilities. I doubt that this will be the only solution, but just one of many new tools to be developed.

DB



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# Cheese Regulations Come Under Debate

Aging cheese on wood latest controversy

BY MAX McCALMAN

Some might think the FDA wishes the cheese industry would just dry up and go away, the way its rules seem to place obstacles in front of cheese's surging popularity. The rules (or the threat of imposition of certain rules) are embarrassing for cheese academics and educators: the prohibition on the importation of Mimolette, the extension of the sixty-day minimum aging requirement for raw milk cheese to ninety days or more, the slashed tolerance levels for *E. coli*, and the ban of aging cheese on wood. Embarrassment is one thing but for the producers, importers, distributors and retailers these actions have caused disruption and near-panic. Many in the industry see the FDA playing an increasingly sinister and adversarial role.

The eye-popping growth in the cheese industry may be causing some consternation within the agency, an agency perhaps unable to keep up with America's appetite for high-quality cheese. That growth creates more work for an already money-strapped agency, a regulatory agency charged with protecting and promoting our health. Adding to the stresses is the implementation of the Food Safety Modernization Act. It may seem the FDA is interpreting the dictates of FSMA as zero tolerance, or black and white.

Many members of the cheese community wish the food regulatory agencies would expend their resources on other foods such as the ones that are responsible for the lion's share of foodborne illnesses.

As is evident in reports compiled by the FDA, the CDC, and the USDA, cheese is not the culprit it is often made out to be: not the raw milk varieties, not the ones with mites on them, and not the ones aged on wood. The record books are there for all to see — cheese is a safer food. Maybe not perfect, yet cheese enjoys an enviable track record for food safety.

The time-tested practice of aging cheese on wood is in question as of this writing. When the first reports started coming in on this matter recently, it may have seemed the ban would be affecting only imported cheeses. However there are millions of pounds of cheese aging on wood today in the United States. To convert those facilities to man-made materials would cost billions, thereby shuttering many creameries, causing disruptions to the supply chain and irreparable harm to the aesthetic qualities of those cheeses.

The regulatory challenges do not end with the wood issue. The cheese industry may be facing a bigger threat: the tolerance of *E. coli* counts has been lowered to a point that could make many dairy operations unsustainable, especially cow and sheep dairies. (It is easier to maintain safe sanitation levels in a goat dairy than in the others.) This close-to-zero tolerance will also mean many imported cheeses will be banned from entry, while some cheeses that are not banned may see their costs rise to non-competitive levels. Instead of risking losing the sale altogether and leaving the vendor on the hook, many exporters are



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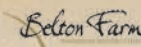
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sending fewer cheeses to the United States these days, including cheeses that could be well within the new limits. As far as many exporters are concerned, the U.S. market share is not worth the aggravation. Cheeses with moisture content of 67 percent or greater (most cheeses less than one year old) will be held to extra scrutiny.

There are some positives that have arisen from all the increased scrutiny: an increase in awareness of potential hazards, adoption of enhanced GMPs, better educational resources, more rigorous vigilance, and better and more frequent testing. The industry appears to be arming itself with all the scientific ammunition available to set the record straight. Yet for many, these new rules and revisions are short sighted, and misinformed interpretations of regulations — regulations ostensibly protecting and promoting our health.

The cheese industry cannot claim its beloved food is perfectly safe — that it is without blemish or it has never been implicated in a foodborne illness. A pathogen knows a good food when it sees it. Yet the records speak for themselves: the incidences of illnesses attributed to cheese are extremely rare.

The American Cheese Society has become a formidable force in the defense of cheese. The organization has its own Regulatory and Academic Committee, a Body of Knowledge Committee, as well as a Certified Cheese Professional Committee. These teams are composed of subject matter experts and other professionals; the entire organization can claim thousands of years combined experience. It is safe to say most people in the business eat cheese, and quite a lot of it, and they would prefer to continue to eat the cheeses they choose to, both domestic and imported, raw and pasteurized, with or without evidence of mites in their rinds, and aged on wood or some other suitable surface. The cheeses they believe have



advanced civilization.

Man-made aging surfaces may appear to be cleaner than wood surfaces yet this may be only what is visible to the naked eye. An advantage that wood has is that it can more easily have its own biofilm — the first line of defense against pathogenic contamination. According to cheesemaker and author of *Mastering Artisan Cheesemaking*, Gianclis Caldwell, attempting to sanitize the surfaces for ripening cheese is a losing battle; a day may arrive soon when we are purposely introducing beneficial bacteria to those surfaces. It will be easier to do, it will be less time-consuming, and it will be much more effective. It is kind of like taking probiotics.

*Listeria monocytogenes*, the most serious pathogen with which cheese has on very rare occasions been associated, can colonize on plastic or metal as well as on wood. The manufactured surfaces can be cleaned rela-

tively easily compared to porous wood but this may be part of the problem with those surfaces. If thoroughly cleaned, the surface is without its own defenses: the colonies of bacteria and fungi, which keep the bad bugs at bay. The relationship to competing microflora is similar to the biome in our guts. Taking antibiotics is a way of cleaning out the gut of all its microflora, the good and the bad. The system may be rid of the offending pathogen, but it also loses its beneficial bacteria, which provide protection from other pathogens, including the primary offender.

Food illnesses can be serious, as anyone who has experienced food poisoning can tell you; some of them can be fatal. Fortunately the good bugs are stronger than the bad bugs; otherwise we would not be here today. Their relative weakness forces the bad bugs to have to fight like bullies. Without force in numbers, they have a diminished capability





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to cause harm. Bacteria have a way of communicating with one another called quorum sensing. When they sense they are outnumbered they “know” it, so they tend not to put up a fight. In other words, the weaker bacteria do not become virulent.

Part of cheese’s problem is that it is a rather complex food, even the pasteurized varieties are complex, though a little less so. The more complex the food is, the more difficult it is to understand. If it is a food that has such a dedicated, seemingly fanatic following, a food that can smell funky, one that contains fat, and a food that seems to stimulate euphoric responses in its consumers,

then the question becomes: how can such a comestible be safe? How can cheese develop better on a natural surface such as wood compared to a manufactured surface such as plastic or stainless steel?

Dr. Mark Windt, an allergist, immunologist, pulmonologist, and member of an advisory committee to the EPA says through the process of natural selection, the biofilms that can develop on wood surfaces provide protection against pathogens. The symbiotic relationships that exist between the ecosystems within cheeses and plant life allow wood to interact in a positive way. He believes that the widely held theory that

bacteria is bad needs to be turned upside down. A biofilm works in a positive way.

Cheese is a “living food” full of respiring bacteria. These civilizations, which reside within and on cheese, should be in a healthy equilibrium, not in a static state. Respiration suggests the need for air exchange. This is much easier to assure if a cheese is resting on a porous surface such as wood, than on a flatter surface such as steel or plastic. One way to allow greater air exchange on a manmade surface is to replicate as closely as possible the porous surface of wood. This may allow for better air exchange so the cheese can “breathe” and not suffocate, but that imitation surface will not support the beneficial and protecting biofilm nearly as well as wood. Beyond protections, the wood choice may contribute aesthetic qualities to the cheese: flavor and aroma. This is why certain types of wood are better suited than others for different cheeses. This is a similar relationship that wines and whiskeys have to their aging vessels. Stainless steel may be fine for a youthful wine with its own array of fruit flavors but it will not deliver the complexities required to bring an age-worthy Cabernet Sauvignon to its greatest aesthetic potential.

The FDA’s first wood clarification in early June went viral and was followed by an immediate and passionate outpouring of support among the cheese community. Today, the Cheese of Choice Coalition is reinvigorated, the organization that provided broad support against the 2001 threat to the 60-day minimum aging requirement for raw milk cheeses. This group is dedicated to gathering evidence and support, now with an updated website, [www.cheeseofchoice.org](http://www.cheeseofchoice.org).

Some members of the cheese community were hoping for a shortening of aging requirements back then, as later occurred in Québec. It seemed the evidence presented by Dr. Catherine Donnelly to the USDA (concerned at the time that our nation’s livestock, for which it is responsible, might contract Foot and Mouth Disease or Mad Cow Disease transmitted via raw milk cheese) proved the near impossibility of such transmissions and inherent safety of raw milk cheese. Instead, the industry had to be satisfied with the status quo, meaning the availability of raw milk cheeses under sixty days of age would continue to be unavailable in the United States.

The cheese battles are far from over and many in the industry believe they are seeing the FDA adopt a more aggressive approach. By the time this article is in print, the agency will have made its presentation at the American Cheese Society’s conference in Sacramento. **DB**



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# Targeting Back to School

Focusing on nutritious lunch options can make registers ring

BY LISA WHITE

**B**ack to school is big business. Supermarket delis have an opportunity to cash in on families seeking healthful lunch options for kids ages 5 to 18.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports about 55 million students are enrolled in pre-kindergarten and high school classes, with about 56 percent of them in first through eighth grades. An estimated one-third of U.S. households, or about 38 million, have children younger than 18.

"The deli section offers the back-to-school shopper a wide range of fresh and convenient products," says Deborah Seife, general manager/marketing for Norseland Inc., based in Darien, CT. "It also allows for the shopper to easily custom-tailor each child's taste preference and offer healthier food choices."

## Defining Back To School

While most consumers associate back to school with the end of summer, marketing healthful school lunch options can extend far beyond fall.

"It should be an ongoing dialogue, tying [healthier lunch foods] to feeling better, higher energy, achieving academic success, social situations and sport team settings," says Seife. "Parents are looking for nutritionally sound brain food that's also fun and appealing to kids."

As a result, manufacturers are listening to families and providing more healthful, tastier school lunch options that are lower in fat, cholesterol and sodium, as well as free of trans fats, nuts and gluten.

Suppliers of these foods also are creating more shelf-stable options that are portable and easily accommodated in lunch bags.

"The focus is on lunches that are easy to put together, inexpensive to make and nutritious for children," says Warren Stoll, marketing director at Kontos Foods, headquartered in Paterson, NJ.

The back-to-school theme provides supermarket delis with a creative way to introduce new products on the shelf and create a destination for parents searching for the right lunchbox fit.

This also should include food items that appeal to children while offering nutritional benefits.

"Consumers are always seeking healthy, new ideas for foods to pack in their children's lunchboxes for school," says Aimee Tsakirellis, director of marketing at Cedar's Mediterranean Foods Inc., Ward Hill, MA. "Back-to-school promotions also allow for retailers to cross-promote like-items for parents to purchase more than one at a time."

In today's society, items that are higher in value are ideal for back-to-school displays. These include foods that are convenient, quick to prepare, healthful, cheap and packed in bulk.

Products with cleaner labels also should be included in the mix because parents and children are becoming more educated about what they're eating, the ingredients in foods and functional food ingredients that contribute to health.

"As consumers are continually becoming more educated about foods and which ingredients are in the foods they are feeding to

their children, junk food items are decreasing in popularity, and healthier items, such as Greek yogurt and hummus, are becoming more popular, especially in portion-controlled cups or snack packs," says Tsakirellis.

Non-GMO Project Verified and Gluten Free Certified foods also are on the rise, in addition to natural and organic lunchmeat and cheeses.

"Back-to-school merchandising is a unique opportunity to focus consumers' attention on healthy deli items for their family members' lunchboxes," says Ari Goldsmith, senior director of marketing at KeHE Distributors, based in Naperville, IL.

### Key Components

Lunchbox options are more likely to include convenience items, such as single-serve hummus, pickles, deli salads and string cheese. Delis also have a number of cross-merchandising opportunities for breads, chips and condiments.

"Offerings need to include portable and portion-controlled choices that are tasty and convenient," says Norseland's Seife. "Pre-sliced Jarlsberg and Jarlsberg Lite offer consumers an easy format for use in [lunch bags]. Our new Jarlsberg Minis are positioned as a snack at school or through-

out the day."

Back-to-school merchandising in the deli should begin in early August with in-store signs letting parents and kids know it's time to start thinking about school lunch options.

"Store displays and lunch items that speak to kids and remind them of school need to take on a heightened approach in August," says Stoll. "Promoting lunch items kids can carry with them is key, but also keeping in mind that kids eat at all different hours."

Kontos' line of more than 50 flatbreads offers an alternative to traditional bread. Products include low-carb and high-protein varieties, along with different flavors, shapes and sizes. For making sandwiches, the company sells a mini oval flatbread, which is 4-by-6 inches in diameter and meets nutritional requirements for school lunch programs, says Stoll.

In 2012, meal patterns and nutrition standards for the National School Lunch and School Breakfast programs were updated to align with the dietary guidelines for Americans. This rule requires most schools to increase the availability of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and fat-free and low-fat fluid milk in school meals; reduce the levels of sodium, saturated fat and trans fat in meals;

and meet the nutritional needs of students within their calorie requirements.

A number of manufacturers provide deli items for back-to-school merchandising that meet the requirements. Denmark, WI-based BelGioioso Cheese, for example, offers fresh Mozzarella snack packs, at 70 calories.

"Gluten free is the big buzz," says Francis J. Wall, BelGioioso's vice president of marketing. "Consumers want to know foods are gluten free as well as the production facilities. Most cheeses are naturally gluten free, but consumers are still unaware of this."

Cedar's Mediterranean Foods offers seven flavor varieties of Hommus Snack Packs, with three flavors paired with Gluten Free Hommus Chips. It also sells 2-ounce Organic Hommus in three flavors that are in portion cups packed in a three-cup sleeve, and 3-ounce all natural, non-GMO project verified hummus in two flavors, also in portion cups packed in a four-cup sleeve.

"And we will be introducing a Falafel to Go pack complete with six falafel balls and 1.75 ounces of tahini dipping sauce that will be launched in time for back to school," says Tsakirellis.

As the demand for healthier items increases, supermarket deli managers have been forced to take risks by reducing displays





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of mainstream items with guaranteed sales to allow room for new, healthful items that may not perform as well.

This is especially true for stores focusing on the back-to-school segment in the fall.

"If this does not happen, retailers risk the chance the customer will shop either at a different department or a different store altogether to find what they need," says Tsakirellis.

The fact remains increasing numbers of consumers are providing healthier lunch

choices for their children, leading to strong sales increases in the segment and in deli departments. As a result, KeHE Distributors has positioned Applegate's new halftime lunchboxes featuring Applegate Naturals meat and cheese, yogurt and snacks in one box for the back-to-school market.

"We are seeing some great opportunities emerging for deli managers," says Greg Greene, marketing director at Sabra, based in Dallas, TX. "At the moment, dips and spreads are enjoying the benefits of being on

trend. But consumers are not enjoying having to search for some dips in the dairy aisle, some in the produce segment, others on shelf and some in deli."

### Successful Selling

School lunch programs are becoming an increasingly important component to nutrition education, "and because it's foremost in the minds of parents as well, it has become so for the conscientious manufacturer," says Norseland's Seife. "The trends in the deli section confirm this healthier change."

Back-to-school displays need to emphasize the portability and versatility of the product in a colorful and fun way that engages children, since they will be influential in their parents' buying decisions. By the same token, these selections must exhibit nutritional values to appeal to parents.

For these displays, a natural cross-merchandising fit for the deli is the produce department. Nutritious deli products can be positioned by whole fruits or stationed alongside fruit and vegetable salads, and other produce items can be cut and prepped as school lunch options. This positioning also appeals to impulse shoppers who are running into the store for a few items.

"I believe the target of back-to-school marketing is the consumer who is not necessarily the buyer," says Stoll. "Deli departments need to appeal to both the mom and the child, since the products that sell will be those mom supports and that their kids will eat."

Targeting parents who look for healthier lunch options, Kontos recently launched lower carb/higher protein flatbread, which has half the carbs and twice the protein of traditional flatbread. In addition, the company introduced its Greek Lifestyle bread, capitalizing on the popularity of Greek yogurt.

"We used to call this a smart-carb product, but ever since we relaunched the bread as Greek, sales have tripled," says Stoll. "We hope to get this line in more delis, since consumers are seeking healthier sandwich options."

As a bread alternative, Kontos also offers 11-inch crepes, which are a third of the calories of a wrap. These are the same diameter as wraps, yet thinner and less than 100 calories.

BelGioioso Cheese will put ads in newspapers and circulars to promote its new fresh Mozzarella snack packs.

"It's important to offer alternatives to processed foods, since people are looking at ingredient statements and components to make healthier choices for their children," says the company's Wall.

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Merchandising items that go well together and span across all food and drink groups that would complement each other in a lunchbox is key.

"Delis can collaborate with other departments to create a one-stop shop for parents and a go-to destination for them to gain new ideas and try items they would not have otherwise paired together," says Tsakirellis.

Convenience continues to be a key factor for this segment. Sabra teamed with deli

managers to develop a shelf solution for consumers during back-to-school season.

"The back-to-school segment is focused on convenience, on wellness, and often on single-serve," says Greene. "Better-for-you dips and spreads, single-serve snacks and totable, packable produce like little bags of baby carrots are all on shopping lists this time of year."

Cross demoing and cross promoting, whether displayed side by side or not, are

always great incentives to parents.

"Some retailers have gone so far as to create recipe cards for the perfect school lunchbox, listing the items to buy for the week on the backside of the card," says Tsakirellis. "The easier the better for parents, and this is a great time to use the opportunity to turn one parent into a higher sale."

Retailers that introduce back-to-school displays as early as possible after Fourth of July merchandising comes down can get a jump on this lucrative sales opportunity. The exact display dates should be driven by local school start dates, which vary by state.

"Complete solutions should be created that represent all the relevant product categories and connect the dots in consumers' minds," says KeHE's Goldsmith.

In addition to calling out allergen-free options, such as nut-free, gluten-free and dairy-free products, cross-merchandising fresh produce, spreads and bread will help build basket size.

Back-to-school displays can be constructed either in the service deli case or on the service deli counter, around the self-service deli cases or by using drop coolers for traffic-interrupting deli area displays.

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# Get Ready For Some Football

A look at how deli retailers and buyers can capitalize on the tailgating craze

BY KEITH LORIA



**W**hen football season is in full stride, the action doesn't take place only inside stadiums. More and more fans have discovered a love for tailgating, whether they're at a pro or college game. People of all ages fill the parking lots several hours before kickoff with barbecue grills and picnic baskets, enjoying the festivities with food that doesn't take all day to make and can be eaten easily with one hand, as the other is typically holding a beer or playing a game.

They'll pack their vehicles with anything that fits, including small refrigerators to store deli meats and coolers to house the beer. Such "tailgate comfort foods" as fried chicken, barbecue chicken, easy-to-serve sandwiches and salads are staples in numerous tailgate spreads, says Patrick Ford, vice president of Ford's Gourmet Foods, headquartered in Raleigh, NC. But he also has noticed a trend toward more sophisticated fare, with the introduction of innovative cooking appliances allowing tailgaters to

make home-like meals in the parking lot.

Another standout on the tailgating all-star list is sausage, according to Amanda Pawlak, marketing assistant for Bobak Sausage Company, Chicago, IL.

"All of Bobak's smoked products are fully cooked, so one could say they are 'prepared,' and this makes it quicker, easier, and faster to enjoy the tailgate," she says. "There are two types of people: Those who stick to what they know, and those who aren't afraid to be a little adventurous. For us, our Maxwell, Brat, and Italian sell so well year after year, but when we throw something else into the mix, like a jalapeno and Cheddar sausage or a chicken sausage, we see people purchase the product and enjoy the variety."

The latest trends in sandwiches encourage a wider selection of artisan breads, spreads and condiments, with protein and cheese contributing specialty varieties beyond the conventional deli sandwich, says Valerie Liu, marketing and advertising specialist for Norseland Inc., based in

Darien, CT. Its Jarlsberg program continues to be a popular option for tailgating season, and new Jarlsberg Minis offer another delicious option.

"Sandwiches can be adapted to almost any emerging culinary trend, whether it's an increased interest in ethnic flavor profiles, high-quality gourmet presentations, local ingredients or healthy alternatives, so meeting consumers' needs will capture more sales," she says. "Our studies show 68 percent of tailgaters always grill. The most popular is the hamburger, and building a better burger with fresh ingredients, cheeses and breads is important."

Today's tailgating trends are mostly driven by the four-point checklist of meals being healthful, premium, prepared and convenient, according to Carl H. Cappelli, senior vice president of sales and business development for Don's Food Products, Schwenksville PA.

"Millennials are looking for fresh and healthy, while baby boomers are more into

convenience and prepared,” he says.

“In the tailgating environment, it has to be fast to acquire, easy to grab and the product has to appeal to a wide variety of audiences,” says Chad Vendette, director of marketing at Broaster Co., Beloit, Wis. “There’s a lot of activity and excitement going on when it comes to tailgating so people don’t want to put a lot of thought or effort into it.”

Broaster has two distinct product lines that will appeal to the tailgater. First is its Broaster Express grab-and-go foods, which include chicken tenders, popcorn chicken and other fun favorites. On the fresh side is its premier product, Genuine Broaster Chicken, which is pressure-fried chicken, but along the lines of fried chicken that everyone loves and really fits the demographic well.

On the other end of the food spectrum, grains continue to grow in popularity, as do other items preferred by tailgaters who follow vegetarian and vegan diets. Although locally sourced products are popular, Cappelli says, healthful ingredients trump their importance.

“Healthy consumers prefer fresh or exotic. For example, many grains [such as quinoa] are sourced from outside the U.S.,” he says. “At Don’s, we will use local ingredients when in season, and our deli assortment will include healthy grains, unique items and indulgent seafood and desserts.”

Keeping pace with the popularity of tailgating, marketers spend “an amazing number of dollars” to provide fans with all the food they need, says Terry Hyer, chief operating officer of Zarda Bar-B-Q & Catering Co., based in Blue Springs, MO. Their spending reflects the changing definition of tailgating, which now also includes picking up some food to enjoy with friends at home.

“For the retailer tailgating has gotten huge, but many times it’s not associated with bringing food to the stadium,” says Hyer.



“Rather, it’s another way for Americans to escape and have fun. It’s all about creating an incredible meal package built around football season so people can watch the game and eat the food, regardless of whether it’s at the stadium or in the home.”

### Going For The Touchdown

Such deli items as prepared sandwiches and salads are chief components of any good tailgating spread, and savvy retailers have seized an opportunity to increase sales in this category by catering to the football fan.

“Trends I have seen in tailgating, as it relates to the deli, are going toward higher-end tailgating meats and cheeses,” says Ford, of Ford’s Gourmet Foods. “Fans will spend money to support their team in the pre-game tailgate. Upping one another in the parking lot is becoming more important, with social media leading the charge. Who doesn’t want a selfie with the biggest tailgate?”

Ease of use is definitely important to the tailgater, but so is quality. Because most fans want something that will make the day fun

and memorable, opting for the higher-quality meats and cheeses is often on their minds.

“The sports fan that makes it to the game for tailgating is showing they are willing to spend more for that weekend event typically than someone watching from home,” says Ford. “Retailers can expand their bandwidth for tailgating parties by having a section for the event. Show the tailgaters your store is serious about the tailgating culture and they should trust you to have what they will need to make their day memorable. Not just the staples of tailgating but have new and fun items to purchase.”

Asian flavors are growing in popularity, Cappelli says, and Southwestern and Mediterranean flavors continue to be strong. Don’s Food Products also provides gourmet dips to please any game day crowd, with the company’s artichoke and Asiago cheese dip most popular among football fans.

Cappelli advises retailers to offer more grab-and-go options to be successful in marketing to the tailgating crowd. Fans want the convenience of ready-to-eat/ready-to-heat items, flavor and taste, and grains and all-natural items that promote health and wellness. Don’s offers more than 150 items made fresh, and many of its side salads can be eaten plain or used as a component.

“Variety is key,” he says. “When it comes to salads and sides, use them as a component to make something cool.”

The timing of tailgating-themed promotions also is important. Start them in late August when football season begins, Cappelli says, but hand out bag stuffers about a week before to alert customers. Promote tailgating in ads and with in-store material atop the deli counter.

“You might do a rib pack for the start of the season, and it might consist of a slab of ribs, potato salad, rolls, beans, and you bundle it for \$19.99,” he says.





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Making things convenient for customers will go a long way to ensure tailgating promotions increase sales. What works best is setting up a table with grocery bags and full-color sheets describing the offer and the price, says Cappelli. Customers take the bag to the deli counter, where it's filled with all of the items, and then to the checkout.

Keep in mind tailgating promotions should continue past the autumn months. Once the regular season ends, "position yourself for a month-long run-up until the Super Bowl," says Cappelli.

### Show Your True Colors

Ford believes retailers can capture more tailgate customers by reminding them of the weekend games with large signs, colorful banners and team flags as they shop during the days leading to the matchups.

"Allowing customers the chance to plan ahead and know they have a place to come for their tailgate needs is very important," he says. "Store signage, circulars and floor displays aimed at tailgating have a big impact on the shopping cart."

Cappelli says eye-catching merchandising is the way to go and recommends displaying Don's grain salads in the deli case alongside Don's bruschetta and pico de gallo.



"Consumers often purchase deli items with their eyes. The Don's grain salads provide eye-popping color and variety, which helps in sales," he says.

Cross-merchandising other items by bringing them into the deli section is a smart idea as well.

"If sausage is at the front of the store, the best place for the sausage buns and mustard is not at the back, but rather closer to the

sausage for a limited-time tailgating special without relocating product all the time, as not everyone is a sports fan or shopping for tailgating items," says Pawlak of Bobak Sausage Company. "Everything is focused on convenience these days, and the customer has become accustomed to that, so make it as simple as you can for them."

It also helps to show how many different options there are for a product, she says.



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"Multi-use is typically perceived as a better value. You can talk about how French onion dip is not just for chips, but great as a condiment on a burger."

Hyer suggests using a banner along the table announcing the tailgating special and reminding people of whatever games are on tap that weekend.

### Packaging Is The Extra Point

Another way for retailers to attract football fans is by using packaging with a team's colors or logo.

Ford notes eco-friendly packaging for tailgating is also growing in importance because younger tailgaters are more environmentally aware. Disposable but recyclable packaging is gaining more ground every season as a result of their concerns.

"We view packaging as part of the food experience," says Broaster's Vendette. "We make it easy to carry but more importantly, it holds the food at the right moisture level. Our packaging is functional and will keep the consumer happy, even if it's hours until the product is consumed."

Nearly all tailgaters prepare their food at the stadium and buy their goods at grocery stores, says Norseland's Liu. Packaging plays an important role in winning them as customers.

"Pre-sliced meats, cheeses, pre-cut ingredients and salads in re-sealable packaging are vital," she says. "Portable snack items offer great convenience, such as our new Jarlsberg Minis, which are perfect for on the go. Individually wrapped, all-natural and bite-sized, they can be paired with sliced meats, veggies, fruits and crackers."

Tailgaters look for convenience when it comes to packaging, says Pawlak. "Does it open easily? Will it spill if left unattended? Can it be resealed?"

### Final Thoughts

Tailgating is a social event that can be as much fun, maybe even more fun, than actually attending the game. Consumers look for value but also want better-quality ingredients, more variety and flavor choices that have real crowd appeal, ensuring a food experience that's tasty and memorable. And of course they want food that's convenient and doesn't take time away from the party at hand.

"What's popular will definitely be something that doesn't have more than a three-step process and is found at a reasonable price," says Pawlak. "This is likely going to turn into their game day favorite, and they will be buying frequently and need to be able to justify the cost on a weekly basis." **DB**



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# Soup is Hot

Improve sales by offering variety, organic, and marketing the joys of a food that's growing in popularity

BY ANTHONY STOECKERT

One are the days when soups were nothing more than an appetizer, a cheap meal or what you made because someone was sick. Modern soups are not only about convenience, but also flavor and variety.

"Over the past five years, soup has been a growing category for our business, and far beyond that timeframe in the industry," says John Becker, senior director of marketing for Sandridge Food Corp., based in Medina, OH. He cited a study by Technomic reporting that "restaurants offering soup and salad now face considerable competition from the retail segment," with 54 percent of consumers claiming they source soup from home at least once a week.

"We've seen this demand directly influence our retail and private-label soup business with double-digit growth in soup sales throughout the past five years," says Becker.

Bob Sewall, executive vice president of sales and marketing for Blount Fine Foods, headquartered in Fall River, MA, says the market is growing largely because soup is becoming a popular option for dining at

home for families who want a nutritious, delicious, and affordable meal.

"It's a nice healthy option, so mom and dad have soup at home," says Sewall. "They feel good about its nutritional value and they add a salad and bread, and the family is spending a lot less money."

## The Scoop On Soup

"Fresh, refrigerated soup is currently a \$243 million category, growing nearly 10 percent year over year," says Jamie Colbourne, chief executive of Portland, OR-based Harry's Fresh Foods & Cuizina Food Co.

According to Becker, restaurants influence retail food sales, with popular restaurant offerings becoming hot in delis after about six months to a year.

"There has been quite a bit of buzz recently on chilled soups and gazpacho, and it's certainly on our radar as well," he says. Sandridge is taking note of inventive flavors such as watermelon-tomato gazpacho, served at Buccan in Palm Beach, FL, and creamy cucumber

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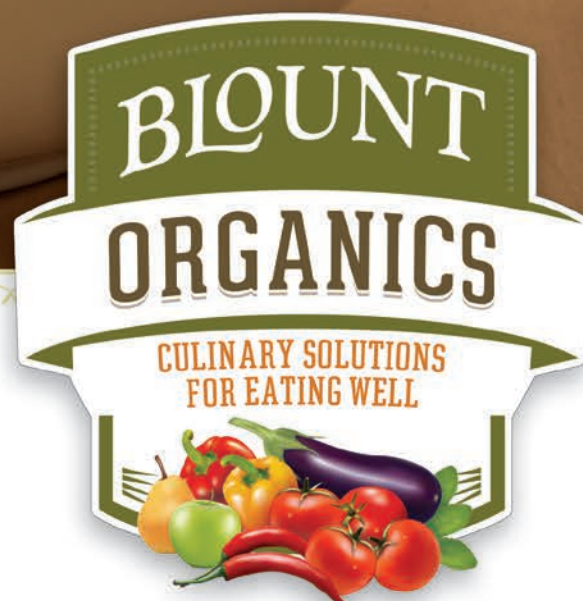


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The latest trends in soups, says Becker, lean more toward healthier and fresh ingredients and ethnic flavors.

"All of our soups are fresh, refrigerated products with premium ingredients which alone can achieve a consumer's perception of 'healthy,'" he says. "Since all of our soups are

says. "A good-quality soup will be good to the bottom of the bowl. A sub-par soup you can tell right after a few spoonfuls." Sup-par offerings often are too salty and have artificial flavors.

A Fortun soup that Shepard describes as having a "wow factor" is gluten-free Lentil & Sweet Sausage. And with ingredients including carrots, onions, garlics and

soup because it often consists of many ingredients, and customers want to know what they're eating.

Shepard says the key to healthier soups is a water-based recipe with fresh vegetables and lean protein.

"Even our American Kobe Beef Chili can be healthy," she says. "It may have [red meat], but the rest of the ingredients are healthy beans, diced tomatoes, onions, green chilies, jalapeno peppers, garlic and spices."

Colbourne says ingredients such as kale, lentils, cauliflower and quinoa "are king" in today's soup business.

"Because consumers are looking for exciting flavors they can't make at home, world-inspired flavors such as Asian-and Hispanic-style soups are another hot trend in the refrigerated-soup category," he says, adding that vegan, vegetarian and organic varieties also are popular trends.

### The Organic Trend

Using organic ingredients is another hot trend. The market for organic has grown to the point that it's not enough simply to use organic ingredients — expectations for robust flavor are just as high for organic soups as they are for standard soups.

"We're going organic big time, but the organic flavors are very full and high in flavor," says Sewall. "So what happens is, the consumer says, 'This is a great soup. Oh, by the way it's organic.'"

Two percent of customers who want organic foods are so devoted to the organic concept they would "eat wood chips" if they were organic, he says. "We're trying to cast that net out for the other 98 percent."

Blount is doing that with vegetarian organic chili, which is full of fresh vegetables and has a bold, spicy flavor.

"There are so many ingredients in it that when you're done eating it, you're full," says Sewall. Consumers who wouldn't normally eat organic vegetarian chili are "happy and satisfied" because it tastes great.

### Getting Rich

Most people want to eat healthier foods, but they often fail. Becker says consumers still have a hearty appetite for richer, more-indulgent soups featuring cream, cheese and potato.

"We continue to see strong growth in rich, full-flavored soup varieties and also significant growth in our vegan offerings," he says.

Consumers also want the best when it comes to rich soups. Blount offers a creamy, gluten-free clam chowder with real cream, butter and sea clams and the company packages it in a way that doesn't require a lot of



fully cooked and ready-to-serve, many of our recipes have been crafted with other health and dietary concerns in mind, such as natural ingredients, preservative free, gluten free, dairy free, low sodium, zero grams of trans fats, etc. Our Fire Roasted Vegetable and Garden Vegetarian Vegetable are both vegan examples of this ... and they can be served chilled."

Although there is a demand for unique flavors, some customers will always stick to the classics, says Mary Shepard, director of sales for Fortun Foods Inc., based in Kirkland, WA.

"We try to have layers of flavor," she

spices, it's a meal on its own. Other popular varieties she makes note of are Portuguese Sausage and Bean and Fresh Spring Asparagus with roasted garlic.

### Soup For Health

While healthier options are a trend in soups, the word "healthy" isn't as simple as it seems according to Sewall.

"It's not that tomorrow morning you're going to wake up and you're going to be a vegan," he says. "What it means is that people are looking for cleaner ingredients." That, he explains, applies to the prepared-food industry as a whole, but especially in

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preservatives.

"With our technique it's cooled so fast ... that we're able to get consumers a great product with a shelf life of 70 days," he says.

Fortun Foods is seeing an increase in sales of clam chowder, which is cream-based and includes potatoes along with fresh vegetables. "The classics, like cheddar and broccoli and roasted tomato soup are always comfort foods that are here to stay," says Shepard.

### How To Improve Merchandising

Retailers can improve merchandising by offering impressive price reductions at least once a month, advises Colbourne.

The physical location of the soup is also important. He suggests placing it in the service deli, in full sight, and also lit well and advertised. "Soup stations in retailers that are enjoying steady sales in this category offer both hot and cold soup in an area with high traffic, usually close to fresh produce and deli counters," says Colbourne. "This positioning drives the consumer to the inevitable soup-and-salad or soup-and-sandwich meal solution for lunch or dinner."

Becker notes Sandridge's soups are usually offered in the prepared-foods and deli departments of retail stores, and he offers another option that has the potential to increase sales.

"We suggest to our retailers a cross-merchandising approach within the grab-and-go area of this section, where retailers can cross-promote soups with like-items including ready-to-eat salads, sandwiches, etc.," he says. "Along with cross-merchandising within the same section, we suggest

a secondary placement in other areas of the store, cross-merchandised with complementary items such as in the seafood department next to refrigerated fish or in a cooler next to the fresh seafood case, 'behind the glass.'"

He also suggests using small refrigerators at the end of an aisle near the canned soup section or by the bakery section near bread because soup and bread is a classic combination.

"These coolers stand out against the surrounding environment and offer the ability for additional signage and unique branding concepts," says Becker.

Sewall notes delis also can take advantage of the fact soup isn't just for cold weather. They can follow the trend of restaurants such as Panera Bread Co., which does a strong business with soup year-round.

Having a section devoted to soup that offers a lot of variety can help customers choose what they want, he says — and expect customers to try different types with each visit.

"The people who eat soup love soup, and they want all different kinds of varieties," says Sewall.

Seasonality also is important as a way to promote certain soups during certain times of the year.

"You can have a great pumpkin bisque or an organic butternut squash in the fall and rotate varieties throughout the season to give consumers what they want," he says.

### Standing Out With Signage

Products can get lost in today's supermarkets and delis because so many options

are available, according to Becker. That makes additional POS material necessary to attract and engage consumers.

"It's important to utilize signage to address the lifestyle of your target demographic, to communicate the ease of preparation or use of the product, and to describe the key selling points of the recipe to the consumer," he says. Signage explaining health benefits or allergens is important as well because customers want easy access to this information as they shop for takeout soup.

### The Importance Of Packaging

Just as it is for most foods in the deli, packaging is a crucial element to merchandising and marketing soup.

"It is truly an art and inspires the manufacturer to creatively blend several characteristics that will provide the user with a positive experience, as well as to attract the consumer and engage them with the product," says Becker. "Characteristics include functionality, ease of use, sustainability, color psychology, size, scaling, material, etc. Like signage, the goal of packaging is to attract and engage the consumer, but also to create an experience after the purchase to evoke a repeat purchase."

Sewall says Blount's packaging strategy includes offering smaller, 10-ounce cups for club stores and conventional retail because soup away from home or as a snack has become an important part of sales. The smaller size means adults can have soup at work, and kids can take it to school for lunch or as an after-school snack.

"On the flip side, the larger, 32-ounce size becomes a great family option where you can bring soup home for dinner time and serve multiple people," says Sewall. "The 32-ounce lets you do that economically because the cost is less per ounce than the smaller packages."

### The Bottom Line Is, Soup Is Hot

"Soup is here to stay and it's growing," says Sewall. "And the retailers have to be cognizant of this because soup in restaurants is now the No. 1 appetizer on restaurant menus. Soup has now overtaken salads as the No. 1 appetizer. We know in retail we have to compete with restaurants, so we make sure that our retailers are aware of the fact soup is not only growing in retail, but it's growing in foodservice as well."

DB





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# Plum Good

Plum products proving superb replacement for phosphate preservatives

BY STEVE COOMES

**F**or decades food producers have used phosphates in food for their preservative, moisture-retaining and antioxidant properties. Today, however, a growing number of consumers are seeking what they perceive as more natural alternatives, leading food processors to consider alternatives such as concentrated fish- and salt-based preservatives, as well as a liquid plum extract and dried prune powder, which has been developed by Sunsweet.

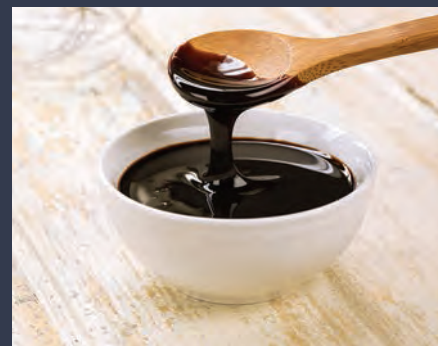
Following nearly two decades of research, chefs such as Rick Perez, who is a corporate research chef at Sunsweet, and scientists at the universities of Kansas State and Texas A&M, have jointly studied plum and prune additives' contribution to food preservation and moisture retention and found them not only equaling the performance of phosphates, but as natural products, having no unhealthful effects on consumers. Studies found they not only enhanced moisture absorption in proteins, their use was cost-neutral compared to phosphate costs.

Deli Business spoke with Sunsweet's Perez about the growing use of plum products in the role of food production.

**Deli Business: What's the headline statement about plum derivatives being more beneficial than phosphates as food enhancers?**

**Rick Perez:** It's more than one. One is that plum extract and prune powder are excellent natural preservatives that allow for a better product and a cleaner label. A clean label is important to consumers these days. The second is since they're high in sorbitol they are great at retaining moisture. And the third is they're high in malic acid, which works well as a flavor potentiator that accentuates a protein's flavor.

The benefit of high malic acid is manufacturers can reduce the amount of sodium and sugar they're using to flavor foods because



malic acid intensifies a protein's existing flavors. By taking phosphates out, you're also removing what's sometimes called a warmed-over flavor that's unappealing.

**DB: If phosphates have been used in food successfully for years, explain the need for replacing them now.**

**RP:** When phosphates originally came out as preservatives, there was limited use in meats. But now we see them in so many foods that the gross amount of phosphates we're eating is huge. People are taking in more phosphorous, more antioxidants like BHA (butylated hydroxyanisole) and BHT

(butylated hydroxytoluene) than we ever were supposed to. And while I'm not a doctor, what I've learned tells me that's a problem. What we're saying is we have years' worth of research saying the plum (derivatives) performs as well as BHA and BHT, yet the plum is natural.

Phosphates do help proteins retain moisture, and so they've been used in marinating, such as vacuum tumbling or injection, to increase added water. When I was a chef years ago with Hilton, we were seeing chicken with 3 percent water added, and then it went up to 10 percent. Now I'm seeing it as high as 30 percent. I sometimes wonder whether companies that do that are

in the protein business or the water business.

**DB: How are these plum extracts and prune powders used in food production?**

**RP:** Applying the powder to chopped, formed or emulsified proteins is one way it's done. We're involved with several manufacturers who do with school foodservice and delis.

But let me say this: Here's something interesting about sliced meats, a lot of which are injected. In roast beef, in particular, you see a rainbow on it when you slice it. Who wants that? That's coming from a lot of



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Sunsweet's Rick Perez

things that are on the label, not the meat. When you pull out phosphates, you'll not have that rainbow.

So back to the deli area: A lot of products are chopped and formed or emulsified. With our plum extract, the goal is to keep products' moisture up and reduce the sodium by 10 to 15 percent. There's just way too much sodium being used in processed food right now, so this helps address that. The extract also helps with retaining a protein's natural color.

**DB: How are these plum products applied to meats?**

**RP:** Several ways. It can be added using a seasoning packet or added directly to muscles prior to the grinding. Since the powdered fruit is so fine, it sticks to the protein really well, and it could be applied in a rub with sugar or salt and give the meat a really nice color. The liquid concentrate works well that way, too, since it's high in sorbitol, which also will provide color when it cooks. You also can marinate your protein ahead of time and then grind it and cook it. But most of our customers would marinate the protein in a vacuum tumbler first and then add the mixture later.

**DB: Is there any noticeable flavor difference using the plum additives?**

**RP:** The amount that we're using is so little and so very concentrated that, no, you can't taste it. It's about a half a percent per a pound of product. And with the water you're adding, it brings out the natural flavors of the protein, which is what you want.

**DB: Is this a marketable message that manufacturers would share with**

**their customers, or would switching to these natural additives just be better left unsaid?**

**RP:** The industry didn't go out and tell people it was adding a bunch of phosphates and BHT and BHA when it did, so why do we need to tell customers we're doing the right thing now? We didn't tell them that we were, in some ways, hurting them for profit. So I see this change just going on the label and that's it.

I'm sure marketers could create a lot of fancy talk for it, but for me it's about being responsible and doing the right thing because we know we can. It's come down to a responsibility statement for culinarians like me and others to keep food clean and healthful for consumers; they are who we should have in mind.

And that leads me to this question: Since these products are cost neutral, why would we use phosphates or BHA or BHT when we have a safe and natural replacement? It doesn't make sense if you have customers in mind.

**DB: Would switching to plum products force food processors to reformulate their recipes?**

**RP:** Well, to some extent, probably yes because they're so high in malic acid, which will accentuate that flavor. You don't have to use as much sodium in that case, so you can back off. It might alter some moisture retention attributes as well, but if you need to add some rice starch to a mixture to offset that, it's not significant.

At the end of the day, making the switch means you don't have all the ingredients you don't want in the food and on the label. You get a cleaner label, and that's what consumers want.

**DB: Who is using these plum products?**

**RP:** We're not at liberty to talk about our clients, but these products are being used in foods you'd find in high-end markets. We're in several national accounts so far, including a very large turkey processor.

Right now it's about getting the word out, planting our feet in certain segments and allowing them to grow from within. The

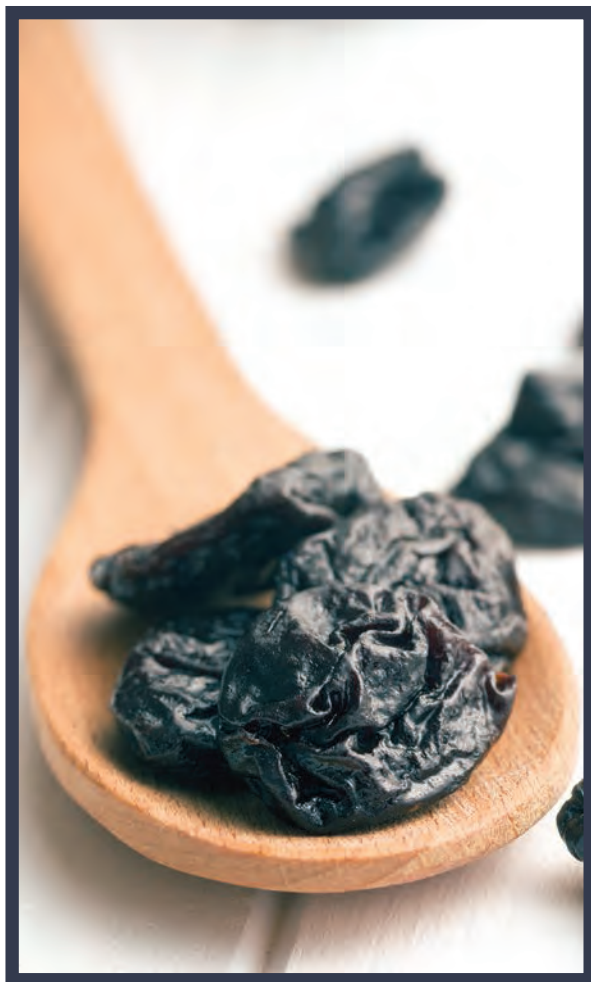
good news is it's catching on with customers quickly.

For guys like me and Jim Degen — our marketing consultant who translates chef talk into documents and science — plus a lot of other research scientists who were involved, we want to leave a legacy behind that shows how we made a difference in how people eat — particularly kids in schools. Look at it this way: consumers made Procter & Gamble stop using phosphates in soaps so we could protect our river systems, and yet we're still allowed to add them to our food supply?

It's been a long time in the making — getting all the science done and all the testing. That took 18 years and a lot of work at places like Texas A&M and Kansas State. Leading meat scientists at those places tested the new products.

It all started with the Prune Board (now called Plum Board), and Sunsweet has supported us all the way through it. The results verify what we already knew, that this is a great replacement for phosphates in our food, and we have a third-party that published its own results in the Journal of Food Science. It's a big home run to know science backs everything we're saying.

**DB**



# HOLIDAYS AHEAD: TIME TO STRUT YOUR CONVENIENT STUFF

Platters give the customer, and the deli, a chance to make a statement

BY BOB JOHNSON

Families traditionally gather around the dining room table to indulge in formal Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners, but deli platters can add the needed convenience to more-casual gatherings or bring a touch of the season's spirit to the holiday kitchen.

The holidays are the peak opportunity to help party hosts please their guests with an assortment of platters, a tasty hook that can keep shoppers coming back to the deli year after year.

"I think platters are critical to bringing the customer to the deli for their entertaining needs," says Cara Figgins, vice president of Partners, based in Kent, WA. "Creating exciting pairings that surprise and delight the consumers and provide an entertaining solution would certainly make me come back." Partners makes flatbreads, cookies and snack and hors d'oeuvre crackers. Of particular interest as platter treats are Mia Dolci brand cookie crisps.

Whether it's pairings of gourmet cheeses, crackers and meats, or collections of more economical items such as Cheddar cheese and cold cuts, platters give the deli a unique chance to showcase its interesting and trendy combinations not found elsewhere in the store.

"Platters in the deli are more customized compared to the produce department, where they seem to be more cookie cutter," says Margi Gunter, brand manager for Litehouse, in Sandpoint, ID. Litehouse makes dressings, dips, and cheeses including artisan Gorgonzola, Feta and Blue cheese for the upscale platter. "Customization is king. If the consumers can get on-trend items pulled together quickly, the deli will be their go-to stop."

Platters have segmented into gourmet and economy models, but the key at both ends of the spectrum is the deli must make an impression on consumers, just as consumers hope to impress their guests.



### The Eyes Have It

A striking variety of colors is the first step toward making a bold impression because “we first eat with our eyes and then our taste buds,” says Dean Spilka, president of Norpaco Gourmet Foods, Middletown, CT. “The platters should reflect the freshness of the deli and the overall atmosphere of the store. Platters have more choices and more color.”

Norpaco makes specialty Italian-style dishes including stuffed cherry peppers, stuffed olives, sun-dried tomatoes, panini-style meat and cheese rolls, and antipasto salads. Look for Norpaco to introduce new trays before the holidays, Spilka promises. The trays will include combinations of crackers, pepperoni and cheese or olives, sweetypepps, cherry peppers and panini rolls.

Sample platters and displays with large signs can catch the eye and make the deli a go-to place for the holidays, says Spilka.

The next step: Draw interest to the platters by including intriguing combinations of textures.

“Offer items that are not only colorful but with different textures and tastes,” says Ann Dressler, foodservice and deli division manager at G.L. Mezzetta Inc., Corona, CA. “What I am seeing are stores adding



more nontraditional items to their holiday platters, including more antipasto olive and pepper items that complement the meat and cheese items. Jalapeno- or garlic-stuffed olives or peperoncini peppers add great flair to these platters.”

Mezzetta sells olives, peppers, spreads, pickled vegetables and other specialty products, many of which are combined in

gift baskets. Dressler suggests adding red sweetypepps filled with cream cheese or Goat cheese to add more flavor varieties to platters.

A final step in making a strong impression is letting the imagination go by building the platter with an unconventional combination of items.

“Delis are being unique with dips, and they are mixing cheeses with fruits instead of just meat or crackers,” says Gunter. “Offer a variety of sizes and items. During the holidays some people make small platters, some make huge platters, some need grab-and-go.”

By offering a combination of colors, tastes, textures and sizes, the deli has an opportunity to tell harried consumers it has all the components to impress their holiday guests.

“The most important thing delis can do to make their department the go-to place is to create displays that provide complete entertaining solutions,” says Partners’ Fig-gins. “Build displays featuring cheeses, meats, crackers, wine, all presented paired and ready to go. Customers are busy. They want a plan without having to design it on their own.”

Like the holiday party hosts who have no time to prepare a meal, however, delis may be too busy to build platters in-house.

“In some cases, retailers are farming out their platters or centralizing them,” says Tom Buddig, executive vice president for marketing at Carl Buddig & Company, Homewood, IL. “Platters are a growing area. People are on a fast pace, don’t have time to make a tray, and it’s helpful if they know they will be proud to serve your platters.”

Buddig produces sliced deli meats and crackers, turkey, smoked ham, and cheese and cracker combinations. It has a

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partnership to market Old Wisconsin meat products.

Although platters may peak during the holidays, the season begins as soon as summer turns to fall.

"I think the season starts with tailgating for football, builds into the holidays, and continues until the Super Bowl," says Buddig.

### The High And Low Of It

Relatively well-off consumers see holiday entertaining as a time to splurge a little to offer friends and family something special, while other customers have one eye on the food and the other on the cost of cordiality.

"We feel there are two categories," says Norpaco's Spilka. "Low end and high end."

High-end platters are a rare opportunity to entice consumers to indulge in the finer foods found only at the deli.

"Platters have transitioned from being primarily for purposes of convenience to being an opportunity to feature gourmet cheese, meats and crackers," says Figgins. "Customers want to be proud of what they are serving their guests. I think customers feel the food they serve their guests is a reflection of their own personal taste. Customers are looking for specialty and gourmet items. They want to make sure

their guests are taken care of. This means gluten-free is taking a new place when it comes to entertaining. It can no longer be an after-thought. Artisan quality gluten-free crackers have a place on platters."

High-quality breads, crackers and wraps can play an important role in gourmet platters. Valley Lahvosh Baking in Fresno, CA, for example, makes a line of crackers and cracker breads, including specialty heart- and star-shaped crackers, which add a touch of gourmet whimsy to platters. The company also produces a wrap delis use to make roll-up sandwiches for platters, says marketing director Jenni Bonsignore.

To soften the sticker shock, upscale items can be offered in more economical portions.

"Litehouse is introducing 8-ounce bags of crumbles for better value," says the company's Gunter. "Center cuts of Blue cheese and Gorgonzola make entertaining easy, since the packaging is designed to be the serving tray."

At the low end of the economic spectrum, many consumers are looking for items both familiar and affordable.

"Some of the trays being sold are in the produce department, where produce and deli items come together," says Buddig. "Carrots or celery can go together with

dips or cheese. They are easy for snacking or dipping."

Some consumers, however, would not want gourmet offerings even if they could afford them.

"Good Cheddar cheese is safer than a goat cheese," says Buddig. "Stabbing a piece of Cheddar is easier than stabbing a piece of goat cheese. It's also a good idea to have a variety of traditional meats."

Although many consumers are on a tight budget, they still want a holiday meal they can feel good about presenting to family and friends.

"Platters are a way to differentiate yourself from your competition, to offer something you would be proud to serve at your own home or take as a gift," says Buddig.

For delis, platters are an opportunity to make a lasting impression on consumers at both ends of the economic spectrum.

"A great tray program can go far in attracting new customers to the service deli as their go-to place for help with holiday entertaining," says G.L. Mezzetta's Dressler. "Today's consumers want something that looks like they made it at home, with eye appeal, rather than croissant sandwich trays."

**DB**



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# Build Holiday Profits



Charcuterie, pâtés and spreads are expected to be strong this season

BY KEITH LORIA



The holidays are just around the corner, which means plenty of celebrations and family gatherings that require enough food to satisfy all the partygoers.

Industry insiders suggest nearly 80 percent of charcuterie sales occur between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve, with pâtés, spreads and other specialty foods ubiquitous on party buffets.

The most profitable season for Alexian Patés and Specialty Meats, based in Neptune, NJ, stretches from October through December, when sales spike tremendously, says company president Laurie Cummins.

"It is a time when people are looking to give specialty food as a holiday gift or use it for their own tables or for holiday entertaining," she says. "We find retailers who are focused on maxing sales will welcome the opportunity to add a few additional SKUs to add novelty and excitement to their holi-

day product offerings.”

A savvy deli department will take advantage of this opportunity to upsell, and retailers will try different sales models to be successful.

Holiday season is often strong for the pâtés, mousses and terrines sold by Les Trois Petits Cochons, based in Brooklyn, NY.

“I think in the deli, offering ideas as far as pairings is a good idea for increasing sales,” says Camille Collins, the company’s marketing director. “We always try to give retailers

ideas on things to do with the product itself, offering recipes and giving consumers an easy way to use what they’re buying.”

Richard Kessler, vice president sales and marketing for Fromartharie, based in Millington, NJ, says retailers should concentrate on selling pâtés and meats by drawing attention to them.

“The opportunity is very large to do some upselling,” he says. “Cross-merchandising works best, from what I have seen, by utilizing whole grains, nuts, olives, cheese —

and showing consumers there are multiple ways to use [them].”

### Successful Sales Models

Deli retailers should think about making shopping easy for their customers, says Vanessa Chang, marketing and education manager for Creminelli Fine Meats LLC, headquartered in Salt Lake City, UT.

“A lot of people are looking for gifts for hosts/hostesses, neighbors, co-workers, but the holidays are also an incredibly busy and stressful time, so it’s important to make gift giving and food shopping super easy,” she says. “Some of our retailers will have holiday gift boxes featuring two to three salamis and sometimes other food items in one contained box that doesn’t require wrapping.”

Using these boxes as a standalone display creates a visual impact, and the display’s accessibility makes it easy for customers to grab a gift set and continue their holiday shopping.

Deli managers and category managers need to engage more with customers, says Kessler. Fromartharie has devised a sort of cheat-sheet script to use when managers talk with shoppers.

“From a consumer behavioral standpoint, to attract users of specialty charcuterie, retailers need to very briefly and clearly describe how to use it, whether it’s an ingredient, as part of a series of snacks, whatever it is,” says Kessler. “You need to overcome that fear and lack of awareness on their part.”

Foie gras is coming on strong in the charcuterie category, he says, and the company’s Le Roulé French rolled soft cream cheese continues to be popular.

### What’s New?

Fabrique Delices, Hayward, CA, recently introduced all-natural pâtés, mousses and duck confit to the market, although its Mousse Truffee remains one of its best sellers.

Although Alexian Patés and Specialty Meats doesn’t have any new pâté offerings, Cummins expects more people than ever will be trying pâté for the first time this year.

“Ours is completely all-natural and it is also gluten free,” she says. “It is a sophisticated, yet a quick, easy treat perfect for any occasion, but best for when you just want to kick back and chill.”

The company will introduce its new, all-natural Applewood Smoked Chicken breast, which only needs to be opened, sliced, and garnished to be presented as a lean and delicious center-of-plate item or appetizer.

“Time is at a premium during the holiday season, and the smoked chicken



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breast is versatile, simple and delicious,” says Cummins.

Cremineilli offers a classic line of salami, but in the fourth quarter of this year will feature such specials as Ungherese (Hungarian-style salami made with sweet paprika and sweet wine) as well as elk salami. Company founder Cristiano Creminelli has been experimenting with his version of wild-game salami for a while and “finally got a recipe down that has impressed the lucky few who have been able to taste it so far,” says Chang. “It’s made with elk sourced from Idaho and heritage Duroc pork fat.”

The company also will bring back the White truffle seasonal salami featuring white truffles from Alba, Italy.

### Merchandising Matters

Tasting is always popular and particularly effective during the high-traffic holiday season, when people are hungry, busy and looking for foolproof ideas.

“Merchandising individual salami with signage suggesting cheese/beverage pairings or even cross-merchandising the items themselves helps customers put great entertaining ideas together,” says Chang.

If the charcuterie selection is placed far from the cheese, Chang suggests sampling staff-favorite pairings or displaying some of the salami within the cheese section.

The wine/beer/spirits department is another great place to offer information to customers, showing which salami and char-



cuterie pair best with that bottle of red wine that’s on special.

Les Trois Petits Cochons provides retailers with a consumer brochure, which contains recipes and helpful tips on how to create a proper charcuterie board with the company’s pâtés and other products.

### Calling Attention To The Products

Signage is key year-round but particularly during the holidays. When customer traffic is

at a peak, it’s easy for deli managers to forget to make their displays look clean, organized, attractive and properly signed.

“Without proper signage, people won’t be able to identify something they might potentially be interested in,” says Chang. “Signage with the price, name of the product, and how to enjoy it is critical. Promoting one item by a simple tasting or pairing with another item like cheese and beverage is also effective with busy consumers.” **DB**



# Blast From The Past



**T**

## “Il Gusto d’Italia – The Taste of Italy”

he beginning of Fiorucci can be traced back to the mid-1800s, when Innocenzo Fiorucci opened a meat shop in Norcia, Italy. Little did he know, in this small town tucked away in the province of Perugia in southeastern Umbria, that the company and its guiding principles would take hold and grow.

During the winter, Innocenzo would travel to Rome to sell the typical dry sausage from Norcia called Norcinetto. Years later, based on the success of this venture, Innocenzo settled in Rome and opened a shop specializing in the traditional preparation of cured meats.

Building on their father’s legacy, the next generation of the Fiorucci family, through the vision of one of Innocenzo’s sons, Cesare, expanded the business by creating a chain of Norcinerie (Norcia Meatshops), which soon became popular in Rome.

In the 1950’s, Cesare Fiorucci created an industrial model capable of both meeting the need for increasing production and safeguarding recipes that have been handed down through generations.

Cesare’s son, Ferruccio, guided the company after the death of his father and has built it to what it is today. In the 1980’s, Fiorucci opened offices abroad, setting out to enter the North American market and acquire new production facilities in the zones of origin of its specialty meats.

In 2011 Fiorucci Foods Inc. was acquired by Campofrio Food Group, the leading processed meats company in Europe, and has been renamed Campofrio Food Group America.

The Fiorucci brand and products have been present for more than 10 years in the United States.

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