

DELI BUSINESS

MARKETING MERCHANDISING MANAGEMENT PROCUREMENT

OCT/NOV 2015 \$14.95

ORGANIC GETS A START IN THE DELI

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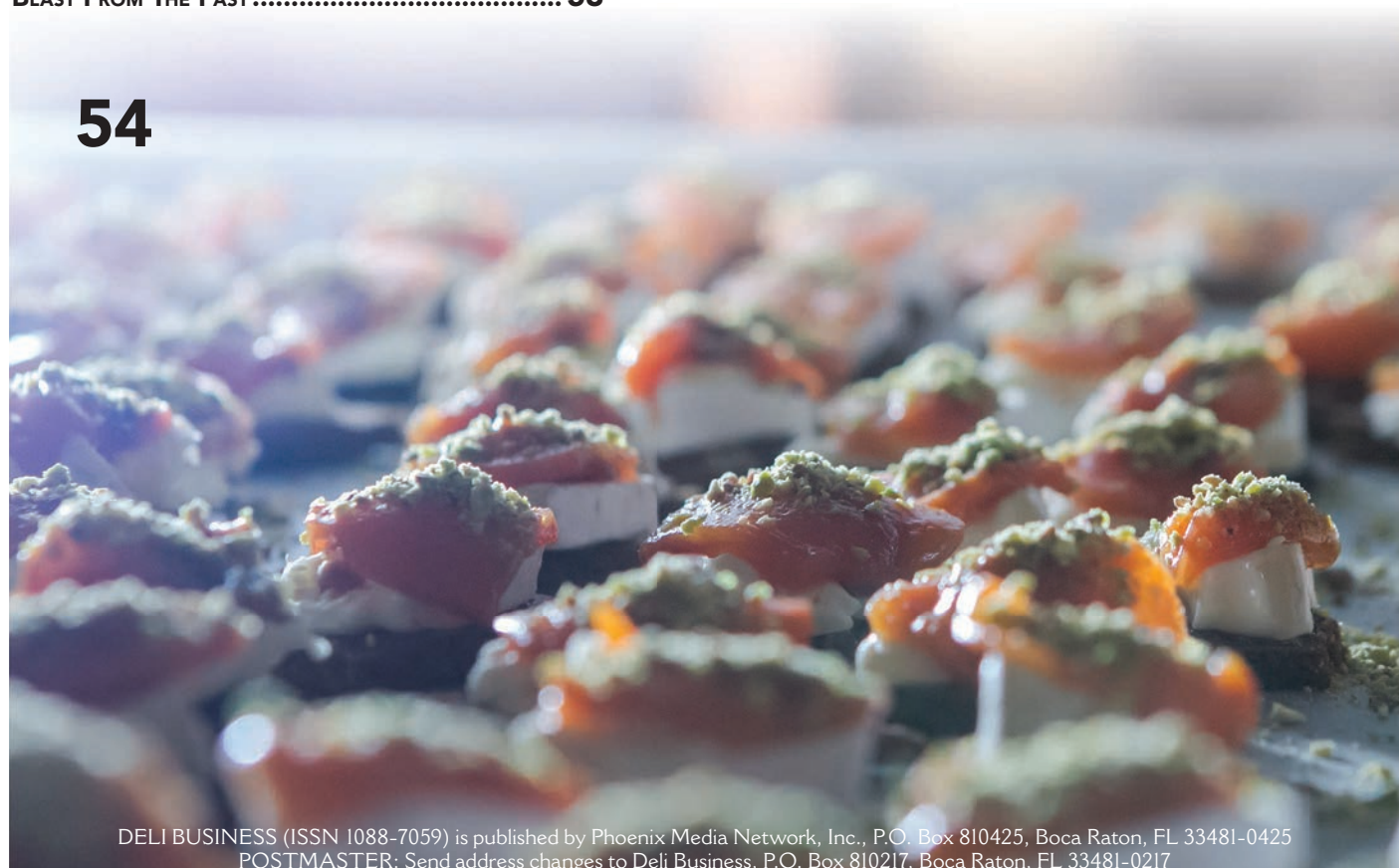
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FIRSTSOURCE EVENTS REBRANDS CONFERENCE

Development, LLC, South Portland, ME, has announced the recent acquisition of the FirstSource series of events. As a result of feedback from participants and eight months of research, FirstSource Events is rebranding the series of events which will now be called 1on1 meetings.

Dates and locations of a new revised version of the FirstSource's Specialty Cheese and Deli event, Deli&Cheese 1on1 will take place February 10-12, 2016 in Hilton Head Island, SC at the Sea Pines' Resort.

FirstSource's Deli&Cheese 1on1 is a ramped-up version of a hosted-buyer event that will bring qualified deli and specialty cheese buyers and suppliers together for two and one-half days of industry presentations, product tastings and networking opportunities. www.FirstSourceEvents.com

COMING NEXT IN DEC/JAN ISSUE

COVER STORY

Retail Trends

FEATURE STORIES

Cross Merchandising
Flatbreads

MERCHANDISING REVIEWS

Olives
Dips & Spreads

PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES

Italian

COMING IN FEB/MAR

DELI BUSINESS will be taking a look at Consumer Trends.

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COMING NEXT



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Announcements



GOLDEW DEBUTS

Peppadew USA, Morganville, NJ, offers a locally-grown Peppadew Goldew pepper produced in New Jersey. In its first year debut, Peppadew Goldew will be marketed for the olive bar exclusively by N.Y.-based Foodmatch Inc. Peppadew Goldew looks to expand its growing operations and make the product available nationally. Although slightly higher priced, the all-natural, non GMO, locally grown Goldew is a boutique offering that looks to take an overseas product and bring it to the U.S. market.

www.peppadewfresh.com



2015 CLASS OF ACS CERTIFIED CHEESE PROS ANNOUNCED

The American Cheese Society, Denver, recently announced 187 individuals passed the fourth Certified Cheese Professional (CCP) exam, held this year in Providence, RI. This class includes individuals from 51 different companies in the U.S. and Canada. They join a group that totals 595 individuals who have earned the ACS CCP credential. Each professional receives an official lapel pin, embroidered patch and a certificate, along with the right to call themselves ACS Certified Cheese Professionals.

www.cheesesociety.org



NEW BELLETOILE RANGE

Belleteille has redesigned and modernized the packaging of its 3 kg & 1.5 kg sizes of 70-percent triple crème from France, while keeping it easily recognizable to consumers. At the same time, La Fromagerie Henri Hutin announces the harmonization of its brand identity within its range of specialty foods. Valfrais brand of spreadable triple cream soft cheese, is now Belleteille, since both spreads, manufactured in France, use the same recipe. Launched earlier this year, Belleteille Rouge, a red-rind, soft ripened cheese, completes the Belleteille range.

www.henri-hutin.com



COUTURIER, NORSELAND ANNOUNCE ALLIANCE

Specialty food brands Couturier North America, LLC and Norseland, Inc. are forming a strategic alliance for the sales, marketing and distribution of Couturier brands including Couturier, Merci Chef and Capra. Couturier NA, Hudson, NY, will join Darien, CT-based Norseland's group of premier specialty brands, which includes Järlsberg and several other premium products.

www.norseland.com

Transition



LITEHOUSE APPOINTS SENIOR VP

Litehouse Foods, Sandpoint, ID, has named Brent Carr senior vice president of sales and marketing, reporting to Jim Frank, president and chief executive. Carr spent 15 years at Colgate-Palmolive before working for Fresh Express, leading the company's national account teams for a decade. Carr joined Litehouse in 2009 to help build the value-added channel. In his new role, Carr will align the sales and marketing teams and strengthen the company's cross functional relationships with customers in each channel.

www.lighthousefoods.com

New Products



ARTISAN LINE LAUNCHED

Champion Foods, New Boston, MI, has introduced artisan flatbreads under the Family Finest brand name. The three varieties include Four Meat, featuring a tangy pizza sauce, pepperoni, sausage, ground beef, bacon, and an artisan cheese blend; Sweet Chili Chicken, spread with a sweet Thai chili sauce and covered with tender diced chicken; and Pepperoni, highlighting Family Finest's signature pizza sauce and sliced pepperoni. Each new artisan flatbread pizza brings the company's heritage of old world recipes from the marketplace to the homes of consumers.

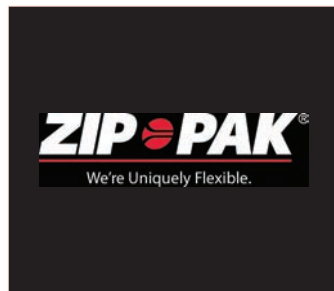
www.championfoods.com



SIMPLE & SAUCY

Conroy Foods, Inc., Pittsburgh, has combined a select few natural ingredients to create Simple & Saucy, a line of simple sandwich condiments with sophisticated flavor. Each flavor in the Simple & Saucy line has a distinctly artisan feel from classic flavors, such as submarine dressing, made with 100 percent pure olive oil and red wine vinegar; clover honey mustard; fiery sriracha mustard sauce; and deli dijon and whole grain specialty mustards.

www.conroyfoods.com



ZIPPER TECHNOLOGY

Zip-Pak, Manteno, IL, has introduced Sensory Feedback Fasteners that feature performance characteristics that appeal to a consumer's sense of sound, sight, smell or touch, along with a range of resealable technologies. The four different zipper profiles incorporate the high-performance sealing feature that provides both aural and tactile feedback to assure the consumer their package has been firmly sealed. Lines include Fragrance-Zip; Vector; Slider Select; ZIP360; Pour & Lok; PresSURE-Lok; and Zipbox.

www.zippak.com

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there. Check out our wild new fun-loving fondue fanatic: the Emmi Fondü FunDude.
See us at the IDDBA booth #2413 and the Summer Fancy Food booth #266.





NEW COOKIE CRISPS INTRODUCED

Sugar Bowl Bakery, Atlanta, has unveiled a new line of Batter Crisps. The thin and crispy cake-flavored crisps taste as if batter was dripped directly onto a cookie sheet. The four varieties include Devil's Food, French Vanilla, Carrot Cake and Lemon Snow. This line is made using high-quality ingredients with no preservatives or cholesterol. Each bite-sized crisp has zero grams of trans fat and contains no artificial flavors or coloring.

www.sugarbowlbakery.com



CHEESE IS HANDCRAFTED

BelGioioso Cheese Inc., Green Bay, WI, has launched an artisanal cheese boutique, La Bottega di BelGioioso. This collection includes hand-wrapped 4-ounce cuts for consumer trial and whole wheels for expert cutting and wrapping in-store. Varieties include Crescenza-Stracchino, a fresh and spreadable tangy cheese; American Grana, which has a nutty flavor; Gorgonzola with Cow & Sheep's Milk, a robust and crumbly blue-veined cheese; Baa & Moo Provolone Extra with a sharp, buttery piccante flavor; and spicy Peperoncino Asiago con Chili Pepper.

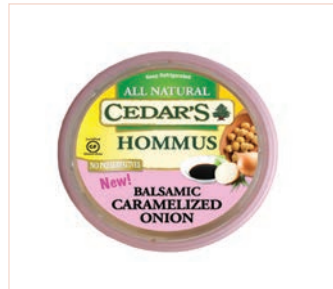
www.belgioioso.com



HANDCRAFTED HUMMUS

Califresh of California LLC, Sanger, CA, offers Sarah's Harvest, a premium hummus made from chickpeas harvested as a fresh produce item and shelled while still green. The line is handcrafted to retain the natural green color of the fresh chickpea. Offered in 12-count 9.5-ounce tubs and 2-pound piping bags for the foodservice and deli trades.

www.califresh.net



CEDAR'S IS ALL NATURAL

Cedar's Mediterranean Foods, Inc., Ward Hill, MA, has introduced All Natural Sriracha Hommus and All Natural Balsamic Caramelized Onion Hommus. The sriracha flavor is blended into an original hummus base. This spicy dip can be used as a spread on a sandwich or vegetable dip. Balsamic Caramelized Onion includes small, flavorful bits of caramelized onions with balsamic vinegar.

www.cedarsfoods.com



NO MORE FOAM

Anchor Packaging, Inc., St. Louis, has launched the latest addition to the Culinary Squares bases and lids line. With the same inside food space as a 9-inch-by-9-inch foam clamshell, the line features bases of durable, cut-resistant material and food visibility provided by clear lids. A deeper dome joins the existing single and three-compartment, vented lids made with crystal clear polypropylene (PP) with Clear Guard anti-fog technology. All lids are compatible with the matching 8.5-inch square, black PP bases, available in single and three-compartment designs.

www.anchorpackaging.com



RENEWABLE AND SUSTAINABLE

Planglow USA, St. Paul, MN, offers the new 12-piece gourmet to-go Gastro Collection, which includes a large and extra-large wedge, large and extra-large sandwich box, three salad pack sizes, bags and labels. Compostable, certified, plant-based liners provide a barrier that safeguards freshness. The line is made with renewable and sustainable materials.

www.planglow-usa.com



HUMMUS DISTRIBUTION AND FLAVORS EXPAND

Hope Foods, Louisville, CO, is expanding distribution to Costco stores in the Rocky Mountain, West Coast and Midwest regions as demand for organic, non-GMO convenience foods grows. The company also is expanding its hummus flavor line-up to include 8-ounce Super Hemp, which packs 2 g of protein in each tablespoon, and Red Pepper, blending in organic red peppers for a chunky texture. These flavors join Spicy Avocado, Thai Coconut Curry, Original, Kale Pesto, Sriracha, Jalapeno Cilantro and others.

www.hopefoods.com



GLOBALLY-INSPIRED SEASONING

Wixon, St. Francis, WI, introduces new seasoning flavor systems for adventurous palates. Developed by Wixon Foodservice Group's team of flavor chemists, meat scientists and food technologists using globally-sourced ingredients, the new menu concepts were unveiled at The Flavor Experience conference in Newport Beach, CA this summer. The recipes incorporate several of Wixon's signature flavor systems, including Wixon Sour Cherry Slaw to top the pork confit crepe, pictured.

www.wixon.com

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by Jim Prevor, Editor-in-Chief

Will Service Delis Have A Place In Small Stores?

The hottest trend in food retailing today is the small store concept. In the United Kingdom, players such as Tesco, Sainsbury's, Marks & Spencer and Waitrose have all had great success adapting their larger supermarket concepts into what are mostly urban convenience stores. In the United States, the fastest growing concepts are deep discounters, such as Aldi and Save-a-Lot, and epicurean concepts, such as Trader Joe's, all of which are small format stores.

Many chains are experimenting with new small concepts, such as Ahold with its Bfresh store in Alston, MA, following on its Everything Fresh store in Philadelphia, and Wal-Mart, experimenting with its Walmart Express and Walmart To Go concepts.

The reasons for this emphasis are clear:

First, it is very difficult to get large sites anymore. So if a chain is looking to grow and expand, it needs an alternative. This is one reason why Tesco went with the small-store concept when it chose to enter the U.S. with its Fresh & Easy concept. If it had decided what Americans wanted was 70,000 square foot stores on prime suburban corners and it didn't want to do an acquisition, it would have taken decades to get a critical mass of stores.

Second, the growth of warehouse club stores and big box retailers has made it very difficult for supermarkets to compete on many products. Sure it may still be more convenient, but on staples of all kinds, consumers can get the same product cheaper at other outlets. This inevitably puts pressure on sales and pressure on margins, so filling a large store with such staples makes it hard to get a decent return on investment.

Third, the growth of Internet shopping is changing the dynamic by which consumers interact with food stores. In places such as London, where there are mature Internet offerings combined with substantial small store offerings, a dynamic has arisen where people order heavy or bulky staples online and then fill in with perishables at the local version of a big grocer.

It all makes perfect sense but also poses a great question as to the future of the supermarket deli. When Tesco's Fresh & Easy opened in the U.S., it elected to not have a service deli. Both Aldi and Trader Joe's eschew service delis.

It is easy to imagine the reasons why the executives that run these concepts might resist the idea of service delis. Many of these concepts are very

price-driven, and service means labor, which means extra costs, so avoiding service and labor is a high priority. In addition, because these are small-store concepts, space is a priority. If you can make the sandwiches or cook the rotisserie chicken in an off-site commissary and preserve the precious store square footage for the display and sale of products, rather than preparation, that is a win.

There is also the issue of keeping product offerings fresh. Although some small stores, say the Wawa stores in beachside New Jersey during the summer season, are very high volume, many small stores are not.

And we are conscious that Wal-Mart included a service deli when it introduced its small-store Marketside concept in Arizona with the goal of defeating Fresh & Easy should its small-store effort have been successful. The Marketside concept didn't work.

It may well be that labor, square footage and shrink just make it difficult to integrate service delis with small-store concepts. Yet there are good reasons retailers should not give up trying.

If you look at the extraordinary growth of concepts such as Aldi, its growth has come from transforming itself so that instead of just being cheap, it is perceived as a value operation. One of Fresh & Easy's mistakes was thinking it could make American consumers perceive food made offsite as equal in freshness and quality to fresh foods assembled on site.

This means the service element has to be used well. Slicing meats and cheese may not do it because pre-sliced product can now be made with good quality. No pre-made sandwich can be customized as one made for the customer specifically, and hot foods such as pizzas are different than a cold pizza consumers can heat up at home.

The victor of the battle of the small stores may well be the retailer who identifies a way to use service delis shrewdly — as a differentiating tool that allows the concept to offer unique reasons to come to the store. With Internet shopping ascending, few topics are worthy of more thought and attention.

DB



James F. Prevor

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by Lee Smith, Publisher

The Cheese Pilgrimage

I'm not sure what constitutes a pilgrimage, perhaps it is a place deemed so special it becomes a rite of passage or takes on such unique importance it becomes a lifetime bucket-list journey. Slow Foods' CHEESE is fast approaching that kind of event.

When more than 270,000 people, 30 percent of whom are international visitors, travel to an off-the-tourist-beat small city in Italy to attend a four-day cheese festival, it is safe to say CHEESE is quickly approaching pilgrimage status. The festival is open to everyone free-of-charge and is held in the city of Bra that has a year-round population of about 30,000 people.

Bra is a typical older city in Italy – tile roofs, cobblestone alleyways, narrow winding streets full of quaint shops, cafes and restaurants. Located in the heart of the Piedmont region, it is surrounded by vineyards and organic farms. This is where Slow Foods was born – a place where food and tradition are respected.

Then, every other year, CHEESE occurs. The nearest hotels are booked years in advance, the streets are crowded with people from around the world taking in the atmosphere, buying cheese, tasting cheese and taking classes and seminars. It is an atmosphere that is all cheese.

It is a time when you can talk about milk, animals, cultures, affinage, terrior and more cheese without anyone looking at you like you have some slightly odd obsession. Bra becomes a city of smiles.

At Bra, you can tastes hundreds, if not thousands, of cheeses as well as oils, vinegars, jams and everything else that might go with cheese. It is a cheese buyer's dream. You can meet with producers, talk business and cut deals. For all of its congenial atmosphere, this is also a place of serious business.

Such is its reputation that in the States the event is known simply as Bra, as in, "Do you think you will be going to Bra?" No other explanation is necessary.

Are there strategic business implications? The answer is yes. Anything that draws more than a quarter-million people deserves respect. Cheese had been important in the deli mix for a long time, but

it is now becoming a staple element. And, the staples are not young, mild, industrial cheeses; they are the specialties – fine Cheddar, Brie, Pecorinos and Gruyères. They are the exceptional American cheeses and local varieties.

If anyone should doubt the passion, but want a taste of what to expect in Bra, I recommend buying tickets for the upcoming Cheesemonger Invitational held just before the San Francisco Fancy Food Show in January. It is a sellout event; the audience is young and very cool, and everywhere you look you will see unbridled passion.

Young people are envisioning a long-term career in one of the key components of making good cheese – farming, animal husbandry, cheesemaking, affinage and mongering – the selling of cheese. Mongering is the job of deli clerks – but these are special people who see a path to the future and who will not be let down by their employers. So give them a reason to crow about who they are, a reason to stand up in a room and be proud of their profession.

As for me, right now, I'm sitting in a dorm room at the Vermont Technical College taking a course called, "Essential Principles and Practices of Cheesemaking." My brain is being tested as I try to master the elements of acid coagulation, the lactation affect, pH, osmotic pressure and casein structure.

I'm trying to understand micelles and the difference between lactic and enzymatic coagulation. Who said chemistry doesn't have any practical uses – despite the fact it was a course I carefully avoided in high school.

So, what else can I say? Join the club and enjoy the passion of the people around you. Be great. Don't settle for mediocrity. Be brave. And, yes, I love the deli. I don't think I could be writing this article about canned corn and peaches.

DB





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ORGANIC GETS A START IN THE DELI

**Not just greener,
the food must also be better**

BY BOB JOHNSON

The organic mega trend is reaching the deli, maybe slowly, and definitely unevenly, but inexorably it is reaching the deli.

Even during the depths of the recession demand for organic products continued to increase at a healthy pace. Since the recovery, growth has resumed at staggering rates.

"Consumer demand has grown by double-digits every year since the 1990s – and organic sales increased from \$3.6 billion in 1997 to more than \$39 billion in 2014," according to the latest

State of the Industry report from the Organic Trade Association, Washington, D.C.

Organic sales increased a little more than 11 percent in 2014, which was about the same as the year before and a little more than in 2012, according to Angie Jagiello, Organic Trade Association associate director of conference and product development.

For a handful of producers who have developed reputations and markets for high quality all natural foods with clean labels it already comprises a significant share of deli sales.

"We've gone from around 10 percent organic in the deli, to today probably a third of the product is organic," says Bob Sewall, executive vice president of sales and marketing at Blount Fine Foods in Fall River, MA. "If people have 12 soups in their line, four of them will be organic."

A well-known clean label brand like Blount's may be growing quicker than most, but this is a growing market throughout the store, including the deli department.

"The mainstream retailers are offering organic products," says Sherrie Zebrasky, former vice president for deli at Wegman's who now serves as a retail adviser at Principe Foods USA, headquartered in Long Beach, CA. "You see some organic penetration into the deli with organic meat, hummus and olives. The olive bars, hummus and even cheese are starting to show up. It is not yet as strong in the deli as it is in produce; I don't think you can go to a supermarket anywhere and not see an organic section in the produce department."

No one knows how fast penetration in the deli will come, or how wide and deep it will be.

But leading producers of organic goods, and others most familiar with the sector, seem to have a good grip on what is driving the increase and what deli retailers can do to grab their share of the action.

It's About Quality

Only a handful of consumers will buy deli products just because they are organic. For the rest it must be about the quality.

"When organic soups first came out they were bland," says Sewall. "There were a few people who would eat organic food, but how do you sell the other 98 percent? You do that by making things that taste great. You can add grains to organic soups to give them body. I don't know if organic is driving it, or great taste."

The depth of the flavor sells these soups, which just happen to also be organic.

"When you're trying to round out your soup line, you stress the quality and the flavor," says Sewall. "You can make 8-ounce soups that are full body and taste great with only 90 to 100 calories. We expand our customers' line. When they have a minestrone, we replace it with ancient grain minestrone. We're upgrading. If they have a chicken noodle, we upgrade to organic chicken noodle."

The upgrade may be in additional nutritional benefits, especially in dairy, that can be clearly stated and easily and intuitively understood.

"One of the unique attributes of organic dairy is the rigorous pasture standards," says Tripp Hughes, director of brand management at Organic Valley in La Farge, WI. "Our animals are out on the pasture eating fresh grass and forages. Even when the grass is out of season they are out in the pasture getting exercise and fresh air. Pasture-based translates to higher quality dairy."

"We think there is a connection between the quality of the inputs and the quality of the food taken home," says Hughes. "We don't treat our animals with antibiotics and growth hormones. Our cheese sales continue to grow. We're up double digits from last year, and we're seeing more and more sales into delis."

Other organic dairies also believe the image of drug-free cows ruminating in wide-open spaces sells cheese.

"Our dairies are some of the finest in the nation," says John Rumiano, vice president at Rumiano Cheese Company, East Willows, CA. "The animals are grass-

fed up on the coast of California."

Started nearly a century ago, Rumiano is California's oldest family-owned dairy. Its pastures near the coast in the northern part of the state is a natural location to develop an organic cheese and butter business still in its infancy in deli sales.

"It's coming slowly," says Rumiano. "It's not as much in the deli yet, not as much as in the dairy section. The deli departments are not real strong yet. Some people put the cheese in the deli, but not behind the glass. The organic pizza is starting in the deli, but I don't know about organic sandwiches."

As a whole, however, at Rumiano the organic are by far the fastest growing cheese products.

"We're bullish on organic," says Rumiano. "About 50 percent of the cheese we manufacture is organic. Five years ago, we were 5 to 10 percent organic. Organic is going into the dairy and into some manufactured items like Annie's."

Based in Berkeley, CA, Annie's makes a line of pastas, soups, dressings, condiments, and other foods without artificial flavors, synthetic colors or preservatives, GMOs, growth hormones or persistent pesticides.



"Clean label is driving everything," says Sewall. "If you go to clean label, the next step is organic. It's not a big step."

There is a close connection between the appeal of organic and the even broader appeal of clean labels with few ingredients and no ingredients that are unfamiliar or incomprehensible.

"Our non-organic soups are all clean label," says Sewall. "We quick freeze, so we don't need starches and emulsifiers. We have clean label side dishes, too, and organic macaroni and cheese."

The organic consumer is a subset of the concerned consumers who want to know what is in their food, and whether it is good for them.

"Today's consumers are more particular," says Michael Girkout, president of Alvarado Street Bakery in Petaluma, CA. "They care about what they put in their bodies, they care about nutrition, they read labels, and they care about the companies that produce their food. These shoppers are astute and expect retailers to be the same."

Alvarado Street has developed a reputation for delicious certified organic breads and bagels.

Demand for organic food is so strong, in fact, delis may have difficulty sourcing some important products.

"The largest constraint right now is supply, particularly in some of the areas the deli is interested in," says Jagiello from the Organic Trade Association. "The organic grain supply is tight right now, and the grain affects cheese, meat and bread."

This grain shortage will not take care of itself overnight, as there are important barriers to even starting the three-year process to convert to organic.

"The grain belt has been an area with large farms and expensive equipment so there's not much room for new organic farmers to start," says Jagiello. "It's not going to break overnight."

There are organic cereal producers acquiring land to grow their own grain, and other large players in the sector contributing scholarships and apprenticeships to train the next generation of organic farmers.

Tell The Story

As more organic options are brought into the deli it is important to have superior signage that lets consumers know what is new, and why it is better.

"Clear simple signage is important," says Girkout. "Show customers what makes certain products 'special'... what separates one item from another. Having knowledgeable staff is another key importance... being able to talk with customers and explain the benefits of organic products (clean ingredient label, no GMOs, nothing artificial.)"

Part of telling the story includes relating how the products are made and why that makes them special.

The cheese and butter from Organic Valley, for example, is not just organic, it is cheese and butter that comes with a story many customers can easily understand and embrace.

"Consumers continue to have a heightened desire to know where their food comes from," says Organic Valley's Hughes. "We're bringing it from our farms

► PACKAGING AS GREEN AS THE PRODUCT

A small California company is getting a favorable response to its micro-sized tasting spoon that uses a minimum of material and storage space, in addition to being vegetable-based and entirely compostable.

"People are looking for solutions, but the solutions aren't always available," says Peggy Cross, chief executive of Ecotensil in Corte Madera, CA. "In California I would guess maybe a third of the stores are using plant-based utensils. A lot of people may not know plant-based plastic may not be compostable if too much petroleum is added to make it less expensive."

Part of the solution is a small tasting implement that uses less resources to begin with, which also makes it a relatively economical option.

"If you get eco tasters in high volume we're very close in cost," says Cross. "We're the least expensive compostable utensil. A utensil will say compostable if it is, because it's more expensive. It's pretty close to double the cost for non-compostable utensils."

Many organic producers prefer packaging and utensils that tread lightly on the environment, even if they are not technically organic.

"We use recycled plastic and other things that are OMRI approved," says Bob Sewall, executive vice president of sales and marketing at Blount Fine Foods, Fall River, MA.

OMRI, the Organic Materials Review Institute, approves packaging that is not strictly organic if it is the most sustainable option available.

"Packaging produced from sustainable materials, such as PLA and bio PET, also support organic positioning," says Jim Foster, marketing manager at Clear Lam Packaging,

Elk Grove, IL. "These materials enable a brand to demonstrate care about the product, environment, and many consumers' values."

The right packaging can help sell organic products by giving them a fresh look in the department.

"Successful organics utilize packaging to accentuate the organic appeal and communicate 'made-in-store freshness' with high visibility windows, clear sidewalls/lidding, and minimal graphics," says Foster. "The shoppers tend to respond better to 'clean' packaging that correlates with the organic positioning — meaning a minimally processed look/feel. The deli section has the opportunity to accelerate demand for organics with packaging that delivers the brand promise and clearly merchandises the contents in a clean, simple manner."

Plant-based containers and utensils are more of a challenge with soups and other hot foods.

"You need to add calcium carbonate to make it stand up to the heat," says Cross. "It's more of a time limit. The tasting utensils are designed to be used for a few bites, but our blue dot products are meant to be longer lasting."

Despite the challenges, there is a nascent trend in the deli toward plant-based cups and utensils, and away from the petroleum-based options.

"It's been gradually growing over the last four years," says Cross. "People are trying to use vegetable-based utensils and cups, and compostable cups. Certain leaders have been doing it a long time, like Whole Foods. A plastic spoon is going to be on this planet for a thousand years, while ours will be gone in a few weeks."

DB

to our partners in retail and deli.”

The work of explaining what is meant by organic has largely been done, as consumers generally know what it means and how they think about it.

A slight majority of families are buying more organic products than a year ago, according to the Organic Trade Association 2015 tracking study, and five out of six parents sometimes buy organic products.

“People are more familiar with organic,” says Principe’s Zebrasky. “The older people are looking at it for health reasons. The Millennials are drawn to organics, even if the younger ones don’t have high incomes yet. It’s young in the deli, and it’s definitely still growing. The products are always tagged as organic, and price is the major deterrent to some portion of the population.”

The price premium for organic is an important and changing part of the story that can impact sales.

“Pricing varies and typically a customer would expect to pay slightly more



for an organic option versus a conventional option,” says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations at Publix Super Markets based in Lakeland, FL.

But the organic industry has come so far that, in some cases, there is barely any premium at all.

“There are some products where there is little premium for organic, like salad greens and baby carrots,” says Jagiello. “There has been very little research on the premium for organic meat and cheese.”

The growth in organic sales returned to spectacular from merely robust with the

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PHOTO COURTESY OF NEW LEAF MARKET

recovery, in part, because more consumers were willing to pay a little more.

"We are able to get a premium for our cheese," says Hughes. "After the downturn in 2008 and 2009 things slowed down for a while, but around 2012 we started to see things pick up."

Much of the continuing growth has to do with the steadily narrowing difference in the cost of producing, distributing and merchandising organic products.

"The price difference is a myth that may have been true years ago... but is now really not the reality," says Girkout. "Organic breads are very competitively priced when compared to non-organic breads. While some items may seem higher... this consumer is willing to pay a premium price for a premium product."

Follow The Leaders

Even though mainstream retailers have well-stocked organic sections within produce, most of them still carry only an organic item here or there in the deli department.

"Departments such as produce are

more mature in their offerings and selections; there seems to be an organic counterpart for most conventional produce items," says Brous.

But Publix is in the early phase of looking at a few additional organic products in deli.

"We are looking at the organic market in our deli departments," says Brous. "Currently, we offer our customers options for organic hummus, such as Pita Pal and Roots, in the Charlotte division only. We also offer organic specialty cheeses, such as Cowgirl Creamery, Organic Creamery, and Parmissio Parmigiano Reggiano. For organic snacks we offer Popcornopolis."

While mainstream stores are generally moving slowly to include organic in the deli, the place to look for possible trends in the future may be stores serving demographics with a higher than usual interest in more natural foods.

"Our list is probably shorter for the items we don't source organically," says Valerie VanderLaan, foodservice director for New Leaf Community Markets in Santa Cruz, CA. "A large percentage of

what we do at the deli is organic. It's probably 85 percent."

VanderLaan is foodservice director for five New Leaf markets in the greater San Francisco Bay area and the Northern California store of their Oregon-based partner New Seasons stores.

New Leaf is something of an independent Whole Foods-type chain, albeit with prices a little lower and more of the produce locally sourced from the many organic farms an hour or less from the stores.

"We have a pretty savvy customer base here," says VanderLaan. "Here in the Bay Area we also have access to an incredible group of growers."

These consumers don't just buy organic, many of them are committed to buying organic.

"All of our greens, pasta and tomatoes in the deli are organic," says VanderLaan. "In our sandwiches all the lettuce, tomatoes, onions and pickles are organic. It's something we're proud of, and we want the customers to know we walk the talk."

How far the mainstream will move in this direction, and how fast they will get there, is anybody's guess.

But the deli is definitely affected by the trend toward organic, and by the broader trend toward a willingness to pay a little more for higher quality, healthier foods.

"Without a doubt organic is growing," says Blount Fine Foods' Sewall. "There are not many places we're not going. We've been doing this for 20-some years. We've been going everywhere in the country for the last 10. People are getting away from 'what's my price' to 'what's my quality?'"

That change of priorities in favor of quality figures to make organic options ever more attractive.

"Consumer demand for organic continues to grow... in fact, it's still the largest growing category in supermarkets," says Girkout. "This is clearly not a fad, but a trend that isn't going away. Consumers are seeking out organic products in all departments, especially in perimeter departments, as they also want fresh."

Demand for organic cheese, in particular, is growing at an even greater rate than organic food in particular.

"Organic cheese was \$396 million at retail in 2014, with a growth of nearly 20 percent," says Jagiello. "Meat was at \$756 million, but meat is one of the only areas where there are meaningful All Natural labels, like 'antibiotic free' or 'humanely raised.'"

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Specialty Meats Drive Sales

Ring up incremental dollars during the holidays

BY KEITH LORIA

With more than three quarters of all charcuterie sales estimated to occur between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day, savvy retailers should start preparing such popular items as pâté and spreads for the busy, upcoming holiday season.

Jay Holt, senior vice president of sales at Columbus Foods, LLC, headquartered in Naperville, IL, says over time the company's supply chain and manufacturing teams have refined the process of preparing and supplying its salumi products to retailers during the peak holiday period.

"To build a holiday forecast, our sales team meets with our customers in the late spring, timing it to lock in their high demand for our products," says Holt. "Pâté, spreads and similar products are making a strong

comeback. The best way to incorporate a pâté or spread into the consumer's usage is through a charcuterie platter alongside cheese, pickled products and, most importantly, high quality salami. We are happy to share our platters with pâté and spreads because we share very similar specialty craftsmanship and philosophies. They also look great."

Preparing For The Holidays

Richard Kessler, vice president of sales for Specialties Inc., Millington, NJ, says anticipating seasonal demand cycles is part of the business for charcuterie, and the company regularly adjusts for new business, emerging trends and other market conditions that impact demand.

"Spreads are a growth category," he says. "The utility factor makes these products easy to understand and use."

Camille Collins, marketing director for Les Trois Petits Cochons in Brooklyn, NY, says the company does projections on each year's sales and estimated growth, and by researching the previous year's performance is able to accurately forecast sales and order raw materials appropriate for the year ahead.

"We have seen a trend among producers creating higher-end specialty meats and pâté," she says. "A good example is game pâté. It is a little more high-end than a traditional country pâté because of the meat and garnishes used in the recipe."

Keith D. Roberts, wholesale sales manager for S. Wallace Edwards & Sons, based in Surrey, VA, says planning for any upcoming holiday season is a process nearly two years in the making, especially where the company's longer-aged Surryano hams are concerned.

"We take a hard look at sales trends both past and present, communicate with our farmer/supplier network to secure the raw materials and adjust production schedules accordingly," he says. "It's a delicate balance of time and resources to make sure we can take care of our customers the way we want to, and fortunately we've gotten pretty proficient at it after 90 years in business."

Jennifer Johnson, director of marketing for Olli Salumeria in Mechanicsville, VA, says the company starts ramping up production months ahead of the holidays to ensure it has quality salami ready to go.

"This year, our capacity has increased as we have just completed [construction of] our 80,000-square-foot California plant," she says. "With the new facility we are able to offer many new items, like deli salami and pre-sliced salami in trays."

Jason Stemm, vice president of PadillaCRT, based in New York, NY says even though people around the holidays sometimes stop thinking healthy, Prosciutto di Parma's gluten-free and nitrate-free products are in demand during the holiday season.

"Overall, I think people are opting for

more lean meats and are thinking more about their protein sources," he says. "Only sea salt is added to the fresh pork to cure Prosciutto di Parma. The minimum amount of salt for Parma was reduced, and Parma traditionally uses less salt than other cured meats."

What's New?

Les Trois Petits Cochons recently launched a new Pheasant Pâté, prepared with pheasant, pork and chicken liver, dried blueberries and almonds topped with aspic. It is made fresh and is free from preservatives and colorings.

"It is a wonderful addition to our Game Pâté line of products, which also includes a Venison Pâté and a Wild Boar Pâté," says Collins. "All are fantastic choices during the holiday season, along with our traditional Bloc de Foie Gras de Canard & Rillettes de Canard."



PHOTO COURTESY OF COLUMBUS

This holiday season Specialties Inc. will offer Bayonne ham imported from France.

"This is the first time this has been officially available in the U.S. It's similar to Italian prosciutto and Spanish serrano, but a bit sweeter with a delicate aroma and soft texture," says Kessler. "We're also providing dry-cured shippers that meet the expectations of the trade. It is a great con-



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consumer impulse purchase that clearly adds sales dollars to the retailers' bottomline with no additional shelf space investment."

Holt says Columbus Foods' new products being offered this year focus on the philosophy of making the salumi experience comfortably accessible.

"We realize during the holiday season our customers like to 'wow' their guests with exciting flavors and premium quality items," he says. "All of our new products are meant to accentuate the customers' eating and entertaining experience by simply opening the package to share."

Consumers will also be perusing the deli departments for something to bring along as a gift to a holiday party.

"Whatever the occasion it will be of superior quality, perhaps novel, but always delicious," says Laurie Cummins, president of Alexian Pâtés and Specialty Meats in Neptune, NJ. "Secondarily, it needs to be convenient and easy to serve. Pâtés and specialty sausages are perfect for these occasions because they stand well on their own and they also pair beautifully with a wide variety of cheeses, nuts, fruits and olives."

For 2015, S. Wallace Edwards & Sons will be bringing back its limited-release, award winning, peanut-fed Surryano Ham, and releasing its new Dry Cured Lamb.

"We're using Heritage Old English

Breed Sheep and following family curing recipes that date back to the original Jamestown settlement," says Roberts. "The flavor profile is outstanding, and we think it's the perfect addition to holiday charcuterie plates. The feedback from chefs and consumers alike has been outstanding thus far, and we expect it to be a big hit across all markets, including catering, private parties and restaurant menus."

When it comes to pâtés and spreads, Roberts says the biggest trend he is seeing is how creative some of the smaller craft and specialty producers are getting with their recipes.

"The pâté/spread market allows companies to blend some great flavors and spices with some out-of-the-ordinary proteins, creating some pretty

unique products," he says. "The challenge will be to see how long the general public will support such a wide array of flavor profiles."

Tips To Increase Sales

Successful retailers know their shoppers, and focus on the holiday food shopping experience.

"The best tip I can share is to focus on the shopper's entertainment needs," says Holt. "Merchandise products by occasion and with correct pairings as they walk through the store. An example is to have a centerpiece display near your cheese or deli area with everything you need for entertainment, such as Columbus salami, crackers, specialty cheese, fig spread, pickled products and olives."

Holt advises retailers who want to inspire customers as they shop to have a deli or cheese specialist lay out an ideal charcuterie platter on a slate and highlight it on the counter or on a small poster board.

"If you display all of the similar items shown on the platter together in one display, the customer will follow your specialist's directions to replicate the inspiration that you gave them," he says.



Collins says it's important to educate employees about what's available in order for them to talk to customers and increase sales at the register.

Cross-merchandising also is important to holiday sales, and charcuterie should be paired with wine, cheese, breads and other seasonal favorites.

"It's important to show the customers how easy it is to pair the products, and this will give them ideas," says Johnson. "I know this can be difficult, but move the product around. Put it near something that customers might not be used to seeing. Cross promote near the beer and have displays that talk about the pairings."

Roberts says the trick is to make it easy for customers, not just the experienced ones, but those who are just discovering how good these products are.

"It's also the perfect time to cross merchandise with cheeses, spreads, pickled crudités and anything else the customer might need to create the perfect holiday charcuterie board," he says.

Communication is key, says Kessler, when looking to sell more charcuterie.

"Retailers need to show how the products can be used to enhance any party plate, and become an appetizer centerpiece for any family or social gathering," he says. "Also, emphasize the everyday usage opportunity for these items to keep generating sales throughout the year. The holiday period is a perfect time to generate trial and introduction."

Sherrie Zebrasky, retail advisor for Principe Foods USA, headquartered in Long Beach, CA, says because there are so many audiences to talk to, the items that come into play during the holidays are specialty meats like salami and prosciutto. The key, she says is to make them easily available to shoppers who may not necessarily be familiar with them.

"Millennials don't read the newspapers and there has to be some way for them to be informed. I think the major supermarkets are smart enough to realize this and have an app, a social media presence and email list so they can send out information about what can be done for the holidays."

Kessler also recommends pursuing a strategy of suggestive sales, engaging the customer to ask questions.

"Make certain any collateral material clearly displays usage and serving ideas," he says. "Keep recipes simple — easy-to-find ingredients and no more than four or five of these."

There's nothing better than education for improving sales — "education of [retailers], their staff and, most importantly, their customers, to the nuances of charcuterie," says Roberts. "It's been one of our main priorities over the last two years, and we've actually hosted several artisanal ham tasting events across the country with chefs, food writers and other charcuterie producers to further the cause."

Along the education lines, S. Wallace

Edwards & Sons will soon be introducing a Ham Tasting Chart that's similar to cheese and wine flavor wheels.

"The chart itself will represent the subtle differences between 17 dry-cured, long-aged hams from around the world, and how breed, feed, cure method, age and terrier affect each one," says Roberts. "The project has been an eye-opening experience, and we look forward to sharing the information with the culinary world." **DB**

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Hummus: A Mediterranean Delight

The potential in supermarket delis continues to expand

BY LISA WHITE

It was not too long ago hummus was an obscure Middle Eastern food, but the popular deli item has been around long enough sales should have plateaued by now. In fact, the reverse is true.

This thick paste of ground chickpeas, sesame seeds, olive oil, lemon and garlic is gaining on salsa as one of the most popular dips in the United States.

"Initially, increased interest in Mediterranean diets was driving hummus, but now there is more general awareness of the need to eat better, and this product fits in with that," says Bob Ferraro, co-founder of Tryst Gourmet LLC, based in Port Washington, NY.

Although there is no recent data on hummus sales in this country, sales of refrigerated flavored spreads, of which hummus is a big part, totaled \$530 million at U.S. food retailers in 2013, up 11 percent from a year earlier and 25 percent from 2010, according to market research firm Information Resources Inc., based in Chicago.

"Hummus is an integral part of Mediterranean cuisine, and as the main-

stream consumer becomes more familiar with ethnic trends, they are exploring new tastes for health reasons," says Warren Stoll, marketing director at Kontos Foods, Inc., located in Paterson, NJ. "Mediterranean foods are not where Mexican food is, but may be in the next 30 years."

Expanding Uses

Hummus is no longer designated as just a dip for veggie trays. It has become a sandwich spread, ingredient, dressing and topping.

What has helped propel this category is consumers becoming more educated about the growing opportunities for hummus use.

For example, with an increasing number of consumers looking for quick and easy snacks that can be eaten on the go, hummus use has been expanding.

"Hummus on-the-go offerings grew 76 percent in 2014," says Lynn Stachnick, brand manager at Tribe Mediterranean Foods, based in Taunton, MA. "Twenty percent of hummus consumers report spreading this product on toast or a bagel."

This is just one example of how this healthier item has crossed boundaries and demographics in recent years.

Pure Mediterranean Foods, based in Elk Grove Village, IL, launched its Hummus Plus brand to capitalize on recent trends with this category. The meal line pairs chicken with hummus for hot or cold entrée options.

"Most manufacturers are taking hummus, which is typically a dip for snacking and entertaining, and creating more uses for it," says Dave Gacom, vice president of sales and marketing for Pure Mediterranean Foods and head of Hummus Plus. "Now it's even replacing traditional sauces, like on pizza or pasta."

The proliferation of new and unique flavors also has helped expand the usage opportunities.

"Consumers are using this product for different things, not just dipping," says Aimee Tsakirellis, director of marketing at Ward Hill, MA-based Cedar's Mediterranean Foods. "Hummus is now a popular ingredient in food recipes, part of bread-ing with chicken and a substitute for less



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healthier ingredients, such as mayonnaise, cream cheese and salad dressing.”

The new usage ideas have been stimulated by the rise of social media, including Pinterest and Facebook, where consumers are posting recipes.

The focus on healthier eating also has boosted this category, since hummus is a good source of fiber and nutrients.

“And consumers want hummus to go to the next level, so portion and snack

packages for lunch boxes or snacking is the next frontier,” says Tsakirellis.

Cedar’s offers 2.5-ounce portion cups and snack packs with hummus and hummus chips.

In the Middle East, hummus also is a dish in and of itself, and some see that as the future of this product in America.

“In New York City, restaurant chains are focusing on hummus,” says Gil Oren, Tryst’s co-owner. “It’s usage is definitely expanding.”

Creative Flavors

Flavor innovations and unique combinations, many of which have capitalized on today’s food trends, have propelled the usage expansion.

As consumers’ palates have become more sophisticated, the presence of international flavor profiles has proliferated. This has had an impact on the hummus category.

“We’re seeing Italian-inspired flavors

like basil and pesto, in addition to hummus with heat and peppers, such as chipotle, jalapeno and habanero.”

Ethnic and spicy hummus flavors are the focus at Louisville, CO-based Hope Hummus LLC, which offers Thai coconut curry, jalapeno cilantro and sriracha varieties, the latter of which is a top seller.

“Our flagship flavor is spicy avocado,” says Will Burger, Hope Hummus’ director of marketing. “We also are looking at how to market a chocolate hummus, which was developed by one of our employees seeking to create a healthier alternative to chocolate spreads.”

Tribe recently introduced Tribe Swirl, which takes toppings that are traditionally placed atop hummus and layers these throughout the product. Flavors are sriracha, garlic & herb, sweet red pepper and salsa. It also has a limited batch line with flavors that rotate throughout the year.

Though Dallas-based Sabra’s classic, roasted red pepper and roasted garlic hummus remain top-sellers, newer flavor varieties like bold and spicy and the new pizza-flavored hummus are also popular.

While the classic, red pepper and garlic hummus are typically Sabra’s best sellers overall, there has been a positive reception with vegetable varieties, says Sara Braca, senior brand manager.

Tryst created a hummus line that incorporates vegetables, such as carrots, beets and cucumbers, marketed under the Eat Well, Embrace Life brand.

“Today, we have almost every vegetable made into hummus, including pumpkin, squash and avocado,” says John Brass, president of Cordova, CA-based J Brass Co., a broker for CedarLane Natural Foods, based in Carson, CA. “Even seasonal and fruit varieties are up and coming.”

Proof of this segment’s potential: larger companies are getting on board. Minneapolis-based General Mills’ Green Giant Fresh offers eight hummus varieties in 10-ounce packages.

In addition to the classic, garlic and red bell pepper, flavors include roasted pine nut, Mediterranean, artichoke spinach, garden vegetable and sundried tomato.

“These hummus flavors are blended throughout, not just in the relish topping,” says Lori Bigras, Green Giant Fresh’s senior marketing manager.

Marketing Opportunities

While household penetration for hummus continues to rise, many U.S. con-

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sumers are still unfamiliar with hummus, which presents a broad opportunity for supermarket deli merchandising that will help consumers discover hummus while shopping for occasions.

Though the summer months have traditionally been considered prime time for hummus — with sales spiking Memorial Day through Labor Day — there are other occasions and holidays ripe for additional sales opportunities.

“Football season is important and represents a months-long opportunity to effectively merchandise hummus,” says Braca.

Because hummus transports easily and is versatile for use with vegetables, pita chips, breads, crackers and other complementary items, it can be positioned for holiday parties as well as tailgating.

“There aren’t as many flavors of dips as there are of hummus,” says CedarLane’s Brass.

And this popularity has led to another marketing opportunity, International Hummus Day, celebrated each year on the third Thursday in May.

A hummus purchase also can boost incremental sales of complementary purchases of produce, chips and breads like pita and wraps.

Since the category typically sits within the deli, and needs to be in the full-service or self-serve refrigerated case, bringing in a secondary display of chips or veggies alongside the display offers added convenience for shoppers.

The number of products depends on the demographic, the retailer and how much space will be allocated to the category.

“While some stores may have four different hummus brands in the same flavor, other retailers will put a different mix of various flavors across numerous brands,” says Tsakirellis. “It’s best to diversify as much as possible with a variety of flavors so the deli becomes a destination.”

Also, consumers tend to purchase multiple hummus flavors, especially when it is used for entertaining purposes.

Buy-one-get-one-free promotions can pair hummus with a complementary item, like pita chips. This also helps direct shoppers to other areas of the store they may not otherwise visit, helping to boost incremental sales.

It’s also key to have dedicated space for hummus, so consumers know where to go on successive visits.

While hummus should never be out of

the cold chain and always be merchandised in refrigeration, there are several cross-promotional opportunities retailers can take advantage of.

To promote its use for holiday entertaining and parties, it can be positioned by premium cheeses with displays of crackers, pita and chips nearby for quick appetizer platter ideas.

Demos in the deli, especially in conjunction with the launch of new flavors, are

one of the most effective marketing tactics for this product.

Hummus is a product that coincides with a number of food and lifestyle trends. It is healthy, provides a variety of taste profiles, is a convenient grab-and-go product and pairs with an almost endless number of meals and products.

For this reason, supermarket delis can easily capitalize on these products year-round.

DB





Fried Chicken Crosses The Road

Resurgence on foodservice menus translates into retail delis

BY MARK HAMSTRA

Consumers have grabbed hold of fried chicken with both hands and are taking a big, juicy bite.

The crunchy staple of Southern cuisine has long occupied a place on many restaurant menus, and has been the centerpiece of major quick-service chains like KFC and Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen. But now the dish has been dressed up in some new coatings and batters to earn a place in more upscale venues.

"Fried chicken was on the decline in recent years, but is coming back with a vengeance," says John Moore, senior deli marketing manager at Perdue Farms, Salisbury, MD. "The main reason is retail has been using more scratch recipes, and doing a tremendous job executing. Another factor is fried chicken in the foodservice channel is making a strong comeback on the menu."

Data from Nielsen Perishables Group, as reported in the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association's What's in Store 2016, showed fried chicken sales in the retail deli were up 6.6 percent in the 52 weeks ended June 27, 2015. Volume grew 1.2 percent in that same period. Sales of fried chicken totaled just more than \$848

million, comprising 22 percent of total deli prepared chicken sales.

Fried chicken still trails rotisserie chicken, however. Rotisserie saw similar dollar growth, with 7.5 percent volume growth in that time period, the IDDBA data shows.

Among the restaurant trends retail delis stand to capitalize on is the growing popularity of fried chicken and waffles, says Cliff Toothaker, president of Better Retail Foods, parent of the Noblesville, IN-based Charley Biggs Chicken brand.

"Fried chicken and waffles is a longtime classic meal, but with a recent resurgence in popularity, it's popping up on more and more menus across the country," he says. "Highly acclaimed chefs are putting their own twists on the dish as well, and as it continues to garner attention, more consumers are looking for an opportunity to try the dish. Consumers have proven they love the simple pairing of crispy, salty, fried chicken with a sweet, soft waffle, but new twists continue to draw in hungry customers."

Toothaker notes using waffle batter for fried chicken is a way to combine the waffle's "buttery and syrupy sweetness with the chicken, putting a new twist on an old favorite."

"Pair this with a sweet dipping sauce for a menu item whose popularity spans the entire day, from breakfast to dinner," he says.

Focus On Freshness

Jonathan Whalley, education coordinator at IDDBA, says many of the same trends that are influencing shoppers throughout the store are playing out in the fried chicken category.

"Freshness is huge," he says, noting IDDBA offers training for retailers to monitor times and temperatures regularly to help ensure products in the case maintain quality and freshness, at iddba.org.

"Fried chicken has great visual appeal potential in addition to an alluring aroma," says Whalley. "As consumers shop the store, use the fried chicken program to let them know they can't skip the deli. But when they're there, they want to see the freshest product available."

Toothaker agrees freshness is key. "First and foremost: fresh, fresh, fresh," he says. "We cannot stress enough how important it is to have fresh fried chicken on display and ready to be served to your customers during peak traffic times."

"A basic lunch and dinner menu of a 'meat plus two sides' has become a staple

in most delis for a good reason: It works for lunch, dinner and for family-style meals. Few items in your store are prepared as often as fried chicken, which means you have more opportunities to impress your customers with this product than any other."

Moore of Perdue says retailers must make sure they communicate to shoppers the product is made in-store and is fresh.

"Let consumers know it is there," he says. "Let them know it is fresh and ready to go. Also, offer it as a meal deal and suggest it for parties and gatherings like tailgating. Offer it as an [antibiotic-free] item to really drive trial."

Healthful Options

Although it might seem counterintuitive, another consumer trend impacting fried chicken is an interest in healthful options.

"The biggest change is the proliferation of antibiotic-free proteins offering consumers items free of substances they want to avoid," says Moore.

Toothaker says retailers also are sourcing more locally raised poultry including hyper-local, as well as all-natural and free-range birds.

"They want minimally processed foods with natural ingredients from farm or estate brands," he says. "Retailers who can capitalize on these trends will capture sales and position their business for growth."

Shoppers also are looking at the ingredients in the batters and sauces that are used to prepare fried chicken, says Toothaker.

"Clean-label coatings with fewer additives are in demand," he says. "Dipping sauces are trending toward all-natural ingredients with no high fructose corn syrup. Consumers want healthy options."

Whalley of IDDBA says fried chicken meals also can be made healthier by offering healthy sides as options.

"While fried chicken might not be perceived as a diet-friendly choice, it still remains popular," he says. "Health-conscious consumers are looking for healthier options. For example, instead of fried chicken with side options like potatoes and mac & cheese offer superfood salads and ancient grains. Merchandising a healthier overall meal option can help consumers feel better about choosing fried chicken for dinner."

IDDBA also has found shoppers like to know the story behind products, says Whalley.

"This could be the origins of the chicken, or that the product was breaded in the store or fried in a particularly healthy oil,"

he says. "This is an opportunity to differentiate your deli's product from the product at the QSR down the street."

Toothaker says variety also is important to today's consumer, and one way to offer variety is through custom seasonings. He says customers are willing to pay up to 20 percent more for customized product than for standard or mass-produced products, and shoppers are also more loyal to those brands that offer customized experiences.

"Portion-controlled seasoning packets offer the customer a personalized culinary experience, positioning the deli as a point of destination for customizable meals," says Toothaker. "A variety of seasonings that can be applied to almost anything, especially fried chicken, will help to capture customers and edge out QSRs as fried chicken competition."

He suggests retailers offer a "library" of flavors, including sriracha, garlic herb,

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Wings And Meal Deals

While most fried chicken is sold in eight-piece offerings, Moore of Perdue says he has been noticing “a lot of hot feature activity on dark meat, as well as two- and three-piece meal deals.”

Toothaker of Better Retail says flavored wings have been seeing lots of growth, and notes boneless chicken remains popular, especially for young and elderly consumers. “Sauces and condiments are a natural extension of this category,” he says.

For the holidays, Toothaker suggests retailers offer platters and large boxes of fried chicken for family and corporate get-togethers.

“Having information available about package sizes and pricing simplifies the planning process for the customer and your deli employees,” he says. “Place full-color brochures not only in the deli, but in the meat, bakery and produce departments and at check-out and customer service areas. Don’t forget to have this information available on your website as well. Have a sample of a platter on display.”

He also notes packaging “has come a long way,” allowing retailers to merchan-



dise crisp fried products in mobile merchandisers at the checkout, or wherever impulse buys are made.

Cross-merchandising also is important,

says Toothaker. “Consider pairing fresh fried chicken with a fresh baked apple pie from the bakery, and add some sides from the deli to complete the meal.”

DB

► CARING FOR FRY OIL IS KEY

Cooking oil can alter the texture, color and taste of fried food, according to Frontline International, a Cuyahoga Falls, OH-based designer, manufacturer and distributor of commercial foodservice equipment for the storage, handling and disposal of cooking oil.

“If oil is not changed or filtered in a timely manner, it will negatively affect food quality, flavor consistency, and, ultimately, your brand and reputation,” says Giovanni Brienza, vice president at Frontline International. “It’s important to establish a consistent filtration program.”

Filtration systems can stretch oil usage by 20 percent to 50 percent, and also help maintain the quality of oil, he says.

Breaded products such as fried chicken need filtration more often, notes Brienza, as these foods produce more fall-off particles compared with French fries, for example.

Operators who own their waste oil management equipment can negotiate oil rebates with the company they contract with to collect the oil. To get the highest rebate, oil should be filtered and of good quality, says Brienza. Some equipment can help earn average rebates of 15 cents to 25 cents per pound.

An investment in oil management equipment also can help reduce the risk of slip-and-fall injuries on greasy floors. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics says 57 percent of all foodservice general liability insurance claims are for slip-and-fall accidents.

“Complete oil management systems that include waste oil containment tanks, fresh oil dispensing equipment, and filtration systems can work as a complete hands-free system — from filling fryers with fresh oil to draining out and storing waste oil,” says Brienza.

DB



▶ POTATOES, SIDES MAKE THE MEAL

When it comes to potatoes and other side dishes, consumers are looking for new recipes and twists on old favorites. "Traditional recipes are still popular, although consumers are now looking for varieties of the traditional potato product they love, such as garlic and herb red mashed potatoes," says Susan Hannah, vice president at Pacific Valley Foods, Bellevue, WA, which supplies potato products for retail and food-service. "A product like that appeals to the consumers who are looking for different flavors to jazz up their foods, as well as incorporating the added health benefits of the garlic, and red potato."

Consumers eat about 117 pounds of potatoes per year, according to the National Potato Council, Washington, DC. About 34 percent of the potatoes grown in the U.S. are used to make frozen French fries — which is the biggest export for the potato industry — and about 28 percent are sold as fresh potatoes.

Customers who shop for potatoes in the retail deli section are seeking convenience, with homemade-style foods they can either eat in-store or take home to heat, says Hannah.

"Potato products sold in the deli offer the convenience of being a home-cooked food for shoppers who don't have the time to cook themselves," she says.

Target consumers could include people picking up dinner on the way home from work, or busy parents who don't have time to make a home-cooked meal.

Opportunities for cross-merchandising potatoes in the deli vary throughout the day, says Hannah, but could include hash browns marketed or served with eggs and fruit in the morning; fries with sandwiches at lunch; and mashed, baked or au gratin potatoes at dinner with meat or poultry.

Potato-product sales overall tend to be consistent throughout the year in the deli, she says, although volumes of individual potato products may fluctuate somewhat by season. For example, says Hannah, salad products are more popular during the summer, while comfort foods such as mashed potatoes can be more popular in cooler months.

She notes while potatoes themselves do not contain fat, manufacturers are seeking ways to eliminate trans fats from ingredients that may be included in potato dishes.

"Also, consumers are looking for 'cleaner, simpler' ingredients in foods these days," says Hannah. "So it's more about focusing on the potato, and reducing or eliminating any unhealthy ingredients."

Southern Sides

When it comes to merchandising potatoes and other side dishes that go with fried chicken and other grab-and-go proteins in retail delis, Kevin Jordan, a co-founder at BD&K Foods, Columbus, GA, says he thinks he has found the answer.

His new line of Fixin's to Go side dishes includes eight Southern-style dishes that

can be merchandised right alongside the fried or rotisserie chicken displays in colorful grab-and-go pouches. The line includes field peas and collard greens, butter beans and sweet kernel corn, green beans, mac & cheese, okra and tomatoes, and smashed potatoes.

"We designed this program to complement all the grab-and-go proteins out there," says Jordan. "What we saw is people were going to the grocery store, grabbing a rotisserie chicken or an eight-piece fried chicken, and then cooking their own sides at home, if they had sides at all."

"We are trying to build a destination point for the complete meal. Chicken is not a meal by itself. If you put these vegetables alongside a chicken with some rolls and tea, you have a meal."

The dishes are shipped to retailers frozen in 1-pound bags and then heated and placed in the gusseted bags at the store. They were offered exclusively at Publix Super Markets, the Lakeland, FL-based supermarket chain, for two years, but have since been expanded to other supermarket chains.

"We have had an overwhelming response from the retailer," says Jordan. "We think this product has legs."

The sides can be offered as part of a meal that includes a chicken, two sides, rolls and iced tea priced between \$12.99 and \$16.99, he says.

"The retailer will get the margins that they want, and the price would still be way, way under what you would pay if you went to KFC or Bojangles' [Famous Chicken 'n Biscuits]." **DB**



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Blount Fine Foods, based in Fall River, Mass., is a family-owned and operated manufacturer of artisan soups, sauces and side dishes, producing more than 700 gourmet products for restaurants, institutions and club stores in all 50 states. At retail, Blount sells refrigerated soups under the Panera Bread, Legal Sea Foods and Blount brands. The company's portfolio includes over 700 proprietary soup recipes, including a new, full line of organic and gluten-free soups.

CERTIFIED ORGANIC AND OTHER SPECIALTY PRODUCTS

Consumer preferences and behavior over the last few years have made it clear that organic products are no longer just a niche trend — "organics" have made it to the mainstream, and are a rapidly expanding consideration for consumers, especially those who demand quality and are willing to pay for it.

Viewing this as a permanent shift in consumer behavior, in mid-2014, Blount launched the Blount Organics lines of foodservice and retail organic soups, including Vegetable Chili, Minestrone Soup, Tomato Bisque and Lentil & Chick Pea Soup. In 2015, Blount expanded its organics lineup with the addition of Savory Harvest Bisque soup, as well as a line of entrées and sides including 12-ounce sides like Creamed Spinach & Kale and Lentil & Chickpea. All of the entrées and sides ship in microwavable heat-and-eat bowls.

GROWING SALES WHILE ELEVATING THE CATEGORY

Blount's executive vice president for sales & marketing, Bob Sewall, believes retailers should make no mistake about the two factors that drive sales: a quality product made with wholesome ingredients; and advances in soup production that allow brands like Blount, Panera and Legal Sea Foods to offer a product with a restaurant-quality flavor and texture profile that also has better ingredients and ever-cleaner ingredient labels.

The result has been a line of refrigerated, certified organic soups with a 50- to 70-day shelf life; and gluten-free products

that are delicious, and that the whole family enjoys.

Blount is succeeding in elevating the soup category out of a "can sold in the center of the store," to a value-added, premium product sought by consumers seeking a restaurant-quality experience at home.

CONTINUED GROWTH AHEAD

Blount will continue to innovate and to meet the demands of customers, which in turn raises the bar on the entire soup category. There are several more new products in the pipeline that will launch in 2016, and the company is also working on plans to once again expand production and logistics capacity.

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Blount is not just a fast growing company that makes great soups and sides. It is a family run business with a long-standing commitment to socially responsible practices and sustainability of the environment. Blount employs the "Three R's" (reduce, reuse, and recycle) at every level of the company.

Whether it is installing a solar energy system on its factory roof, investing in high-efficiency refrigeration, or designing new products to minimize waste and utilize recyclable packaging materials, Blount does what it can

to be good stewards of the environment. Blount also maintains a policy of sharing proven successes with customers, vendors and other food industry partners to maximize the collective benefit to the world.

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TOUT HEALTHY COOKING OILS

Consumers look for reasons to continue enjoying fried foods

BY CAROL BAREUTHER

Americans love their fried foods. In fact, frying ranks second only to grilling — 73 percent vs. 80 percent, respectively — in terms of cooking methods identified on restaurant menus, according to market research firm, Datassential.

Furthermore, fried foods account for nearly 4 percent of all deli department sales, based on Nielsen Perishables Group's FreshFacts data for the 52 weeks ended July 25, 2015. Fried chicken leads the pack, representing 92 percent of the deli's fried-food sales, followed by egg rolls, fried appetizers, stir fries and French fries/tater tots. Some delis are even frying tacos, churros, fish, shrimp, onion rings and goat cheese in-house.

However, with consumers demanding more healthful fare and newly enacted federal regulations banning the use of artificial trans fats, retailers are responding by changing the oils they use to fry foods.

"Oils that contain no trans fats and lower saturated fats have given consumers reasons to continue purchasing fried foods," says Kevin Bowlby, vice president of retail sales for the deli division at Ventura Foods, a Brea, CA-headquartered manufacturer of custom and branded dressings, sauces, margarines, shortenings and oils.

The Oil R-Evolution

Until the 1980s the foodservice industry fried foods in highly saturated fats like those from animal sources — flavorful oils that didn't break down easily or require

frequent replacement. Then, when nutrition research linked saturated fats to heart disease, manufacturers and foodservice operators made the switch to unsaturated fats that had been partially hydrogenated to make them more stable. This, however, created even more heart-unhealthy fats known as trans fats.

"Partially hydrogenated oils are the primary source of industrially produced trans fats," says Roger Daniels, vice president of research, development and innovation at Stratas Foods LLC, a major supplier of fats and oils for foodservice, food processing and retail based in Memphis, TN. "When these began to exit the deli in 2005 due to health concerns, they were replaced by corn, cottonseed, sunflower and soybean oils [that are rich in heart-healthy unsaturated fats]."

Since 2010, the industry "has seen a continued expansion of frying oil options to include peanut and high-oleic soybean, high-oleic canola and high-oleic sunflower oils," adds Daniels. "High-oleic oils continue to gain in popularity for use in deep-fat-frying applications such as fried chicken because of its nutrition and performance potential. High-oleic oils are rich in omega-9 fatty acids and as such stay in the optimal frying zone or 'sweet spot' longer than conventional frying oils."

Omega-9 canola and sunflower oils, developed by Dow Agro-Sciences, an Indianapolis-head-

quartered provider of agricultural seed and biotechnology solutions, offer a unique combination of high-oleic and low-linolenic fatty acids that give the oils superior health, performance and flavor attributes, says Mary La Guardia, omega-9 oils market manager. "Omega-9 oils are naturally stable, making them a cost-effective solution due to their longer fry life and shelf life."

The recent changes in oil usage have led to such current trends as the pairing of oil with food types, experts point out. "For example, high-oleic sunflower oil, or blends of peanut and soybean oils, contribute masterfully to the traditional flavor of fried chicken or fried fish," says Stratas Foods' Daniels. "Additionally, French fries and onion rings achieve optimal flavor development when paired with high-oleic soybean oil, high-oleic sunflower and cottonseed oils, and high quality soybean oil."





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one oil in one and the second in the other. We evaluate the performance of the oil over its entire life. This might be as little as two days in a high-volume operation or as much as 14 days in a low-volume one. Fry evaluations are easy today and can be requested at any time.”

Market Your Oil

Oil is an important dietary component, and having the right oils in the right quantities is important, says Bowlby. “As long as delis move to lower saturated-fat content and [oils with] no trans fats, and manage their fry stations to give the optimum food quality, consumers will continue to purchase fried foods. Consumers are getting more aware of what’s in oils as well as how important they are to our diets.”

To promote this trend, Bowlby recommends deli operators advertise their choice of cooking oils on their websites, signage on the hot case and grab-and-go sections, and on packaging. This can help delis remain competitive by showing the operator cares about the customer’s health.

Suppliers also can be helpful. Three years ago Dow AgroSciences launched its Good Fats 101 website. The site provides downloadable tools such as fact sheets, shopper education materials, imagery and signage, presentations for shoppers and deli staff, and additional materials such as in-store announcements and social media posts.

“Generation X and Millennial shoppers especially want to know how their food is prepared,” says La Guardia. “The Good Fats 101 program can help retailers drive sales of products like fried foods.” **DB**

Another trend that applies to a small segment of deli operators is the move toward using non-GMO — genetically modified organisms — frying oils, says Daniels.

“Operators are open to using palm oils with the ban on trans fats,” says Suraj Bhojwani, managing director of Western Pacific Oils, a Los Angeles-based supplier of palm oil products. “Our Golden Joma Palm Oil provides three attributes that customers want: it’s trans-fat free, GMO free and produced sustainably. It’s the gold standard for frying chicken around the world. We’ve traditionally sold this product in 50 pound blocks, but have introduced a half size or 25-pound block that would work well in smaller delis.”

Experts note more healthful oils generally are more costly than those that are not as healthful. “Omega-9 oils have a higher

price tag,” says Dow AgroSciences’ La Guardia. “However, they last twice as long [and] don’t cost twice as much. As a result, use of good fry practices can maximize the benefits of the oil and end up cost-neutral.”

Conduct A Fry Test

To switch over to a more healthful fat in the deli, ask your supplier to conduct a fry test that measures both performance and value. Once this has been completed, make certain your supplier offers a training program to educate the deli staff on good frying practices.

“If it’s a chain with, say, 2,000 stores, we’ll pick three or four [locations] to conduct the test,” says Ventura Foods’ Bowlby. “This might be a high-volume store, low-volume store and two in-between. Delis typically have two fryers so we put

►► MAXIMIZE YOUR OIL’S ‘SWEET SPOT’

Frying oil is not at its peak performance when first used. It improves after several uses, reaches a “sweet spot” when it’s at its best, and then eventually begins to lose its fry life, producing food that tastes burnt or undercooked. “The life of a cooking oil is like a bell-shaped curve with the ‘sweet spot’ being that plateau in the middle,” says Benjamin Leingang, corporate chef for the Eaton, OH-headquartered Henny Penny Corporation, manufacturer of commercial food equipment for foodservice chains such as KFC, McDonald’s and Wendy’s.

Leingang says deli operators can help to maximize the life of their frying oils by implementing the following practices:

1. **Filter.** Regularly straining off debris left in the oil after frying can save an operator \$6,000 to \$7,000 or more annually in prematurely discarded oil, while creating a more consistent-tasting product.
2. **Load Away.** Water can break down oil. Therefore, empty a bag of frozen food onto a prep table first to remove ice crystals and debris. Then load the food away from the fryer.
3. **Don’t Salt.** Salt causes oil to foam and reduces its fry life. Don’t salt food over the fryer.
4. **Cover the Vat at Night.** This prevents food or other products from spilling into the fryer from nighttime cleaning staff.
5. **Use Idle Mode.** Idle mode on a fryer — for example, heating oil only when needed rather than keeping it hot all day — can extend oil life and save on utilities. **DB**



Pizza:

KEEP IT HIGH QUALITY BUT SIMPLE

Time-tested ingredients still big favorites

BY BOB JOHNSON

Few foods appeal to such a diversity of people as pizza — the faintest whiff of which can get so many of us craving a slice or two.

“There is nothing better than the taste of comfort and the wonderful memories it brings when eating something you love,” says Deb Crissan, senior vice president for sales and marketing at Rao’s Specialty Foods, New York, NY. “Pizza is a food category that continues to grow each year, and pleases everyone at any age.”

However, while the category may still be growing, the challenge is finding a way to stand out from the crowd of pizza parlors, home delivery businesses, take-and-bake outlets, and frozen retail products, all of varying price and quality.

Despite this formidable competition, pizza sales at the deli continue to increase, according to statistics compiled by the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association of Madison, WI.

Deli pizza sales topped \$280 million for the quarter ending March 2015, which represented an increase of more than 11 percent compared to the previous year. As mature as the category is, last year’s sales in the deli grew at an even faster rate for pizza than for salads, sandwiches and entrées.

Make It Interesting And Authentic

The solution to the fiercely competitive marketplace may be found in an array of pizza ingredients that are readily available in the cold case.

“The best way the deli can differentiate itself is to feature fresh deli items as ingredients — the cheeses and the meats,” says Greg Caloia, marketing and communications manager at Deiorio’s Frozen Dough, Utica, NY. “That will highlight the things the deli has to offer.”

The deli can rise above the competition — which may be more economical or more convenient — by offering authentic, fresh,

high quality ingredients not found elsewhere, experts say.

“People are looking for good products; they want tomatoes that look like tomatoes and chicken that looks like chicken,” says Brad Sterl, chief executive at Rustic Crust in Pittsfield, NH. “We have a new line of wood-fired products. We will be ready for the deli in 2016. It will be clean label.”

Natural flavoring ingredients can make for pizza dough that is both inviting and relatively healthy.

“We’re seeing a lot of interest in herbs, either in or on the crust,” says Sterl. “Basil and sea salt is a big one. People want something other than ‘me too.’”

Information is moving much faster these days, which makes keeping on top of trends more challenging and exciting.

“With the growth of food and cooking-driven blogs and online media, there is much more information for the Millennial consumer to digest in terms of creative



Individual Pizzas

There are so many possibilities when it comes to pizza these days, it may be helpful to offer individual-sized pies so everyone in the party can have their favorite.

"The continuing trend with pizza is individualism or individual creativity," says Warren Stoll, marketing director at Kontos Foods, Paterson, NJ. "In the pizza industry, everyone wants it their own way. That's the trend I see. We sell individual-sized crusts in both retail and foodservice. These crusts are 7 inches in diameter and the ingredients you can use are limitless."

As Kontos moves toward more flatbread sales in the retail market, the company finds there is strong interest in their pizza crust built for one. "We are mainly foodservice, but we've recently increased our retail penetration," says Stoll. "We recently picked up several mainstream retailers, and everyone wants the pizza crust."

Pizza by the slice is another way to let every member of the family make an individual choice.

"Offer pizza by the slice or a fresh made-to-order whole pie," says Crissan. "Sampling a freshly made pizza when it comes out of the oven is a great way to increase sales."

There is even room to showcase crusts as another area in which consumers have multiple choices.

"We see variety as key to the pizza category, offering different types of ready-baked crusts and flatbreads for consumers to be creative at home," says Stonefire Au-

thentic Flatbreads in Toronto, Canada. "We see those trends in at-home cooking and entertaining, and pizza continues to be a staple in homes across the country. People still stick with their favorite basic cheese, veggie and meat options, but they are getting more adventurous as well when it comes to recipes and pizza toppings."

The possibilities for exceptional culinary adventure in the toppings are almost endless, say the experts.

"You will see a combination of artisan pizzas for Millennials topped with buffalo chicken, wild mushrooms and ricotta drizzled with white truffle oil, and healthful options like whole-wheat and gluten-free crusts and vegetarian ingredients such as grilled or roasted vegetables, arugula, radicchio and chopped salad," says Crissan.

The deli can distinguish itself in the crowded field by putting together a display announcing its pizza is delicious and authentic.

"Create an Italian look and feel by having a wood-fired oven or brick oven in-store along with the animation of making pizza in front of the consumers," advises Crissan. "We are still seeing a lot of true Neapolitan-style Margherita pizzas, an assortment of vodka sauce pizzas, and many white pizzas with either all cheese, frutti di mare [assorted seafood such as clams, shrimp, lobster, crab and smoked salmon], Alfredo sauce or aioli base."

Deli operators can offer consumers both the convenience of prepared pizzas

and the opportunity to add special ingredients. "We have topped pizzas you can add a few ingredients to," says Deiorio's Caloia. "We have thinner crust in an 11-inch round and par-baked shells at 12 or 16 inches."

Flatbread crust options also are gaining in popularity, in part because the deli can use them to create multiple items. "We are selling more to delis than we have in the past, especially products like flatbread you can use for sandwiches or small pizzas," says Caloia. "The flatbread is the big thing right now. You can get a few menu items out of one SKU, and that helps if you are a small retailer or small department."



PHOTO COURTESY OF RUSTIC CRUST

thentic Flatbreads' Caulkins. "At Stonefire we are launching three new pizza crusts this fall — Italian Artisan, Italian Artisan Thin Crust and Artisan Flatbread [a rectangular flatbread crust ideal for appetizers and entertaining]. These pizza crusts are baked in the Italian tradition, using high heat in a stone oven for an authentic taste and texture."

However, while consumers find artisan pizzas to be interesting and delicious, they should not be the foundation of a deli pizza program.

"With the number of artisan pizzas out there, everyone is looking to grab that market share," says Jim Pierson, vice president for sales at Pocino Foods Company, City of Industry, CA. "There are a lot of people trying new things, but how long will they stay with them?"

The basics executed consistently well are, by this view, the key to a successful deli pizza program.

"Quality matters," says Pierson. "No one wants a greasy pizza, so watch the pepperoni and sausage. In terms of the vegetables, stay with the basics, too."

However, your parents' favorite pizza toppings are almost certainly going to be

your kids' favored toppings. "Pepperoni is still the No. 1 topping, and sausage is still No. 2," says Susan Ross, director of corporate communications at Noble Roman's, Indianapolis.

A deli pizza program should combine classic ingredients prepared well with unique options that reveal culinary flair.

"Traditional fresh Mozzarella and basil is timeless, and pepperoni or sausage pizza seems to be in that comfort zone," says Crissan. Deli operators also can offer such artisan selections as Buffalo chicken, barbecue, Thai and Asian, white clams, lobster, smoked salmon, or fresh fruit partnered with soft, non-Italian cheeses like fresh Chèvre or Brie.

A quality program may artfully offer both old favorites as well as unusual ingredients not seen on pizzas elsewhere.

"It's important to keep with the basics, like pepperoni and sausage," says Pierson. "Keep with what sells well, but continue to offer something new to your customers."

Make It Better For You

The deli also can stand out by offering pizza that is more healthful than that of the competition.

"We see trends growing in health-focused products," says Caulkins. "Consumers are more aware of ingredients and dietary issues today. At Stonefire Authentic Flatbreads all of our products, including our pizza crusts, are made without artificial preservatives, additives, artificial colors, trans fat and hydrogenated oils."

In fact, an increasing number of consumers are looking for clean labels that do not list ingredients with long and incomprehensible names.

"We're seeing more interest in clean label and non-GMO [genetically modified organism] crusts," says Rustic Crust's Sterl. "There is more interest in anything with the 'better-for-you' component. It has really picked up in the last 12 to 18 months."

According to Sterl, clean labels mean, among other things, that no chemicals are used to speed up the process or preserve the crust.

Beyond what they find on the label, people are looking for high-quality, healthful ingredients that appear fresh — and these ingredients frequently begin with the crust. "The quality and taste of the crust is most important," says Caulkins. "But we



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and Gorgonzola, grilled vegetables or oven-roasted tomatoes and basil.”

But while flatbread crusts usually yield fewer calories, nutrition does not always trump all.

“Flatbread pizzas are coming on strong but what about thick crusts and flavored crusts? We continue to see growth in flatbread sales,” says Caulkins. “In fact, our Stonefire Original Naan is now outselling the competitors’ top pizza crust SKU. It is important to note different types of flatbreads are definitely making a play for the pizza market share and winning.

“In addition to flatbread, we have both a thin and thicker crust pizza debuting this fall as part of our new Stonefire pizza line,” continues Caulkins. “We’re looking forward to offering multiple options for pizza crusts to satisfy all of our consumer needs.”

However, there is an art to distinguishing whether consumers want more healthful options or whether they just say they want them.

“We have two flavors — traditional white and multi-grain,” says Stoll. “Just like vanilla is the most popular ice cream flavor — although no one wants to say it — traditional white is still the pizza crust leader.” **DB**

see many of our consumers discovering creative and healthy combinations, often with seasonal ingredients, to top our flatbreads and pizza crust.”

Some consumers are even ready to consider lower carb and calorie crust options. “Flatbread pizzas are strong, especially

for those that do watch their carb intake,” says Crissan. “Thick-crust, stuffed-crust and flavored-crust pizzas are all personal choices; however, I do not see many in the delis.

“I am seeing some inviting focaccia breads topped with caramelized onion



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Gruyère

from Switzerland

Long on flavor and tradition

BY MAX MCCALMAN



The Gruyère name has been borrowed or co-opted for centuries, as it is a great cheese of distinction with an ancient history, known for its sweet but slightly salty flavor. Perfect for baking and melting or alone on a cheese plate, the taste of Gruyère can vary greatly as it ages.

Gruyère could be considered a cheese family all its own but the AOP definitions for Gruyère are strict, beyond the permitted production zones. Le Gruyère AOP must be produced with unpasteurized milk. No additives, hormones, preservatives or GMO's are used. Each wheel must be aged a minimum of five months before being released for sale but can be aged up to 18 months or more and can weigh between 55 and 77 pounds.

It is important to specify the Gruyère is AOP — Appellation d'Origine Protégée — Protected Designation of Origin, or PDO. A cheese must have a number of quantities to qualify for AOP status: a tradition, a limited production zone, a savoir-faire and history, a name, and the product itself. The recipe for Gruyère has been imitated

for centuries, often with noteworthy success; it is a recipe that can yield a superior cheese so long as the milk is up to par. It almost goes without saying that in western Switzerland — the milk is up to par. A minimum of 70 percent of the cattle's forage must come from the farm. The milk comes only from cows that are fed grass in the summer and hay in the winter. No silage is permitted. The milk is delivered to the cheesemaking plant twice a day from within a 12.4-mile radius and it is always traceable. The milk must be used within 18 hours after milking and the milk is raw — this is why there is so much flavor in the final product.

AOP Gruyère is considered one of the world's greatest cheeses. It speaks for itself; one small taste will tell you this cheese merits contemplation. The aesthetic quality suggests technical quality, including generous nutritive values. AOP Gruyère has a massive organoleptic profile with depth and persistence; there is plenty going on, even in the younger maturities. Gruyère is shaped by its painstaking and elaborate method of making and ripening

but also by its provenance — the unmistakable identity shaped by terroir. Gruyère received its AOP status in 2001 with a production zone that includes the cantons of Fribourg, Vaud, Neuchâtel, Jura and some municipalities of Berne.

The cheesemakers must complete four years of specialized schooling to become maître fromagers. There are 172 Gruyère AOP dairies today. The cheesemakers often work seven days a week, beginning around 5 a.m., finishing production midday, then switching to the maturing process on their cellars. At the end of the day their attention turns to the arriving milk, usually around 7 p.m. The number of the dairy can be found on the rounded edge of the rind for traceability. The date of production and the Le Gruyère AOP casein mark can be found on the top of the cheese to confirm its authenticity. Casein is used for the markings so that no other non-milk additives are used.

After three months under the cheesemaker's care the cheeses are sent to the affineur for further ripening. After a few weeks the affineur selects the best wheels

for further ripening and added flavor development. The cheeses must be aged on spruce boards under precise climate control and the care of the master refiners. The temperature in the caves range between 12 and 18 degrees Celsius and the relative humidity is held around 92 percent. While the cheeses are aging they are regularly turned and washed with salt water. The precise conditions and care have the effect of retaining the unique qualities in each wheel of Gruyère. The master affineur will choose some wheels to be sold as early as five months of age, while others are held for up to 16 months.

The Alpine Family

Although Gruyère has a rind that is washed, it is not categorized as a “washed rind” cheese. Instead, it falls into the Alpine family, even though most Gruyère today is not produced in the Alps themselves but in the relatively high altitude of the sub-Alpine regions and the valleys below.

There are suggestions that cheese production in the region dates back to Roman times but this is highly speculative. Roman influences may have helped shape its original development but the Gruyère we know today is an entirely different cheese from the cheeses made 2,000 years ago. It may not have taken that many centuries to bring Gruyère to where it is today but many factors have contributed to its unrivaled quality and the stellar reputation of the name itself. Gruyère is one of the two oldest hard cheeses of Switzerland, the other being Sbrinz, both of them mentioned in medieval documents. Nonetheless, suggestions that it dates back 2,000 years, and possibly longer, still linger.

Cheese has been one of the most important export commodities for the country since well before the various cantons united to become Switzerland in 1291. The other most ancient of hard Swiss cheeses is the aforementioned Sbrinz, from central Switzerland. Most other well-established cheeses from around the country today are descendants of the two, including the iconic Emmenthal with which Gruyère often is confused. Emmenthal has holes but real Gruyère has no holes.

The ancestors to the hard Swiss cheeses were being developed between the 11th and 16th centuries in central Switzerland and especially in the Alps of Western Switzerland — the home of Gruyère. Toward the end of that interval the villagers bought the mountain pastures from abbeys and peasants



who lived on the mountainsides took care of those high meadows. They worked in collectives and further developed summer cheesemaking. These dairy practices were the precursors to the cooperatives still in existence today. The system favored the production of large wheels and the cool humid conditions of ripening cellars further favored production of slow-ripening cheeses such as Gruyère.

The production of full-fat rennet cheeses only began to surpass those crafted from sour milk in the 17th century before the great export boom, and after the first geographically clear denomination of Gruyère was recorded in 1602. Lively export markets developed in France, Italy, Germany and Holland. The Dutch recognized the sturdy nutrition source the hard Swiss cheeses provided for their extended maritime exploits.

The growing demand for full-fat hard cheeses such as Gruyère caused many dairymen to bring their dairies down to the valleys, further reducing the availability of butter, to the point that a conference was called in 1619 to investigate the butter shortage. The Thirty Years' War slowed the growth of the Swiss dairy industry and during the second half of the 17th century cheese production went into an extended decline. Gruyère was one of the only cheeses that continued to sell reasonably well throughout that period however the reduced demand caused many dairymen of the Fribourg region to take their cheesemaking skills to France. The Gruyère styles they crafted in the French Alps and the French Jura later became competitors to the cheeses from Switzerland.

The growth of the dairy industry in the valleys led to increases in production, to

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larger vats, and to larger wheels but for Gruyère AOP it has always been a criteria to keep it under a certain weight and size in order to be able to carry it. Hard cheeses were still primarily produced in the Alps until well into the 19th century but cheese dairies were being established with increasing frequency in the lowlands and near cities from the middle of the eighteenth century onward. The Swiss dairy industry experienced a bit of a renaissance toward the end of the 18th century and once again, cheesemaking became a more profitable enterprise.

At the time, Russia — a significant importer of Swiss cheeses — taxed imports on the item instead of by the weight, further increasing demand for larger wheels. And because the larger wheels have longer lives than the smaller ones; they tend to be better travelers.

Widely Imitated

The number of dairies grew exponentially during the second half of the 19th century, not only in the lowlands but in the highlands as well, to the point they outgrew profitability. Another long recession ensued after the bust of the Vienna Stock Exchange in 1873. Once again, Swiss dairymen took their talents elsewhere, to Germany, France's Massif Central, northern and Eastern Europe, as well as the United States. It could be said that western Switzerland became a training ground for many of the world's greatest cheesemakers. It should be no surprise then that the Gruyère, the dominant Swiss cheese and the ones these cheesemakers learned to make, became so widely imitated.

The more recent confusion between Gruyère and Emmenthal could be partly attributed to the fact these two cheeses share similar attributes derived from similar make methods and similar selections of cultures and rennets. Gruyère and Emmenthal were not that different centuries ago, neither in size nor the type holes, also known as eyes, inside. The latter cheese was known as Gruyère de l'Emmenthal when it was shipped along with wheels of Gruyère from the Vevey harbor across Lake Geneva and on to French export markets via the Rhône River. To this day Emmenthal is sold in some overseas markets as Gruyère.

Today's AOP Gruyère has fewer and smaller eyes than Emmenthal, if any. The diameter of AOP Gruyère can range between 40-64 cm, the height can range



between 8-13 cm, and the weight can range between 35-40 kg.

As noted, Gruyère has a rind that is washed but it is not categorized as a "washed rind" cheese. The effect of the bacteria that develops as a result of the wash influences the rind but plays a negligible role on the cheese compared to the effect of the bacteria on the inside. Gruyère acquires its pliable texture due to the high heat at which the curd is cooked, which all but stops acidification; the cultures are inactivated and the pH is kept high when the whey is drained. This prevents minerals from being lost as would occur if the whey being drained off were more acidic. The firm rind is a result of the brining followed by drying at a lower temperature.

The supple texture aided by retention of the minerals makes Gruyère an excellent cooking cheese. Fully five percent of the weight of the cheese is of mineral content. The water content of Gruyère ranges between 34.5 and 36.9 percent, depending on age. More than one-fourth its weight is protein and about a third of its weight is made up of beneficial fats. Each ounce of Gruyère offers about 100 calories of power-dense nutrients.

For the retailer or restaurant fromager it is recommended that whatever amount of Gruyère is bought should be sold off within a month. Gruyère AOP should be kept refrigerated otherwise it will melt. A drier storage temperature will dry a cut piece. Ideally the cut pieces should be stored in cheese paper but plastic wrap is an acceptable option. Like all cheeses,

Gruyère should not be left in direct sunlight. If it is stored in boxes it should be checked periodically to make sure it does not get too damp. If it does it will benefit from a little air and turning.

Gruyère is further categorized by age. Le Gruyère AOP Mild is aged between six and nine months. At this age the flavors are smooth, milky and balanced, and the texture is semi-hard. This is an ideal age range for a cooking Gruyère. Le Gruyère AOP Réserve is aged for a minimum of ten months. At this age the flavors deepen and fruity flavors are exhibited, and the texture hardens to a slightly crumbly stage. Le Gruyère AOP Mature is aged for a minimum of 14 months. At this age the color of the paste becomes more yellow and the cheese becomes fruitier, and the texture becomes more granular. Le Gruyère Alpage AOP is produced high up in the Alps and the Jura mountains during the summer months when there is enough vegetation for the animals.

One of the most endearing qualities about Le Gruyère AOP is its tremendous keeping qualities. While other cheeses lose flavor Gruyère can shine through until the last crumb is consumed. AOP Gruyère has the capacity to awe. Judges in cheese competitions look on with envy to those judges lucky enough to be the ones giving scores to Gruyères. The top honors and "Best-in-Shows" are frequently bestowed on one of these beauties. In fact, in the cheese world, wheels of Gruyère AOP are often regarded as works of fine art, masterpieces as it were. **DB**

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CRACKING THE CRACKER CODE

Deli placement provides variety of cross-merchandising opportunities

BY LISA WHITE

With snacking occasions continuing to rise, supermarket delis can benefit from investing in the cracker segment.

No longer just a grocery aisle staple, this popular “food carrier” is made to accompany the meat, cheese, spreads and toppings found in the deli.

“The deli is a great place to position crackers, because it gives people all of the elements of an entertaining or eating presentation in one spot in the store,” says Cara Figgins, vice president at Partners, based in Kent, WA. “It also increases the likelihood more than one item will be purchased by that consumer.”

U.S. retail sales of crackers are expected to increase from about \$7 billion in 2014 to \$9.3 billion in 2018, according to a recent report from Packaged Facts, a Rockville, MD-based market research firm.

Deli Benefits

When it comes to merchandising crackers, delis have the advantage over the grocery aisle.

The biggest advantage is the ability to sample. Delis have a dedicated staff that can provide serving ideas, suggest pairings and promote new lines. Also, a deli’s knowledgeable staff may be able to better educate the customer on what cheeses

work best with particular crackers and therefore encourage a broader mix of products and flavors.

“Basically, when someone is serving cheese or charcuterie, they are pairing them with either bread or crackers as the vehicle to carry the primary ingredient,” says Steve Lorenz, director of marketing at La Panzanella Artisanal Foods Co., headquartered in Tukwila, WA. “Other enhancements may be used like fruit, fig spreads or nuts, but something is generally needed to carry these flavors and do so in a complementary way.”

It provides added convenience for customers when all the necessary components

are displayed together and also provides added opportunities for incremental sales.

"This ability to visualize tends to lead shoppers to buy more of the products they need because they identify things that may not have been on their list or top of mind to begin with," says Lorenz.

In this way, the deli can help drive incremental sales of crackers. When these items are available in two places in the store, catching the eye of the consumer when they are thinking about cheese, meat and other items will help build the basket.

"I think presenting pairing ideas to consumers as a ready-made solution increases the sale of all of the pairing items," says Figgins. "It increases the sale of crackers when salami or cheese is being featured and the sale of salami, cheeses and dips when the cracker is being featured."

Also, crackers placed on deli counters, in shippers or display vehicles provide answers for consumers and opportunities for retailers more so than solely relying on shelf positioning.

Still, it's the presentation, not just the placement that will help sell these items.

"Retailers have to put up enough units or cases to make an impact," says James

R. Anderko, national sales manager at Hingham, MA-based Venus Wafers Inc. "Knee knockers get lost on the floor, since people don't typically look down when shopping."

With entertaining, it's about creating the experience, and deli placement helps put all the pieces together for consumers.

Product Placement

Manufacturers recommend positioning crackers in the deli as close to the cheese case as possible. This helps make the connection between cheese, spreads and other accompaniments.

"Some examples we have seen that work really well for center aisle cheese cases are [crackers] displayed above and on the top of the case," says Lorenz. "We have also seen shelves placed around the base of a case that include crackers or additional baskets attached or next to cheese displays."

Temporary shipper displays or wire racks also are effective solutions, particu-



PHOTO COURTESY OF 34 DEGREES

larly during busy seasons and holidays as these provide points of interruption.

Additionally, La Panzanella Artisanal Foods Co. demos its lines in select stores with a cheese or spread product.

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crackers as well as educate the customer on our variety of flavors," says Lorenz. "And it helps the deli department drive additional sales for the partner products."

When demos are held, it's key to have enough inventory on hand to accommodate the increased purchases.

For example, Venus Wafer demos typically result in the sale of nine cracker cases in three hours, says Anderko.

Another effective way to increase visibility of crackers in the deli is by instituting bundling programs.

Denver-based 34 Degrees has run promotions in conjunction with cheese, charcuterie and condiment brands, with "buy two items and get a third free" offerings.

"When we do bundling programs, sales increase dramatically," says Craig Lieberman, founder and president of 34

Degrees. "Package, product message and positioning also inspire customers to buy complementary items that work together."

By placing these items collectively with signage in an eye-catching display, consumers will be more easily drawn in and have increased confidence in pairing unfamiliar food items that work.

Crackers also can be an effective vehicle when sampling meat, cheese and spreads in the deli, since there are types like plain water crackers that are non-intrusive to other food flavors.

"When pairing with cheese, it's important the cracker doesn't have an overpowering flavor," says Venus Wafers' Anderko.

The display presentation is as important as the products that go in it. It must be shoppable with eye-catching signage, with all product and information at eye level.

"Delis can't just put crackers out and expect them to sell," says Anderko.

Holiday Promotions

Any holiday or entertaining occasion is prime time for crackers, so deli displays need to capitalize on as many of these events as possible.

This year, La Panzanella has partnered with a local winery, Michelle Sparkling Wine and its creamery, Mt. Townsend, to feature and display a holiday entertaining solution.

"Our peaks are typically around key holidays that coincide with gatherings for friends or relatives," says Lorenz. "Some examples would be Easter or Mother's Day and of course the last few months of the year around Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year's."

There are additional pairing opportunities during the holidays, including cheese platters, wine, gourmet spreads and high-end toppings.

These are prime sampling occasions and can be a good time to encourage customers to get out of their comfort zone.

"Some of the more successful delis will always have active cheese tasting going on," says Lorenz. "A deli can take this one step further and show the customer how a cheese's flavor can be enhanced and change depending on the flavor and texture of the cracker. This could lead to the purchase of more than one type/flavor of cracker."

In addition to the holidays, cracker sales also increase during the summer picnic season and around Super Bowl Sunday.

The fourth quarter is the most vital for 34 Degrees and starts earlier each year, most recently in July.

"We've come up with creative promotions and campaigns to tap into the focus on crackers in the fourth quarter," says Lieberman. "This includes bundling, cross promotions with wine and expanded displays."

By creating abundant, attention-grabbing cracker displays with creative and traditional pairing suggestions, delis can become a cracker destination equal to or greater than the grocery aisle. **DB**



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Inspiration For Pairing Cheese



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHRISTINE HYATT

Creative ideas give customers a way to spice up the season

BY LIZ THORPE

With today's consumer more sophisticated than ever savvy retailers know cheese pairings are no longer blocks of cheese placed beside a bunch of grapes on a plate. Getting out in front of the customer with festive, creative pairing ideas for the holidays can increase sales, bring excitement to the deli department, and grab the attention of the all-important Millennials.

The landscape of food and beverage pairing is littered with adages meant to make things easier: "What grows together goes together"; or "Like with likes"; and "Opposites attract." Despite spending years immersed in the cheese world, even experts get ner-

vous when it comes to proper pairing. Good cheese is expensive after all.

DELI BUSINESS decided to pick the brains of some of the most accomplished cheese pairers in the United States. These are folks who took top honors at the biannual Cheesemonger Invitational, which is considered a premiere national cheese event held in San Francisco and New York City, and is highly regarded by cheese experts. This cheese contest includes the final preliminary challenge, "Perfect Bite." Judged on presentation, originality and taste, each competitor is assigned a cheese and given an hour to prepare 100 bite-size compositions. Here are the four big take-aways from the top mongers:



the cheese. At the end of the day, pairing is about layering flavor and complexity, but it's always got to be about the cheese. Taking a heavy, buttery cream-bomb of a cheese and wrapping it in puff pastry smeared with thick, cloying fruit preserves is an exercise in palate fatigue. The whole mouthful is rich and thick and sticky, and the cheese becomes just another smear.

Which brings us to ...

Texture

"Texture is a huge part of pairing. If it's going to be completely mushy I'm not going to enjoy it. It needs some sort of textural dynamic." — Matt Reilly, Eataly, Chicago

Pairing isn't just about flavor. It's also about texture. I'd argue this is especially true for cheese, because it's such a fat and protein-rich food. Younger, softer, higher moisture cheeses coat your mouth. Drier, aged cheeses literally lodge in your teeth. The feel of the cheese, and of what you put with the cheese, can make or break a pairing.

At the winter Invitational, Alex Ourieff, of Vagabond Cheese Company in Los Angeles, was given Cowgirl Creamery's Mt Tam for his Perfect Bite. A cream-enriched (triple crème) cow's milk cheese, Ourieff points out that the flavor of the cheese is relatively straightforward. Deliciously, it's a cheese that's about sweet cream. Texturally, it's about tempered butter.

Ourieff reduced his recipe's call for black molasses and corn syrup because he wanted the cheese, layered atop homemade gingerbread, to have a firmer, snappier texture. Crushed pistachios added crunch. Without this sandwiching of texture, his cheese might have languished as a predictable goo-bomb.

Similarly, what brought Miller to his version of a breakfast sandwich is the realization that the texture of his assigned cheese reminds him "in a good way" of a Kraft Single. What would he do with said Single? He'd make an egg sandwich. Fried bacon, however, is "too bacon-y." It is oily and thick, and what you would walk away with is the sensation of eating a slab of pork fat.

Miller wanted the milky, slippery goodness of the cheese to shine, so he oven-roasted thin strips of prosciutto. I bet crackling would have worked too. What he got was flavor balance (fermented tang and porky sweetness), but even more

Balance

"If you're gonna start thinking about pairing cheese with other things you've gotta start simple." — Eric Miller, Mission Cheese, San Francisco

That's easy to say if you're the guy who fried 100 quail eggs in your efforts to reinterpret the New York classic bacon, egg and cheese sandwich. But as Miller is quick to point out, the Perfect Bite is a competition at the highest levels of cheese mongerdom. To pull out the stops he wore his restaurant hat, not his retailer hat.

For people looking for a good pairing at home, the classics — think Manchego and quince paste or Blue drizzled with honey — are all about balance. A salty, gamy cheese is balanced by a sweetly fruity or floral element. Lana Patrick, of Wheel House Cheese in Los Angeles, is in complete agreement. "Sit down with your cheese and taste it. Ask yourself what balances it. Find other things that groove alongside."

One of the most common mistakes all the mongers warn against is overwhelming



critically, he'd managed to "get some crunch in there."

Reilly's foray into textural balance was the most eye opening for me. After making a nacho "chip" out of dried and puffed cheese, he topped it with, of all things, Mexican crema (his play on sour cream). One would assume that cream atop cheese would just be overkill. But the thick palate coating texture of the crema actually spread the chipotle-imbued flavors of his crispy cheese chip.

Acid Is The New Sugar

"Cheese pairings get lost in the sweet/salt balance. I didn't want to play that game so I relied on acidity (and spice)." — Alex Ourieff, Vagabond Cheese Company, L.A.

The most touted condiments for cheese pairing — membrillo (quince paste), fig jam, honey, fruit — rely on sugar. Sweetness can be a great way to balance salt, which is often a predominant flavor in cheese. But acidity will balance flavor and texture. Like a crisp white wine, an element of acidity slices through the richness that all cheeses share, regardless of milk or style. To his Perfect Bite, Ourieff added acidity in the form of a quick sugar/champagne vinegar pickle for persimmons: an essence of sweetness without cloying intensity.

Patrick had the challenge of pairing a dense, aged cheese that is a razor's edge away from cheese candy; what makes Cypress Grove's Midnight Moon (and other aged goat Gouda styles) so compulsive is the caramel note that lingers.

Tasting the cheese made Patrick think of citrus: "It needed an acidity component."

Reilly, who took home the grand prize at the winter Invitational in San Francisco, relied on tamarind to lighten his Rogue Creamery chipotle-laced Pistol Point Cheddar. And cooking down tamarind wasn't enough. He did that, diluting it with water, and then added back the scrapings of the tamarind pod. He wanted to "accentuate the brightness," and while he was originally concerned the tart, sour note would overwhelm his cheese, he found he actually needed much more than originally planned.

Miller, too, found acidity was the essential element to his milky, meaty, eggy bite.



No breakfast sandwich would be complete without ketchup. Instead, he made a bright, mouth-puckering tomato jam and laced it with the same proprietary dried chili jam that garnished his Cowgirl Creamery Devil's Gulch.

Trust Your Experience

"It's about what you like. Put the cheese in your mouth, and see what happens." — Lana Patrick, Wheel House Cheese, L.A.

Another universal acknowledgment among the mongers is that everyone is intimidated by pairing. Most of us don't want to "mess it up." But we all have a lifetime of food memories that can inspire and guide some really exceptional cheese pairings. Miller's textural association with a Kraft Single made him think of an egg sandwich. Patrick tasted Midnight Moon and remembered "this moment when I had a goat milk caramel. Aha that was fantastic!" Reilly ate a flavored block of cheddar and thought: "Nachos!"

This isn't sophisticated or rarified food recall; these are the fundamental tastes of our childhood, or our first food discoveries. We all eat cheese because it's delicious. It offers a seemingly infinite range of flavors and textures, all from a few humble ingredients. Pairing it should be fun, exploratory and playful.

The producer of Cheesemonger Invitational, Liz Thorpe is a 13-year industry veteran, author and consultant.

She is currently writing a reference guide to cheese to be published in fall 2016. **DB**



Clean & Authentic — A Good Idea



By

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Consumers have made it clear — they care about the integrity of the foods they eat and are seeking out more wholesome, authentic and traceable options. From a labeling perspective, statistics indicate a majority of shoppers are taking the time to read and understand the nutritional merit of ingredients (i.e. gluten-free, non-GMO, no artificial additives or fillers) and will use this information to guide purchasing decisions for themselves and their families.

While many manufacturers strive to produce “clean labels” — labels that avoid artificial or unnatural ingredients — there are far more occurrences where labeling is misleading, product information is limited or details are missing altogether.

According to the International Food Information Council Foundation, Americans acknowledge there is room to improve the healthfulness of their diet. Unfortunately, more than half of the individuals surveyed say they would rather just enjoy their food than worry too much about what’s in it.

So how do you organize products, especially when easy access to packaging, labels and detailed product information in the deli department is in short supply? More importantly, how do you help consumers make more informed, appropriate and healthful purchasing decisions?

To start, it is important to recognize that two distinctly different merchandising strategies and shopping dynamics are in play in the deli department. For foods such as wrapped cheese, cocktail salami chubs and packaged salads that are merchandised adjacent to the full-service counter, shoppers are at liberty to inspect products and evaluate labels at their leisure.

At the service counter, purchasing decisions are based on an increasingly narrow range of branded options and are made without detailed investigation. Shoppers are forced to define value based on brand awareness, prior understanding of product variety, and/or price with limited assistance from service staff. In some delis where tasting samples are regularly provided prior to purchase, product performance (taste/texture) also comes into play.

It would be beneficial for all deli items to be kept out in the open with labels intact, allowing buyers to fully inspect each and every product. Realistically, providing full access to bulky chubs and roasts, commercially sized blocks of cheese or finding ways to preserve the integrity of fresh salads and prepared meals would prove cumbersome and costly to say the least. There are, however, a number of remedies that can be implemented without issue.

Stock Better Products

Concerned retailers should rethink their relationship with cheap, artificial and highly industrialized brands. In ever growing numbers, regional farmers,

dairies and food processors are developing the capacity to deliver wholesome, nutrient rich, sustainable and affordable foods consistently and reliably. Additionally, many of the popular regional and national producers have been re-formulating their lines with recipes that embrace all natural and nutritionally dense ingredients.

Accordingly, the best first step you can make is to conduct a department-wide product audit. Any item that contains questionable ingredients or fails to deliver honest nutritional value should be eliminated from your inventory.

Make Distinctions

In the same way that produce departments find ways to identify and distinguish organic from traditional items or feature sale items more prominently than everyday priced merchandise, similar techniques can be applied within the deli department. Whether you choose to feature locally produced, heart-healthy, low-salt, low-fat or other such healthy lifestyle oriented themes, customers will appreciate your helping them make more informed purchasing decisions.

Display Nutritional Information

With so many walls, surfaces, counters and shelves in the deli department, it should be easy to clearly and prominently display the nutritional and ingredient information that appears on back labels. Whether you highlight nutritional attributes on price pins, adhere signage to the front glass of display cases or use posters, banners and chalkboards, the options are plentiful.

Provide Tastings, Education

Recognizing that nutritional value and wholesome ingredients are important to your customers, make sure your staff is trained and able to communicate these attributes while working the service counter. When customers are assisted with information that facilitates a greater understanding and trust in your products, the incentive to make repeat purchases increases significantly.

In this day and age, when integrity, authenticity, nutritional value and service are top of mind for most Americans, it would be irresponsible for retailers to ignore this dynamic. In fact, the more you can do to demonstrate an interest in your customer’s well being, the more well regarded your store’s brand becomes. Retailers of every stripe, including Whole Foods, Trader Joe’s, Starbucks, H-E-B, Publix and Costco have recognized these dynamics and are reaping tremendous rewards.

It may seem trivial to worry about product labels and disclosing nutritional information. That being said, it’s a great place to start. The more you can do for your customers, the more they will do for you in terms of brand loyalty and repeat visits. **DB**

BLAST FROM THE PAST

86 YEARS AND COUNTING ...

Since 1929, the privately held Beaverton Foods has thrived by following wholesome business practices set in place by founder Rose Biggi. Rose started the specialty foods condiments company during the Great Depression – a time when it was not common for a woman to start and operate a business.

What started in Rose's basement, grinding and bottling homegrown horseradish roots, has now grown to a family owned, multimillion dollar corporation with more than 600 skus of specialty condiments, including horseradish, mustard, cocktail sauce and ketchup.

Today, the company is owned by Rose's son, Gene Biggi, who is chairman of the fourth generation family owned business. Gene is the ultimate product developer at the company he has worked at since childhood. Chief executive Domonic Biggi refers to his father as the "Maestro of Mustard" and "Master Innovator." Gene took the company to the next level launching the industry's first bottled Chinese-style Hot Mustard – and the company's first mustard in the 1950s – and then innovating again in the 1970s with the specialty condiment industry's first Honey Mustard.

The company's brands include: Beaver Brand, Inglehoffer, Tulalake, Napa Valley, Pacific Farms and Charlie's Salsa. They are sold in mainstream grocery and specialty foods stores, restaurants, and gourmet shops throughout the U.S. and in 12 foreign countries. You can learn more about the company at: www.beavertonfoods.com.



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 email DeliBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com. For more information contact us at (561) 994-1118.

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