

## ALSO INSIDE

Fried Chicken and Potatoes  
Holiday Parties  
Hummus  
Handheld Foods  
Pâté  
Soups  
American Cheese  
Specialty Cheese  
World Update

# Deli BUSINESS

Aug./Sept. '07

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# The Deli

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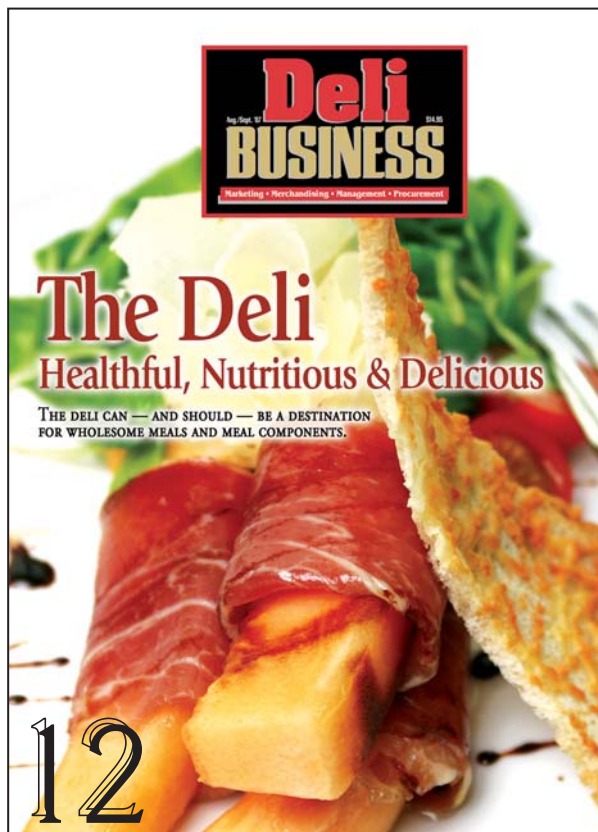
Today's consumers are demanding high quality, ready-to-eat salads in the deli. They want fresh homemade flavor without all the work. When it comes to salads, the best choice is the freshest choice – Pilgrim's Pride Gourmet Deli Salads. Our patented process holds freshness 2 to 3 times longer than other brands – to deliver the maximum in food safety. Pilgrim's Pride's delicious salads are perfectly blended with tender portions of chicken breast,

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# DELI BUSINESS QUIZ



## TIMOTHY BURKART

Deli Business Manager, Western Region  
Nestlé Foodservices  
Carlsbad, CA

Helping retailers maximize their deli sales by offering the right products within a limited space is just one of the responsibilities Timothy Burkart fulfills as deli business manager for Nestlé Foodservices' western region. A 7-year veteran with the Glendale, CA-based company, Timothy has focused five of those years in the deli foodservices.

He has been reading DELI BUSINESS for five years. "It gives me the opportunity to see what's going on in the industry, various trends and new products," Timothy says. "I like knowing what's going on in the industry in areas other than my region. It gives me a much broader perspective."

As the winner of the DELI BUSINESS quiz, Timothy will receive an iPod Nano.

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## HOW TO WIN

To win the DELI BUSINESS Quiz, the first thing you have to do is enter. The rules are simple: Read through the articles and advertisements in this issue to find the answers. Fill in the blanks corresponding to the questions below, and either cut along the dotted line or photocopy the page and send your answers, along with a business card or company letterhead, to the address listed below. The winner will be chosen by drawing from the responses received before the publication of the Dec./Jan. 2008 issue of DELI BUSINESS. **The winner must agree to submit a photo to be published in that issue.**

## Quiz Questions

- 1) What is the toll-free number for Summer Fresh Salads? \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) What is the street address for Lamb Weston? \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) What is the email address for Conroy Foods? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) What is the web address for Kettle Cuisine? \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) In what city is Blue & White Foods located? \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) Who do you contact at Fiorucci Foods for information? \_\_\_\_\_

This issue was: ☐ Personally addressed to me ☐ Addressed to someone else

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Street: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

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Please send answers to:

**DELI BUSINESS QUIZ: Aug./Sept. 2007 Issue**

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Reader Service No. 121



# The Order/Product Disconnect



By  
**Jim Prevor**  
*Editor-in-Chief of*  
**DELI BUSINESS**

A modern deli department at a top operator is a marvel to behold. Bountiful displays of prepared foods, mouth-watering rotisseries cooking in the background, sandwiches overflowing with the finest ingredients from all corners of the globe, wok stations, pizza programs and more.

Yet the ordering mechanism in the vast majority has not kept up with the broadening of the range and the increased emphasis on cooked items. Although able to fulfill culinary dreams unthinkable a generation ago, the modern deli in a mass-market outlet is horribly

slow and typically does not meet consumer needs for convenience.

This dichotomy between food and service often sours consumers on the deli. Why? Consumers attracted by fresh, sliced and prepared-to-order offerings wind up settling for prepackaged and self-service items — which aren't what they wanted.

The whole situation creates a Hobson's Choice that can't be a winner for retailers:

If consumers wait in line, they waste time. All too often, they leave the deli to exit the store as soon as possible, having been thrown off schedule by a long wait. If the line or service time is off-putting, the consumer leaves the store to pick up restaurant take-out food or buys a pre-packed product, making a mental note to buy take-out next time.

The order/product disconnect also means the deli operation functions on a hit-or-miss basis — even if the product is made on site. For example, if a store uses several marinades and the consumer really likes the lemon-pepper chicken, there is no way to guarantee it will be there when the consumer shows up, and other than a full catering order, there is usually no mechanism for the consumer to order one.

One could dream of a massive staff of well-trained customer service people, but a more realistic alternative would be to look for opportunities to use technology in the service of making ordering more convenient.

One excellent example is the way Sheetz, the well known convenience-store chain — its slogan is *Fresh Food: Made to Order* — uses touchscreen ordering systems that allow multiple people to simultaneously order. Here is the way Sheetz explains the system:

*It's a popular belief that you can't get good tasting food at a convenience store. At Sheetz, we like to turn such conventions on their heads. We have developed a made-to-order food program that rivals any quick serve restaurant you've ever visited. We use only the highest quality ingredients and prepare your food exactly the way you like while you wait.*

*Our menu also feeds your busy lifestyle. Whether you need breakfast to start your day, you eat family dinner in the car as you're running the kids to after-school activities, or your lunch break is at 3 am, all menu items are available 24/7/365.*

Choose from:

*Hot and Cold Subz; Deli Sandwiches; Saladz; Wrapz, Burgerz and Hot Dogz; Grilled Chicken Sandwiches; Pretzel Meltz; Fajitaz and Nachoz; Fryz and Chicken Stripz (Select Locations); Breakfast Sandwiches*

*All of these items are completely customizable using our Touchscreen ordering system. Imagine an entire menu right at your finger tips. There's no need to scream over the counter to get Mild Pepper Rings on your sub... Just press a button. It's quick, easy, helps ensure the accuracy of your order and prevents others from knowing your strange eating habits.*

Sheetz also provides a fax order form so consumers, including local businesses, can fax an order and pick it up.

As a convenience store focused on made-to-order fresh foods, it is understandable Sheetz would pioneer systems to speed the ordering process. Yet a Sheetz-like system would be more valuable for a supermarket deli. A Sheetz store is tiny, without a large amount to purchase. Most Sheetz purchases are probably for immediate consumption, so customers don't want to go drifting off while their orders are prepared.

Supermarkets are completely different. If consumers could walk in the door, beeline to deli and place an order on a machine, it would liberate them to shop, confident a perfectly executed deli order would be ready for pickup as they left.

It would help the overall store — and help the deli, too. Consumers who don't have time or patience would order more. Perhaps for a family, the basics are roast beef, ham and turkey, baby Swiss and American cheese. By the time one orders from the service deli clerk, one can get antsy and leave it at that. With a mechanized ordering device, it is easy to add ½ pound of chicken breast, ¼ pound of kosher salami, ½ pound of cheddar — when it is all on the screen.

Done properly, the touchscreen opens up merchandising possibilities. If someone buys roast beef, the system could suggest a horseradish cheddar; if someone buys ham, a nice Swiss. In effect the machine can be the perfect suggestive salesperson we try to train our staffs to be.

In addition, the touchscreen can make it a breeze to place orders with several different deli areas. One deli operation could have a line for the wok program, a line for a sandwich, a line for sliced meats, cheeses and salads, still another line for pizza — it is enough to make a consumer give up. Now it can be one order, one time.

The Sheetz system is not the only answer, nor the answer for every type of operation. This much is certain, though: Productivity growth depends crucially on the adoption of technology. Why in the world do most service deli counters take orders exactly as they did 50 years ago?

If we don't improve our order-taking experience, it will be difficult to capitalize on our advances in food quality and assortment.



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# The Idiosyncrasies Of Genius



By  
**Lee Smith**  
*Publisher of  
DELI BUSINESS*

I'll get right to the crux of this editorial — I really like John Mackey, the unconventional CEO and co-founder of Whole Foods. I understand the problem with his anonymous on-line fooling and, rather than change my mind, it just confirms why I like him so much.

For those unaware of his embarrassing misdeeds, here is a recap. For the last eight years, Mackey has been blogging on a Yahoo Finance message board under the assumed name of Rahodeb, an anagram

of Deborah, his wife's name. Over that time he passionately defended Whole Foods, trashed Wild Oats, made financial predictions and commented, "I like Mackey's hair-cut. I think he looks cute!"

As reported in The New York Times as said by Jeffrey A. Sonnenfeld, a professor of corporate governance at Yale, "We have the most protected, covered, cautious and public relations-barricaded generation of leaders in history. Today's tightly controlled, artfully packaged executives," he said, 'want to release and spout off, and somehow think this is a forum where they'll be held less accountable.'"

Of course, the illusion is false and many others have paid a steep price for their indiscretions.

Allegations have been made that during that time he had the ability to promote the value of his company's stock and do the opposite to Wild Oats. I leave it to others who are far better qualified to decide whether it was legal or not.

Regardless, some of what is being said makes me react with "Huh?" First, who in their right mind makes financial decisions based on an anonymous blogger on the Web? Rahodeb could just as easily been a very smart 16-year-old kid or a not-so-smart me.

In this day of carefully groomed CEOs, whose every word is sanitized and who stand emotionless on podiums delivering speeches that sound good but really say nothing, Mackey is a breath of fresh air. He says what he wants, even if his singing is a bit off key.

But, what I admire about Mackey is not his lack of control, but rather his genius. Genius by definition is unique. If Mackey were a musician, he could dress up like a lizard or change his name to a symbol and everyone would comment, "Yes, but his last album — have you heard it?" If Albert Einstein hadn't been a genius, he would have been seen as a very strange little man. When a genius is seen as an individual, we tolerate the strange. In fact, we don't just tolerate it, we expect it; but when genius describes the leader of a public company, we expect him or her to be conventional.

The counterargument is that once a company has stakeholders, the president takes on a new responsibility — his responsibility is no longer to himself, but to his investors. Often entrepreneurs outgrow the companies they started

and are bought out or fired, due, in large part, because of their inability to adjust to corporate demands. However, I don't think that is the case with Mackey. He has proven that weirdness can co-exist with growth and profitability.

Mackey has done more than just visualize a new retail concept and make it work; he has become a new kind of leader with innovative employee policies and a new approach to decision-making and business.

I had heard Whole Foods discontinued Italian prosciutto, so I asked a clerk standing in front of the deli. He confirmed what I had heard, so I asked him if customers were still asking for it and he said, "Yes." I asked him if he thought he was losing business because of the decision and again he said, "Yes." But then he went on to say Whole Foods is very concerned that animals raised for

food were treated humanely and the product now being carried was Certified Humane. "I know we're losing some business but isn't it more important to be true to your ideals? I hope you'll give the new product a chance," he continued.

HUH? I had never heard a clerk come close to saying anything like this. No excuses about dumb corporate decisions, no take-it-or-leave-it attitude, just an understanding of what makes this company tick and loyalty to its mission.

In 1992, one year after going public, Mackey announced, "We're creating a company based on love instead of fear." How's that for a hippy, Woodstock-style comment? I have to wonder how seriously that statement was taken by retail traditionalists. Actually, I don't have to wonder at all. Strange thing is his philosophy seems to work.

So, if Mackey is a little off when it comes to corporate protocol, I forgive him. Even more interesting, he's proven that "love" and profitability can go hand-in-hand.

Stores are divided into teams and each team decides what will go on the shelves. There are no corporate-forced distributions and each store is encouraged to buy regional and local products.

Teams also decide who gets to be a permanent member. All hiring is conditional and after four weeks, the teams vote about whether to retain someone; it takes a ⅔ majority to make the cut. Store teams are evaluated 13 times a year and bonuses paid every other week. I understand that for a store clerk, the bonus can be as much as \$2 an hour, so slackers are not tolerated. The same conditional hiring applies to every level of the company. Gives a whole new meaning to treating your employees with respect, doesn't it?

Whole Foods is unique and John Mackey is the driving force. Call him weird, obnoxious, a hippy in corporate clothing or outrageous, but don't dismiss his genius or his ability to execute the impossible. The uniqueness of Whole Foods doesn't come from the products it carries, but from its approach to people.

DB

With genius come behaviors that most of us would find unconventional, unexpected and, sometimes, quite bizarre.



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[jjack@fioruccifoods.com](mailto:jjack@fioruccifoods.com) | 800-524-7775



Reader Service No. 119



# DELI WATCH

## New Products



### Breaded Pork Bites

Tyson Foods, Springdale, AR, introduces Breaded Pork Bites. Capitalizing on the trend for new flavors, forms and textures, Tyson Bites are versatile enough to work in appetizer, center-of-plate or ingredient applications and are especially well suited for mid-scale buffets. Menuing ideas and more information is available on the Web site.

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

Reader Service No. 401



### Stuffed Spudz

Lamb Weston, Eagle, ID, has introduced Tantalizers Stuffed Spudz appetizers, made with premium ingredients wrapped in a battered crust. For classic cheese and potato taste, try Cheddar Cheese Stuffed Spudz; for something a little more "spicy," try Southwestern Cheddar. Pre-prepared Stuffed Spudz require little labor and bake or fry in minutes.

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

Reader Service No. 402



### Premium Aged Cheeses

Finlandia Cheese, Inc. Parsippany, NJ, will add aged Gruyère and Gouda to its premier line of imported specialty cheeses that includes Black Label Swiss Emmentaler. Black Label Gruyère is produced in the remote mountains of the Vorarlberg region of Austria according to Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) specifications. Black Label Gouda is an imported Gouda handcrafted in the great Dutch tradition.

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

Reader Service No. 403

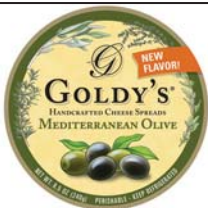


### Baked Soy Crackers

Genisoy, Tulsa, OK, introduces a line of heart-healthy baked soy crackers in Lightly Salted, White Cheddar and Garlic Parmesan flavors. Offering taste and nutrition, these new all-natural crackers deliver seven grams of heart-healthy soy protein and are cholesterol and trans-fat free. Only 120 calories per serving.

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

Reader Service No. 404



### Two Cheese Spreads

DCI Cheese Company, Ridgefield, WI, has launched two new Goldy's Handcrafted Cheese Spreads. The flavors are Mediterranean Olive and Sweet Peppadew Pepper with Feta Cheese. Peppadew is a sweet yet piquant pepper grown exclusively in South Africa. DCI has an exclusive agreement to market them in The United States as an ingredient in the cheese spread category.

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

Reader Service No. 405



### Sugar-Free Cheesecake

Love and Quiches Desserts, Freeport, NY, unveils its no-sugar-added cheesecake. This smooth, creamy cheesecake has only 3 grams of net carbs and 0 grams of trans fat per slice. It has the great taste Love and Quiches is famous for, and fits in perfectly with carb-conscious diet plans. Plus, this 9" product is pre-cut in 16 slices for perfect portion control, saving time and money with thaw-and-serve convenience.

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

Reader Service No. 406



### Chilled Pasta Sauces

Atalanta Corporation, Elizabeth, NJ, introduces Biffi chilled sauces from Milan, Italy. They come in 200-gram plastic tubs (approximately 8 ounces), and when served with pasta, one tub covers three to four side dishes. Biffi Pesto Fresco contains traditional basil, hard cheese, oil, garlic and nuts (pine nuts and cashews). Other flavors include 4 Formaggi, Arrabbiata and Napoletana (basil/tomato).

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

Reader Service No. 407



### Holiday Flavors

Norseland Incorporated, Stamford, CT, introduces Toppers, a variation on Boursin, the popular spiced French Gournay cheese. Packaged in colorful, resealable mini-canisters, convenient bite-size pieces of this creamy cheese come in Garlic & Fine Herbs and Green & Black Olives.

Versatile for use in salads, canapés, pizzas, pasta, mini-skewers for the grill, hot or cold soups, egg dishes and beyond.

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

Reader Service No. 408



### Wings And Tenders In Bags

Willow Brook Foods, Springfield, MO, provides taste and convenience in the form of Wings and Chicken Breast Tenders. Available in Kettle Fried, BBQ, Buffalo and Honey Mustard, these wings and tenders come in 2-pound, resealable bags. Fully cooked and ready to heat

and serve, these appetizers or entrées are low in carbs and high in protein. They are also gluten free and contain 0 grams trans fat.

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

Reader Service No. 409



### Pouch For Wings

Robbie Manufacturing, Lenexa, KS, introduces the first known flexible all-in-one packaging solution that offers all the benefits of Hot 'N Handy packages but now designed to hold wings. The colorful, new pouches are easy to load, carry and reheate, as well as resistant to moisture, tearing and leaks. The Hot 'N Handy Pouch features a resealable zipper and crystal clear window.

<http://www.robziemfg.com>

Reader Service No. 410



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# The Deli

## Healthful, Nutritious & Delicious

THE DELI CAN — AND SHOULD — BE A DESTINATION FOR WHOLESOME MEALS AND MEAL COMPONENTS.

By Barbara Robison

**H**ealthful, nutritious, fresh, all-natural and organic are buzz words in today's food world. Headlines warn of major health problems, such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure, with diet posed as a major contributing factor. Consumers look to food retailers to help them select a healthful diet that fits new nutrition guidelines. Food retailers and their suppliers are listening.

In the 2007 *State of the Industry Study* from Food Marketing Institute (FMI),

Arlington, VA, 71 percent of consumers surveyed said they were seeing health and nutrition information in the primary food market where they shopped. This compares to 62 percent in 1997.

According to Nancy White, director of marketing, Natural Marketing Institute (NMI), Harleysville, PA, NMI's 2006 Health and Wellness Trends Database showed 51 percent of consumers interested in healthful foods/beverages that can be eaten on the go. Sixty-seven percent of consumers concerned with preventing diabetes would use foods in its

prevention of the condition, while 62 percent would use foods to treat it.

Delis are a logical place for retailers to provide more healthful eating assistance to customers wanting quick and convenient solutions to their menu needs.

"Consumers are definitely savvier about healthful foods, especially with an aging population on more special diets. Each retailer has its own nutrition programs, but unless it can provide nutrition and ingredient information to meet the current customers' needs, it will lose business," states Mike Ryan, executive



director, Eastern Perishable Products Association, Inc., Wanaque, NJ.

"It is all about offering consumers choices that have nutritional integrity. Our research shows one of the most trusted brand names consumers mention when asked about fresh foods is their local retailer's brand. That's great news for the retailer, but it also means markets have a responsibility to offer customers choices they want. Retailers can't be responsible for their customers' health, but they can make great tasting, healthful foods available and affordable for mainstream customers. Consumers can be skeptical about the taste of foods marketed as healthful, but sampling and delivering on taste can make them true believers," says Sharon Olson, president, Chicago, IL-based Olson Communications, Inc., a marketing communications firm specializing in the food industry.

"There should be more going on in the deli in the way of providing nutrition and health information the customer needs. The problem is that many items available in the deli don't actually have to be labeled, but some information would be helpful to consumers," states Alan Hiebert, education information specialist, International Dairy, Deli, Bakery Association (IDDBA), Madison, WI.

## CONSUMER EDUCATION EFFORTS

Publix Super Markets, Lakeland, FL, announced earlier this year that after in-depth studies of the health, natural and organic sectors, it will expand its Publix Green Wise markets to four locations. "At Publix, we're committed to serving the changing lifestyle and nutritional needs of our customers. Publix Green Wise Markets will allow for an environment focused on natural foods as well as provide a venue with an emphasis on prepared foods," says Maria Brous, director of media and community relations.

Publix also is expanding its Apron's programs, including cooking schools and a "simple meals" plan. A "meal-of-the-week" program includes sampling, with ingredients for the meal already bundled along with the recipes. The Apron's Make-Ahead-Meals, a pilot concept being developed in two Publix stores, is an example of the growing popularity of meal assembly centers (MACs). Customers can register online for a meals-assembly session. At the session, the ready-to-cook ingredients are prepared and ready to assemble. Meals are then built and packaged for cus-

## Interactive Kiosks

The use of kiosks as a source of nutrition and health information in food markets is increasing, according to Bill Greer, a spokesperson for Food Marketing Institute (FMI), Arlington, VA.

Healthnotes Connect from Healthnotes, Inc., Portland, OR, is a comprehensive merchandising and marketing program delivered through in-store touch-screen kiosks and interactive retail Web sites. Independent research shows over 40 percent of consumers who use Healthnotes Connect make a purchase based on kiosk content. The research also shows 97 percent of consumers using the program believe it is easy to use and 93 percent say it is important to have it in store. Sixty-four percent of shoppers who use the kiosks say they learned something new, and over 80 percent indicate they had mentioned or intended to mention the Healthnotes kiosk to another person.

"In-store interactive kiosks attract a younger consumer demographic. They want answers to questions quickly and like the interaction. The applications can be customized to the individual market. Coupons can be offered and store areas, such as the rotisserie or the prepared foods sections of the deli, can be linked with special offers. Information on varietal cheeses, deli meats or prepared foods can be provided along with complementary recipe ideas. We're presently in 100 percent of the Fred Meyer Stores [based in Portland, OR], and in other markets as well, such as Wild Oats Marketplace, [based in Boulder, CO], and Whole Foods [based in Austin, TX]," states Jeff Seacrist, Healthnotes vice president of marketing. **DB**

tomers to freeze and use later. In a twist on the MAC concept, customers can call ahead for Publix to do the assembling and have the meal ready for pickup.

A Southern California outlet of Austin, TX-based Whole Foods has readable-sized signs posted in front of all food items in the hot and cold prepared food cases, with a listing of all ingredients in each item. Similar signs are posted in the olive bar and with individual meats and cheeses in the Charcuterie.

Oldways Preservation Trust, Boston, MA, is a nonprofit group focused on nutrition (health, science), tradition (pleasure, joy and history), and sustainability (environment, organic). Sara Baer-Sinnott, executive vice president, says, "We convert high-level science into accessible, consumer-friendly tools for the retailer, chefs and others. One of our main focuses is the Mediterranean diet and food pyramid, which we consider the gold standard of healthful eating. Extensive nutrition science research confirms consumption of that diet pattern promotes good health and longevity. We have established the MED Mark, a packaging symbol, designed to help shoppers quickly identify healthful Mediterranean-diet products.

"There are many foods in the deli, among them olives, whole-grain breads, hummus, cheeses and salads, which fit into the Mediterranean diet pattern,"

she adds.

Camino Mágico, developed by Oldways and the Latino Nutrition Coalition (LNC), is designed to help Latinos eat more healthfully based upon traditional eating patterns. It is the first comprehensive supermarket-shopping guide targeting the Latino community and was launched last spring in Fiesta Supermarkets in Houston, TX.

"Other cities we expect to visit and work on the program with retailers include Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Miami and Boston, with variations of the guide planned for different regional markets. The 16-page guides will be distributed at food stores, churches, health centers and community organizations," says Baer-Sinnott. Delis would certainly be an area within a retail food market where a tie-in program could be effective.

## SPECIFIC NUTRITIONAL OFFERINGS

Rotisserie protein is one of the most popular items in the deli and newer offerings often include a selection of seasonings on chickens and turkey breasts.

Butterball LLC, Naperville, IL, recently introduced marinated raw turkey breast tenderloin, with no breading or coating, for use in the deli. "The deli drops the average 1-pound product in the deep or pressure fryer. It cooks in as little as 13 minutes in a pressure fryer, 18

minutes in a deep fryer. The results are a crispy outside with the marinade flavor sealed on the inside. Most fried foods tend to be heavy with oil but because this product has no coating or breading, the oil isn't absorbed as much, yet it has the delicious flavor of fried turkey. This new item provides the market a special way to supply fried turkey to its customers," explains Chris Bekermeier, Butterball brand manager, deli division.

Specialty breads provide an easy way

for the consumer to add an accompaniment to a salad or entrée. Flatout Bread, Saline, MI, is offering wraps in a variety of flavors, shapes and sizes. The wraps are made with whole and multi grains and provide an alternative for those seeking lower calories.

"The products have been endorsed by Bob Greene, Oprah's chef, in his Best Life Diet and also fit into Weight Watcher's guidelines, with each wrap containing under 100 calories. There is also a

kid's wrap, with fun characters on the package front," says Bob Pallotta, president, Tonic, Chicago, IL, and Flatout marketing representative. Flatout offers freestanding racks for use in the deli, with room for the wrap products and recipes that incorporate other deli items.

Consumers appreciate tasty accompaniments for their deli salads, soups, sandwiches and entrées. Stacy's Pita Chip Company, Randolph, MA, markets pita chips in a selection of flavors. The chips are made from fresh pita bread, rebaked, with just a touch of sea salt.

"Consumers feel good about purchasing the chips because they are all-natural, taste delicious and contain no trans fats or cholesterol. We work with retailers on the best positioning of the products, using freestanding or other racks where appropriate," says Margery Schilling, general manager.

Freshness and natural taste appeal are important in the grab-and-go section. Taylor Farms Pacific, Tracy, CA, is marketing Fresh Deli Snacks, which include apples and low-fat yogurt dip with granola; apples and caramel cream dip with granola; and carrots, celery and ranch dip with sunflower seeds. Taylor Fresh Toss-Up Salads include Asian Style Spa Salad, Chardonnay Splash Caesar Salad, Green Valley Garden Salad and Mediterranean Salad. All contain fresh vegetables, other items such as chicken breast, crisp noodles, cheeses and olives, plus a special dressing.

Soup in the deli is also growing in importance. Pacific Natural Foods, Portland, OR, markets ready-to-use soups and organic broth concentrates. "There is special interest in our soups because they taste like grandma used to make," says Patrick Gabrish, director of foodservice. "Our company is careful in tracking the natural and organic ingredients to assure quality and guarantee the sources. We make sure the chickens we use for broth never received feed from China. We have a 20-page form we ask our suppliers to complete to assure the products' quality. There are no trans fats in the products and we've recently introduced soups with 50 percent less sodium.

"Our most popular soup in mainstream markets is red pepper and tomato and in the natural foods markets it is butternut squash. We have soups for the deli kettle operations and the grab-and-go container section," he continues.

Pacific's newest product is an organic pie shell that deli operators can use with their quiches and other pies. **DB**



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Reader Service No. 116

# Fried Chicken & Potatoes

## Fried Chicken — As Popular As Ever

When it comes to fried chicken, consumers indulge on a time-tested favorite.

BY BOB JOHNSON

Americans may be trending toward leaner, more healthful foods but it would appear that many of them make an exception when it comes to fried chicken. For many consumers, fried chicken is still an allowable dietary indulgence.

"I don't think the healthful food trend is hurting fried chicken sales because some people just love the taste of fried chicken," relates Tim Kasler, director of marketing, Eaton, OH-based Henny Penny Corporation. "They may try to eat healthfully six days a week and go ahead and have some fried chicken on the seventh day."

"People may say that they are staying away from fried chicken for health reasons, but we haven't seen it," notes Tara Downing, Hot 'N Handy product manager, Robbie Manufacturing, Inc., Lenexa, KS.

With trans fats grabbing so much media attention, maintaining the popularity of fried chicken will involve eliminating trans fats. Downing has seen trans fats removed from the recipes and formulas of many fried chicken and frying oil producers, and others are seeing the same trend.

"There certainly has been an increase in interest regarding reducing trans fat," according to Norm Ramos, director of marketing for prepared foods, Foster Farms, headquartered in Livingston, CA. "We have zero grams of trans fat per serving on our cooked chicken products. We have accomplished this while maintaining the great flavor that our consumers demand."

Suppliers of cooking oils have had to respond to the desire for trans fat-free oils. "The biggest trend right now is toward the use of non trans-fat oils," says Chuck Grif-



fith, vice president for sales and marketing, Alto Shaam, Menomonee Falls, WI. "Non-trans-fat oils tend to break down earlier, which shortens the life of the oil. There are issues of health and obesity. Fried chicken

can be healthful — the oil has a lot to do with that."

Other suppliers of cooking products have experienced the same shift in demand. According to Tom Bandler, national business



director of oil products, ACH Food Companies, based in Memphis, TN, "Trans fat has become a big deal. There's a big switch going on among most of the fast-food chains and a lot of the in-store delis." ACH offers several trans fat-free oils including a canola-based oil, a corn and sunflower blend and a cottonseed and sunflower blend.

"There are certain parts of the country that have banned trans fats, including New York City and Philadelphia," he continues, noting the ban has raised questions about whether taste profiles can be maintained when frying in a different type of oil. However, Bandler says, great tasting fried chicken can be made without trans fats. "Some customers taste a slight difference, but for most customers the taste is the same."

"There's no noticeable difference in taste with the trans fat-free oil," agrees Kevin Bowlby, national sales manager for the deli division, Ventura Foods LLC, headquartered in Brea, CA. "I don't see a decline in the demand for fried chicken. Everybody is going in the direction of non-trans-fat oil. There's been a huge increase in the last few months." Ventura Foods produces a variety of oils, pan coatings and flavor bases.

The new oils have helped the image of fried chicken. "Switching to no trans fat has helped the health image of fried chicken," claims Henny Penny's Kasler. "That's all we use now and it's absolutely possible to cook good tasting fried chicken without trans fat." The key to the taste of fried chicken is in the breadings and seasonings, not in the fat, according to Kasler.

### The New Ways Of Frying

Cooking with the leaner, more healthful oils does require some changes from cooking with the previous generation of oils.

According to Mike Thomason, sales manager, Allen Family Foods, Seaford, DE. "The only difference with trans fat-free oil is that it takes a little longer to get the color you want. You might have to cook it a minute or half minute longer. I've seen a lot of my customers switch to cottonseed or other trans fat-free oils. There's no difference in taste."

It is also necessary to consider some fry-life tradeoffs with the new oils. "The issue that people have run into is if they buy inexpensive oil, they won't get as long a fry life and will have to change the oil more often," according to Bandler. "If you go to good oil that maintains fry life, you have to pay more for it."

One key in switching to more healthful oils is to monitor consumer acceptance of the product. "We used sensory panels to validate that formulation changes not only

## Fresher, More Inviting Displays

The success of a line of more healthful and tastier fried chicken products can depend on packaging and displaying them in a convenient and appealing way. "Packaging is critical," advises Chuck Griffith, vice president for sales and marketing, Alto Shaam, Menomonee Falls, WI.

Suppliers are working to develop better methods of packaging and display. "We have a new fried chicken bag that enables the pieces of chicken to not be bunched together," says Ed Sussman, co-owner, Merit Paper Corporation, Melville, NY. This new bag, introduced late in 2006, is wider at the bottom, providing more room for the pieces of chicken.

"We use a new film that keeps the chicken fresher and crisper," he adds. "This bag is also being used for the fried chicken tenders." The bag has more perforations, which also helps to keep fried chicken fresher.

The new bags can be printed in custom designs in up to eight colors. These designs can include the store name and logo, UPC code and ingredients. "This helps to eliminate the cost of the label that would contain that information," Sussman explains.

According to Tara Downing, Hot 'N Handy product manager, Robbie Manufacturing, Inc., Lenexa, KS, "We're launching a new pouch with additional venting. You can keep chicken fresh in

the case for three hours."

Effective displays also depend on using good equipment. "Handling of the product is a key," notes Griffith. "Maintenance of the right temperature is a key. Too hot and you can ruin the product, but too cool and you run the risk of disease. The equipment you use is important to maintain quality."

Other new products can help effectively display and merchandise fried chicken. "A lot of people are going to vertical merchandisers," says Tim Kasler, director of marketing, Henny Penny Corporation, based in Eaton, OH. "They might even put it at the checkout for impulse grab-and-go buying." The company is preparing to introduce a merchandiser designed to offer retailers a convenient size and shape.

Displays can, by themselves, significantly increase sales. "I have seen secondary displays of chicken — separate from the deli — drive sales by capitalizing on incremental traffic," relates Norm Ramos, director of marketing for prepared foods, Foster Farms, headquartered in Livingston, CA.

But nothing can sell fried chicken like the smell of it cooking. "You have to have fried chicken cooking in the store where people can smell it and see it to get the impulse customers," claims Mike Thomason, sales manager, Allen Family Foods, Seaford, DE. **DB**

resulted in hitting the nutritional objectives but also resulted in products that consumers enjoy," Foster Farms' Ramos explains.

### Make It Different... And Better

In addition to making fried chicken that is as healthful as possible, delis must also provide fried chicken that is on par with — or superior to — that found in the alternative food venues.

"The trend we're seeing is that the supermarkets are trying to improve the quality of their chicken products to compete with the fast-food restaurants," notes Robbie's Downing.

Some supermarkets are upgrading their breading programs. Others are cooperating with their producers on a branding program. And, according to Downing, there is also an emphasis on having plenty of fried chicken

items hot and ready to go during peak hours. "The supermarkets are trying to be a step above the fast-food restaurants, trying to be more of a gourmet option."

Using better equipment may be the key to better chicken products. "A pressure fryer can cook faster, at a lower temperature — and it seals in the juices," relates Henny Penny's Kasler.

"There's a trend to go to a less processed fried chicken and that helps us because we are fresher," claims Thomason. "You need to have a fryer and an 8-piece item. If you don't have a breaded tender, you're missing the boat. And you've got to have a party wing."

If the deli wants to be competitive in the fried chicken arena, it must offer convenience. "Your competition is not other retail grocery stores, it's fast-food places," he continues. "Your customers have to be able to

get in and out in 10 minutes. If you can't do that, you can't compete. If you're going to make fried chicken a destination item, you have to offer a bundle that lets customers get in and out quickly with an entire meal."

Other producers agree deli fried chicken has to be convenient. "Consumers often cite convenience as the main reason why they

purchase deli items," Foster Farms' Ramos explains. "Bundling complementary items such as sides can make it easier for consumers to answer, 'What's for dinner?' Also, leveraging the same item for different occasions works well for some retailers. For example, while an 8-piece dinner may be perfect for the family dinner, there may be an

opportunity to cater to company picnics with a 50- or 100-piece option."

Fried chicken can be packaged as part of a meal and sold with fried potato wedges or french fries. Chicken wing bars are also becoming very popular, according to Alto Shaam's Griffith. "Getting the most menu options out of a fryer is important." **DB**

# Potato Side Dishes

Delis that offer great potato sides to accompany their main course offerings have a leg up on the competition.

BY BOB JOHNSON

**F**ood fads come and go but even extremes such as the low-carb diet could not end the America love affair with potatoes. Fortunately for deli departments, that spud-love means potato dishes remain at the top of the list of popular deli sides.

"Potato side dishes are widely recognized as one of the most profitable and popular food items on restaurant menus," says Lisa Bescherer, director of marketing, Lamb Weston, Inc., based in Kennewick, WA. "Within the fast-food segment of the industry, over 77 percent of all servings include a potato item. As supermarket delis continue to compete with fast-food outlets for share of the consumer dollar, potatoes are a natural side dish option."

With competition so intense, delis must offer potato dishes that are both easily prepared and appealing to consumers. "It's all about convenience and taste in my view," says Alan Kahn, vice president of marketing, Simplot Food Group, Boise, ID. "It's got to be easy for the deli to prepare, it's got to be transportable and it's got to reheat well."

Producers are rolling out new potato side dishes that can give the deli an edge in competition with the fast-food chains. One of the new Simplot products is baby potato skins. "These are mini potatoes scooped out so you can fill them with anything you want," Kahn says. "You can fill them with bacon and cheese, with crab meat or with any kind of cheese you want." An other new



Simplot product is Idahoan Brand Yukon dehydrated mashed potatoes.

Bob Evans Farms, Inc., headquartered in Columbus, OH, offers Texas Mashed Potatoes that combine white Cheddar cheese, roasted poblano peppers and red peppers for a Southwest flavor. "This is a flavor combination unlike anything else in the refrigerated case," according to Stewart Owens, CEO.

"And the real Cheddar cheese added to the mashed potatoes in our other new side dish [Cheddar mashed potatoes] makes it the ultimate comfort food that the entire family will enjoy."

The potato knish, long a staple potato product in New York City is working its way into the rest of the country.

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Reader Service No. 130



## Sweet Potato Popularity Soars

One sign of the increased desire for good nutrition is the popularity of sweet potato side dishes.

"We see a lot of movement toward our sweet potato fries," says Jack Acree, national sales manager, Alexia Foods, Long Island City, NY. "Consumers see them more as a side dish than as just a potato."

More traditional sweet potato sides are also enjoying a growth spurt. "Mashed sweet potatoes are becoming more popular – more than just for the holidays," according to John McCarthy, senior retail marketing manager, Reser's Fine Foods Inc., Beaverton, OR.

"Sweet potatoes, recognized by the Center for Science in the Public Interest [Washington, D.C.] as one of 10 super foods for better health, are growing in consumption and in menu mentions in the restaurant industry," notes Lisa Bescherer, director of marketing, Lamb Weston, Inc., based in Kennewick, WA. Lamb Weston offers Sweet Things sweet potato french fries and mashed sweet potatoes. They "were designed to fit the lifestyle of today's health-conscious consumers, with incredible flavor and less fat than conventional fries." The fries have "an average of 25 percent less fat than conventional fries and when processed with 100 percent canola oil, they contain 0 grams trans fat per serving as shipped," she adds. **DB**

says Mark Cohen, sales manager, Gabila and Sons Manufacturing, Inc., based in Brooklyn, NY. "A potato knish is a mashed potato pie. They are big in the Northeast and the Southeast, but knishes are all over. We're in every deli in the New York metro area, but we're also in Lucky's, Ralph's and Safeway

delis in California.

"We're trying to introduce different kinds [of knishes] so people start to think of them as mashed potato pies, not just as European Jewish knishes," Cohen says. "That's how we're going to get beyond being just an ethnic dish. We're hoping it gets beyond being

just ethnic." Gabila also produces potato cocktail knishes, which are mini knishes that are perfect for snacking. The company's other potato side dishes include kugels (potato puddings) and potato pancakes.

"Lamb Weston offers a wide variety of consumer favorites that fit into standard deli operations, such as Chicken Battered Deli Wedges, a hearty skin-on potato wedge covered in a highly seasoned batter that is a perfect complement to deli fried chicken," explains Bescherer. "As away-from-home breakfast continues to grow, operators should consider adding a Hash Brown Patty to the hot case as an easy grab-and-go morning option."

As the potato side category expands, so do the display options. "The deli hot counter is the traditional option for merchandising potatoes," Bescherer continues. "Many operators are now expanding to the self-service section. Lamb Weston's full line of frozen mashed potatoes provide operators with the ability to provide consumers with grab-and-go dinner options by locating hot mashed potatoes next to rotisserie chicken in the self-serve hot case."

### Not Just Newer, Also Better

The consumer of deli potato sides is looking for premium dishes that cannot be found at fast-food chains.

There are new ways of making potato salad even more appealing. "People want new flavor profiles with potato salad," says John McCarthy, senior retail marketing manager, Reser's Fine Foods Inc., Beaverton, OR. "People like the traditional flavor but they also want something new and different."

They are also looking for "premium" flavors, according to McCarthy. One of Reser's newest lines is a home-style potato salad kit that is put together at the retail deli. This kit, which features larger potato chunks and a lighter dose of mayonnaise, is designed to replicate homemade potato salads. "Some of the premium varieties of potatoes are becoming more popular," McCarthy says. "We're seeing more Yukon golds and red skins, rather than just russets."

The frozen potatoes cooked up by deli operators need to be of high quality. According to Jack Acree, national sales manager, Alexia Foods, Long Island City, NY, "We achieve this [quality] by giving them a home-cooked flavor using quality ingredients such as olive oil, Parmesan, etc. and taking special care in our manufacturing. Beyond flavor we see practically all consumers looking at trans fats to some degree or another. It may not define their ultimate purchase at the point, but it is beginning to play a part in it." **DB**

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# Add Some Ring To Your Holiday Season

Offering easy dinner and entertaining solutions guarantees big bucks this winter.

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

**T**he holidays are a time for gathering friends and family together for traditional meals and open-house celebrations. But unlike party-givers of the past, today's busy hosts are buying most of what they serve. Smart shoppers are turning to the deli for easy, impressive feasts.

For Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners without the fuss, more and more consumers are buying precooked dishes for their protein, sides or both. Praters Foods, Inc., Lubbock, TX, manufactures "traditional turkey dinners for Thanksgiving with all the trimmings," says Benny Cousatte, vice president and general manager. "For Christmas, we sell more ham dinners. They're precooked. You just heat and serve. Retailers sell them a number of different ways. They may buy cases of different components and put them together, or we sell complete dinners."

While most consumers will want to buy the dinners cold and heat them at home, he says, "There are a lot of office parties. They want to call it in and pick it up hot."

The quality of these meal solutions has continued to improve in recent years. "It's comfort food. We make it as close to home-made as we can, and then we blast freeze it," explains Cousatte. "The shoppers today — they're 2-income families. The consumer is looking for quality and convenience, and we are learning as manufacturers to meet that demand. When it is good — when the quality is there — that's what people are looking for."

Convenience is the other driving factor. "On Thanksgiving, most people only get one day off, and that's Thanksgiving Day. They're looking to spend more time with their family and with their guests," he continues.

Recognizing that tradition varies from region to region, Praters offers its turkeys and sides in a variety of flavors and styles. "We do a baked turkey as well as smoked. In the South, we also sell Cajun fried turkey with a side of dirty rice. It depends on the region as to what stuffing — or dressing —





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and gravy goes with it. Stuffings or dressings are made with different breads for different regions."

Other side dishes, such as green bean casserole, are also available in a variety of styles. "We do three or four different dishes just with sweet potatoes," says Cousatte. Dinners can be mixed and matched to give each store a unique set of offerings. "We customized 152 different dinners last year."

While most of the meals by Praters are sold specifically for Thanksgiving and Christ-

mas, meal solutions can sell well during the entire season.

"Sales are always higher during Christmas time," reports Steve Eldridge, national sales manager, Polean Foods, East Norwich, NY, suppliers of boneless rotisserie hams, which weigh about 2½ pounds each and can be heated in-store or at home. "You pick up one of these rotisserie hams and you've got a meal. If you grab this and go home and you've got potatoes and a vegetable, you can have a home-cooked meal for half the

cost of eating out."

Polean's Canadian hams are available in three flavors — fine herb, maple and classic. "Maple is a big seller in the fall in New England. The fine herb is great for a dinner because of the added gourmet flavor of the herbs. For holidays, people think of ham or your traditional roast. Ham is a festive item. To highlight a holiday menu, this is a fantastic item to have."

The rotisserie hams are designed to work with a store's rotisserie chicken program. "It's not something to replace rotisserie chicken," says Eldridge. "It's to enhance that program."

For those looking to add to their foodservice programs, "Retailers can marinate it in barbecue sauce and serve it that way, or marinate it in an Asian product. There are a lot of ways to make more of the hams," Eldridge notes.

Some stores choose to offer the hams as part of a whole meal-to-go. "The retailers that we do business with now are packing these with a starch and a vegetable," he adds. "It has huge potential and possibilities in that respect."

No matter what the level of commitment, there is a meal solution for every customer. For example, if a family wants to cook some, but not all, of its holiday dinner, "They can still buy their basic dinner and add their own flair to it," by cooking a few home-made side dishes, notes Cousatte.

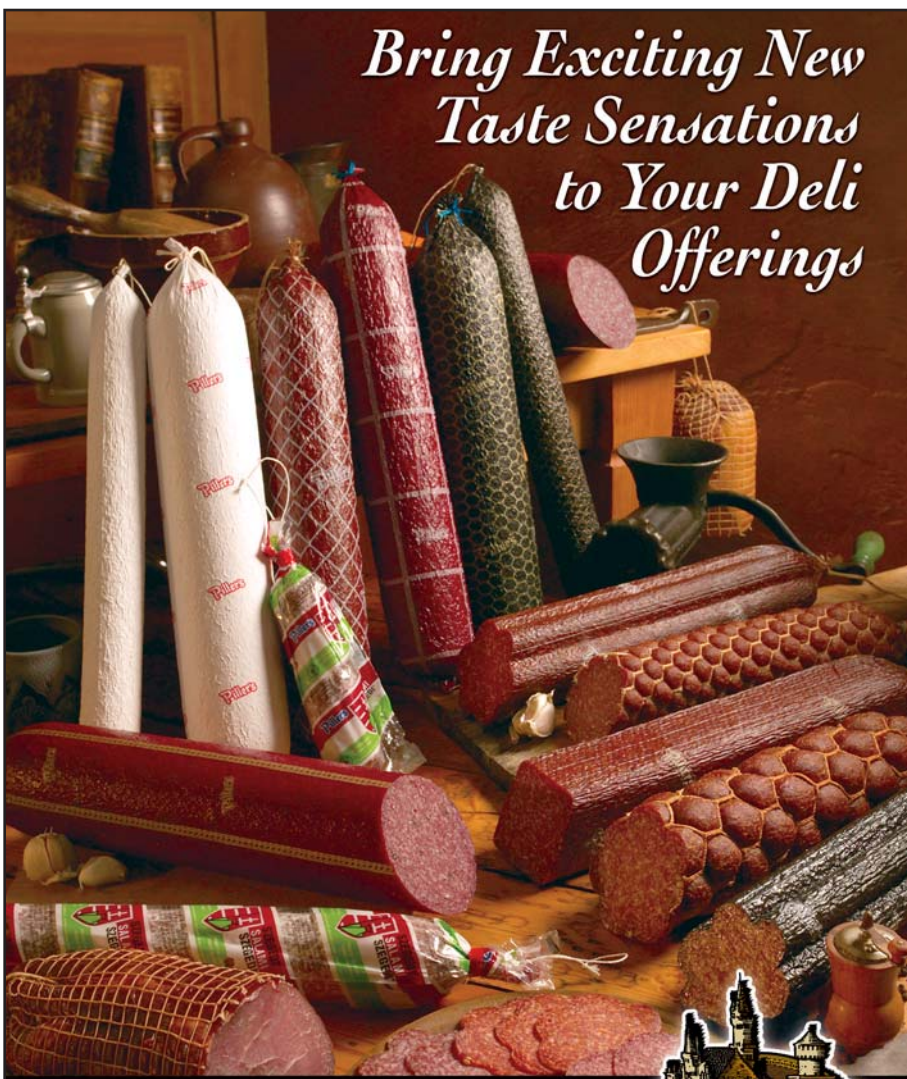
When choosing which items to sell for holiday dinners, Cousatte recommends sticking with the traditional. "What you sell this year, that's what they're going to want next year. That's why McDonald's is so popular — it's predictable. Tradition that's come down through generations is not something you're going to get away from."

### Small Bites

Whether for parties or quick meals, appetizers and small bites are a big part of people's eating habits at this time of year. For example, Sonja Elmauer, marketing manager, Freybe Gourmet Foods Inc., Langley, BC, Canada, makers of European-style specialty meats, says pâtés sell particularly well during the holiday season.

Rubschlager Baking Corporation, Chicago, IL, reports high sales of its smallest items during the holidays. "In particular, it would be our cocktail varieties of bread. They're meant for canapés, hors d'oeuvres and mini sandwiches," says Mike DiCristo, national sales manager.

"Fourth quarter is our strong quarter, our busy quarter. Our products certainly lend themselves to the season. Primarily, our shaped crackers — the heart shapes and stars — are very popular this time of year



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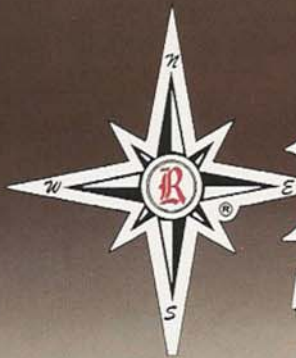
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because they've got a lot of appeal on the plate," explains Jenni Bonsignore, marketing coordinator, Valley Lahvosh Baking Company, Fresno, CA, makers of lahvosh, an Armenian bread that can be served as a cracker or soft wrap. "The Valley wraps make a very nice pinwheel hors d'oeuvre.

"People are on the go, they're entertaining, they're busy. You can certainly throw a wrap together or eat crackers out of the bag," says Bonsignore.

"The fourth quarter and January are the peak of the cracker season," notes Bill Ammerman, CEO, Venus Wafers, Georgetown, TX, makers of gourmet crackers. "About 60 percent of annual cracker sales are during this time. It is now top snacking season. There are a lot of social activities

## A Season Of Gift-Giving

**D**elis are in a prime position to offer unique gift-giving ideas during the holiday season. The trick is to promote holiday items in creative ways.

"Food is a good gift. People appreciate food," according to Benny Cousatte, vice president and general manager, Praters Foods, Inc., Lubbock, TX. He believes complete meals, such as the turkey and ham dinners that his company manufactures, make wonderful presents from both corporations and individuals. And, he notes, "There are a number of shut-ins and people who can't get out" who would love to receive complete gourmet dinners.

Many shoppers are looking for unique gourmet items to give as part of a larger package. Jenni Bonsignore, marketing coordinator, Valley Lahvosh Baking Company, Fresno, CA, says, "Some retailers will use the hearts and stars in gift baskets. But consumers are using them in gift baskets, as well, because they're kind of cute and unique."

DB



PHOTO COURTESY OF CORBIN KITCHENS

tied to that — cocktail parties, wine tastings. You name it."

And while bite-sized items have always been popular during the holidays, they appear to be especially popular this year. "Minis seem to be the new trend," notes Angela Chan, director of marketing, Corbin Kitchens, Santa Ana, CA, makers of items such as mini tamales, mini patty melts and hand-held empanadas. "They're portable, snackable, sharable, cute. They're not just for

appetizers. They're great on the go. They can be made into a sharable meal."

### Display To Increase Sales

During the holidays, shoppers are at their busiest and more likely to buy on impulse. "The fish are biting during that time. It's easy to rack up incremental sales," says Ammerman. "It's an ideal time to display off the shelf. We make all of our items available in pre-pack display shippers. It's a proven volume builder any time you put one in the store. The consumer has about three seconds when she goes by the crackers to decide to buy them or not to buy them."

These eye-catching displays also make it easier to cross-merchandise. "Retailers can get a display shipper of crackers and a pre-pack display of flavored cream cheese or spreads, place them together and sell two products instead of one or none. It gives them a vehicle for suggestive selling," he notes.

"We have a floor shipper display for our cocktail breads," relates Rubschlager's DiCristo. "It's such a peak period, and the shelves have more than they can hold. Plus, it adds visibility and enables retailers to cross-merchandise. They can group products together — related items that can top the bread, maybe like sausage."

"At the holidays, we recommend any kind of display where you can pair crackers up with any type of entertaining possibility," says Bonsignore, "combining them not only with the hard cheeses but also with spreads and things like that. Give serving suggestions. It's relatively easy to use the lahvosh. Imagination is the limit to what you can create with these, so people need a little help with that. It's nice to show people what you can do. Sometimes we do some demos, and I think that makes it easy for people to see what they can do, and that puts it in their mouths."

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# The Hummus Hook

Boasting a healthful profile, many say hummus is on the verge of emulating the salsa category in terms of popularity.

BY LISA WHITE

A decade ago, hummus was a little-known Middle Eastern dip relegated to a small spot in the ethnic food section of only the most elite markets. A recent *Marketing Daily* article in *MediaPost* from MediaPost Communications, New York, NY, reported sales at that time to be about \$5 million annually. Times have changed — *Marketing Daily* reports hummus is now a \$143 million business.

And now hummus is poised for a breakthrough in delis. With the popularity of Mediterranean foods, this versatile, healthful product has garnered increasing shelf space and visibility in today's supermarkets.

There is a growing movement to treat hummus as a category rather than a product to be included in the Mediterranean or grab-and-go section of the deli. Instead of choosing one supplier and a limited number of SKUs, many retailers are selling hummus from multiple suppliers, often with duplicating flavors. In addition, manufacturers have taken the typical Middle Eastern flavor profiles and used the uniquely American habit of morphing them into flavors to satisfy all ethnic tastes. Hummus can now be found in chipotle pepper, artichoke, garlic and pine nut.

The increased popularity of ethnic foods has helped propel hummus to new heights. "Mediterranean is a lifestyle, but it is a lifestyle that is food-centered. People feel they are indulging with these foods, but Mediterranean food is healthful, so it is a win-win situation," says John McGuckin, executive vice president of sales, Sabra Blue & White Food Products Corp., Astoria, NY. He estimates hummus has a 5 percent household penetration and says the category is growing at about 25 percent. "We think it will sustain this growth."

Paula Shikany, senior brand manager, The Churny Co., a division of Kraft Foods based in Northbrook, IL, and manufacturer of Athenos brand hummus, notes interest in Mediterranean foods has been on the rise over the last several years and does not show any sign of slowing down. "We continue to see a rise in restaurant menu mentions for Mediterranean foods like hummus,





which is a leading indicator of growth. If consumers try these products when they eat out, and they like them, they want to bring these tastes home when they are snacking or entertaining."

Frank Chow, marketing manager at DCI Cheese Co./G&G Foods, Santa Rosa, CA, agrees, noting many Americans are finding Mediterranean food diets are a good way to control both cholesterol and weight.

Hummus has improved in taste and quality over the years. According to Rick Schaf-

fer, vice president of sales and marketing for Taunton, MA-based Tribe Mediterranean Foods, consumers also have more choices with these products today. "The category is splintered into different segments and price points. Private label also has come into play."

Many now consider hummus more of a staple, especially the health-conscious and vegetarian population, notes Nicole Day, part owner and vice president of sales and marketing, Mediterranean Delights, Saxtons River, VT.

Even with all this interest, there is room for improvement. Mark Smith, national vice president for sales at Ziyad Brothers Importing/Wild Garden, Cicero, IL, calls hummus an "under the radar" segment. "There are still many consumers who have not heard of hummus. This means there is a tremendous educational opportunity for retailers to teach consumers more about this good-tasting, healthful snack."

### Hummus For Health

Made mainly of chickpeas, tahini (sesame paste), lemon juice and garlic, hummus is rich in protein and has no trans fat. "It is very healthful, especially when compared to dairy-based dips used for similar eating occasions," Sabra's McGuckin explains.

Saying hummus is where salsa was 20 years ago, Smith notes hummus is high in soluble fiber, which has been proven to cleanse the arteries. "It is a health benefit that is hard to ignore. Baby Boomers, in particular, are big hummus fans."

Along with being low in saturated fat and a good source of protein, hummus can be used in a variety of ways, including as a dip, spread or meat alternative, according to Leslie Gordon, business development manager for Summer Fresh Salads, Woodbridge, ON, Canada. "And because it is healthful, consumers can have larger portions, such as ¾ of a cup compared to a couple tablespoons of other spreads or dips."

Despite its many virtues, one of the challenges with hummus is shelf life. Chow says the trick from a manufacturing standpoint is getting more shelf life by not using preservatives. DCI uses a cold processing system, even though cooking helps extend hummus' shelf life. "Our distribution is more regional because of this," he explains.

Organic and natural also are impacting the hummus category. According to Schaffer, these categories may be still in their infancy, but they are beginning to flourish.

Day says Mediterranean Delights offers both natural and certified organic hummus. "We have a 52-day shelf life on our organic hummus."

### Flavor Trends

With the growth in the hummus category has come a variety of new and innovative flavors.

According to Gordon, flavors are moving away from traditional toward the more exotic and fusion varieties. "Spicy also is a very popular option," she notes.

Day is also seeing a strong interest for spicy flavor profiles. "We came out with a chipotle pepper hummus years ago and now

*Continued on page 32*

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## Culinary Adventures

by Lee Smith

Over the years, there have been culinary wonders – products and experiences – that have stuck in my memory, made even more wonderful by time. In the early 1980s, while I was training to be a deli buyer, an Israeli couple who had recently opened a bakery came into the office to sell us a new snack item – large pocketless pita bread with an olive oil and spice topping that was out of this world. I still remember it as one of the best new products ever presented to me. I don't remember why the product wasn't a success in our stores, but I still yearn for the crunchy, savory, toasty coating.

Years later, during a vacation in Turkey, where I had the good fortune to have my own guide – a young English-speaking doctoral candidate – I tasted the culinary delights of a city I have come to regard as one of the culinary capitals of the world – Istanbul.

Since my itinerary was my own, I made only one request – please take me where Americans don't go. I ate in casual “meatball” shops with college students and in restaurants tucked away in little corners of ancient bazaars. Along the way, I had the good fortune to experience Turkish pizza – a large rectangular crust that was somewhere in between a New York-style thin crust pizza and pita bread. The toppings included olive oil, fresh chopped tomatoes, finely minced lamb and a spice mixture that reminded me of the Israeli pita treat I had eaten years ago.

All of this would amount to nothing more than wistful memories, if a discussion with my associates hadn't led to the discovery that the spice mixture I so fondly remembered was probably za'atar – a staple spice of the Middle East. Then, a couple of weeks ago, Yahia Lababidi, a DELI BUSINESS editorial staff member, returned from a vacation to Jordan with a wonderful gift – za'atar.

I found za'atar a delicious addition to chicken, hummus and eggs. Discovering it complements tomato and mozzarella salad drizzled with olive oil, I started worrying about where I was going to replenish my supplies. My search led me to believe za'atar is a spice blend American taste buds seem to gravitate to without hesitation. And it adds the traditional Middle Eastern flavor profile I was missing for so many years.

“It is an unknown spice in America, but it very well known to Middle Easterners and is made in many countries and areas. It is basically a spice blend,” describes Charlie Zahadi, one of the owners of Zahadi Fine Foods, located in Brooklyn, NY, an importer and distributor of Middle Eastern foods. Zahadi

has a retail store on Atlantic Ave. in Brooklyn called Zahadi's Importing Company, Inc.

“In the Middle East, especially Lebanon, Za'atar is known as ‘brain food’ and is served for breakfast with pita and leb'nuh, a creamy cheese made by draining yogurt until it is the consistency of cream cheese. This is a favorite for mothers who want to send their children off to school ready to learn – it is traditional before big tests or exams,” he remembers.

“Za'atar is commonly served in the villages of Lebanon,” notes Demetrious Haralambatos, culinary director and chef for Kontos Foods, Paterson, NJ, which imports za'atar and other Middle Eastern spices. “It is eaten with pita bread by dipping the bread in olive oil and then in za'atar.” To make za'atar bread, a simple execution at store level, says Haralambatos, brush pita bread with olive oil, sprinkle it generously with za'atar and bake in the oven for three minutes at 350° F.”

“It is very important to use great quality olive oil, since the oil is an essential ingredient and the taste of the olive oil shines through,” recommends Zahadi.

Carey Franco, product manager, Atalanta Foods, Elizabeth, NJ, imports the Pyramid Brand line of Mediterranean spices from Israel. He recommends using za'atar in any Mediterranean food, including soups, salads, eggs, sandwiches, cheese, pizza and pastries – wherever a Mediterranean flavor profile is desired. Pyramid spices are available in retail size packages, but Atalanta can also provide za'atar and other spices in bulk, if desired.

“I like it on cheese, such as feta, and olive oil. However, za'atar is also used in sweet pastries. There is a cookie called k'ak that is made with za'atar,” says Franco.

Za'atar is a staple spice of many Middle Eastern countries, including Israel, and spellings vary depending on the culture. Like most Semitic words translated into English, there are many spellings: za'atar, zatar, za'tar and zattar (all are based on phonetic interpretations). Its uses are ubiquitous throughout the Middle East but the actual spice blend varies from region to region.

According to Wikipedia, “It is also popular with the Armenian diaspora where Middle Eastern Armenians live. It is used to spice meats and vegetables and it is also mixed with olive oil to make a spread, which is used as a dip for sesame rings (also called ka'k). Palestinians consider za'atar one of their staple foods. In Israel, za'atar is frequently sprinkled on hummus or served with olive oil as a spread. Za'atar can also be spread on a dough base for the Middle Eastern equivalent of a



Turkish pizza

miniature pizza, also known as manakish.”

“There are many variations of za'atar,” according to Haralambatos. “The Lebanese, Jordanians and Syrians prefer za'atar with hyssop; however, the Turkish and Egyptians prefer roasted thyme. There is also a variation of za'atar called dukka made with peach kernels or almonds. And, the French use an herb called herbe sacrée, which is hyssop.”

In Arabic, za'atar actually refers to a type of thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) grown in the hills of Syria and called hyssop, holy or bible hyssop or Syrian oregano. However, due to over harvesting, roasted thyme or oregano (a Mediterranean variety) is often substituted.

“The traditional hyssop has a broader leaf than thyme. It's a difficult plant to grow and requires a lot of water. It's sweeter and doesn't have the bitterness and punch of thyme. Roasting thyme releases the sugars, caramelizing the thyme, making it less harsh and rounder in flavor. Thyme grows wild in Greece and Turkey,” says Haralambatos.

Za'atar most commonly refers to a combination of spices that includes roasted thyme, olive oil, toasted sesame seeds and salt. It also commonly includes sumac, a dark red Middle Eastern spice made from crushed berries – a delightful lemony spice that adds a bit of zip and is similar to tamarind. While related to the poisonous North American sumac, Middle Eastern sumac is safe to eat. In fact, sumac is delicious by itself and a wonderful spice to liberally spread on chicken before roasting.

Za'atar is so useful and versatile that it is easy to forget the application that is the easiest of all – with hummus. For retailers selling hummus, especially in bulk out of the full-service case or as part of a Mediterranean food bar, za'atar is the perfect addition. It can be used as a spice mixture that can be added by the consumer or it can be added to traditional hummus for an authentic new flavor.

Za'atar also has easy applications as an additional spice blend for Mediterranean sandwiches or rotisserie chicken. And, don't worry about a heavy hand – the more the better.

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*Continued from page 28*

it is one of our top sellers. For a while it was new and people weren't into spicy, but they're shifting their flavor profiles as more gourmet flavors are on the market," Mediterranean Delights' Day explains.

Some of the flavor mainstays include traditional, roasted red pepper, garlic and pine nut, says Sabra's McGuckin. "We have also introduced jalapeño hummus. But our top SKUs are garlic, classic and roasted red pepper, which have the highest velocity [in terms of sales]."

An increasing number of consumers want to try new hummus flavors and use these products to enhance other dishes, Day notes. "For years, we were seeing traditional roasted garlic and roasted red pepper as top sellers. However, now people want new flavors to try and complement recipes."

Mediterranean Delights' offerings include avocado and lime, artichoke, sun-dried tomato and dill, and green olive and pimento. "Our R&D department develops these new hummus flavors from customer requests," she explains.

Ziyad's Smith agrees new hummus flavors are helping to fuel the growth of this category. "Still," he says, "traditional or plain, roasted garlic and sun-dried tomato dominate the category and comprise in excess of 65 percent of the segment."

Of Wild Garden brand's eight flavors, Smith says Jalapeño is doing well, as is Fire Roasted Red Pepper, Sweet Too Pepper, Black Olive, and Red Hot Chili Pepper. "The top three flavors are clearly the top three. After that, the other five flavors comprise the same percentage of sales," he says.

One of the newest developments is garnishing. In the last year, DCI's Chow has noted this addition to many lines. "The hummus will be sprinkled with spices and include a dollop of an ingredient, like pine nuts, roasted garlic, roasted pepper or caramelized onions. This is the next big thing with hummus. We introduced our Artisan Hummus last year [which features a garnish] and it has been very successful. It is not just for entertaining, but for every day."

### Marketing And Merchandising

Although this category is particularly strong during the holidays, when it is used as a dip, Chow says manufacturers are trying to make it more mainstream and less seasonal. "That will be key for continued growth in this segment," he says.

Retailers must think creatively when marketing and merchandising hummus.

Summer Fresh's Gordon believes having a good variety is vital to strong sales. "We have 13 hummus flavors in our regular lineup

and four others in our value-added line. Having an entire section of hummus is key."

Cross-merchandising with other Mediterranean foods, such as pitas or flatbreads, creates an international section that also can help spur sales of complementary items. "You have to plan and execute this carefully," Gordon says. "We don't see as much cross-merchandising as we'd like to because it is more difficult to manage for retailers. They have to use the appropriate refrigeration units and displays."

Some manufacturers are taking care of the pairing. For example, Summer Fresh offers Snack and Go, a 2-ounce hummus with flatbread that can be eaten as a snack or meal replacement.

"We recommend merchandising hum-

mus on end caps, rather than upright shelves," McGuckin notes. "Because our brand has a garnish that can be viewed through the packaging's window, it adds in-store theater, along with a fresh and authentic look."

In more mature hummus markets, where the category index rises by 8 or 9 percent, McGuckin says there is typically one premium brand, one private label and one value offering of hummus.

Chow agrees, saying retailers usually carry a national brand, a regional brand and, sometimes, a private label hummus.

"Supermarkets with more than 42,000 square feet typically carry between five and eight varieties of each brand. There should be more varieties and more Mediterranean

## Category Building

by Lee Smith

**H**ummus is a \$143 million business, according to a recent *Marketing Daily* article in *MediaPost* from MediaPost Communications, New York, NY; even more impressive is the growth of hummus over the last 10 years. A decade ago, reports *Marketing Daily*, sales were \$5 million annually.

"It is an expanding category, but retailers are still not devoting enough space to do the category justice," says Dominick F. Frocione, vice president of sales, Cedar's Mediterranean Foods, Ward Hill, MA, a Mediterranean foods manufacturer and importer. "Maximizing category growth is more than just adding another vendor and/or additional flavors."

The key is treating hummus as the bedrock of a Mediterranean food section in the store, he explains. There are sub categories of products retailers should be adding, including organic and single-serve hummus snacks that are often packaged with crackers.

While everyone should carry the basic flavors, hummus is expanding beyond Mediterranean and including uniquely ethnic-based flavors like chipotle, avocado and lime, and red-hot chili pepper. Middle Eastern people commonly add condiments to hummus, but these unique flavors are American innovations.

While retailers, especially larger retailers, typically carry three or more brands, Frocione contends duplication and unending flavor combinations are not the answer. The category also

needs to stay fresh and interesting, and rotating flavors are important.

It is also more than just cross-merchandising other products near or next to hummus displays — it is about category management in a category that is quickly growing to include much more than just hummus.

Pita bread is another mainstay of Mediterranean foods and, rather than separate displays, it should have a visible and permanent presence, along with pitas chips and other snacks that accompany hummus. Hummus is not a stand-alone product — it is always used in conjunction with other products — breads, chips, spices and condiments, according to Frocione.

Products that add excitement to the category and are beginning to grow in popularity include stuffed grape leaves, tabbouleh, chickpea and lentil salads, and other traditional dips such as tzatziki, a traditional Greek dip made from yogurt, cucumber and garlic; and baba ghanoush (called melitzanosalata in Greece), an eggplant dip made with tahini (sesame paste) garlic and olive oil. Olives, especially packaged, can complete a Mediterranean food section that can complement an olive bar or a more complete Mediterranean food bar.

In addition, new products traditional in the Middle East are becoming known outside ethnic communities and are adding to the complexity of the category, generating interest and excitement as well as added profits and incremental sales.

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items," according to Sabra's McGuckin.

Creating a Mediterranean food destination with hummus, dips, salads, feta cheese and an olive bar is effective. "As stores move forward with adjacencies and similar products in this category, people will naturally migrate toward hummus," he adds.

From a cross-merchandising standpoint, McGuckin advises retailers to place more premium snacks, such as upscale crackers, dips and even baby carrots, by hummus to capitalize on its many uses.

In terms of merchandising, DCI's Chow

recommends three core varieties — traditional, garlic and roasted pepper. "Every retailer should carry these flavors first, then get into the other flavors depending on space limitations."

DCI offers account specific marketing. "We help retailers tie in hummus with crackers or pita bread. For instance, we'll do a program where customers who buy pita bread receive 55¢ off hummus to encourage them to try it. We also encourage retailers to merchandise hummus in bulk at the olive bar and sell it by the pound," Chow adds.

With the growth in this category, more space for hummus is justified, explains Tribe's Schaffer. "You can count on the category growing at 30 percent in the deli department. Retailers should have regular hummus presentation, even if it means cutting back on other categories."

Good representation is key. "I would recommend retailers carry an organic variety, a garnish line, traditional hummus and a private-label version. Between three and four sub-category representations will help grow sales," he continues.

At press time, Tribe had a joint promotion with New York Style Bagel Chips. "The bagel chips included a coupon for a discount on our hummus. We are excited about this," Schaffer says.

Mediterranean Delights' Day is definitely seeing better facing of hummus in the supermarkets than in past years. "Hummus is now a strong category and is being taken more seriously," she says. "As a result, it is getting better placement in supermarkets with better locations and larger shelf accommodations due to consumer demand."

The ethnic trend in delis has increased, so supermarkets are carrying a broader line of products in many segments. "This makes it easier to cross-merchandise our product lines. We are seeing more flavors that are driven by consumer demand, in addition to a higher concentration of organic hummus versus the value brands. People are more concerned with quality now," she continues.

According to Ziyad's Smith, the majority of hummus is merchandised as dips in the cooler. "As for cross-merchandising, pita bread is the staple. Ethnic consumers have hummus and pitas with every meal."

Because Americans are still discovering Mediterranean foods, Churny's Shikany believes it is important for retailers to assist them in locating these items in the store and educate them on how they can be used. "Shoppers are ready to try new tastes but may have less experience with products like hummus. Sampling and providing consumers with usage ideas through signage, in-store cooking classes and recipes can help educate shoppers and encourage purchases."

She agrees cross-promoting hummus with complementary products, such as pita chips, cut veggies, crackers or pita bread, can assist consumers in locating these products in the store and recognizing their versatility.

Looking ahead, Schaffer predicts the hummus category will continue to grow at record rates. "It has low household penetration now, but this will change. We will definitely see category expansion with these products."

Consequently, retailers with strong hummus offerings will come out ahead. **DB**

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# Food On The Move

With today's fast-paced society, busy consumers are seeking handheld foods that are easy to eat on the run.

BY LISA WHITE

Americans are increasingly eating on the run. With today's growing time constraints, it is easier to grab a sandwich or snack to consume in the car than it is to schedule a sit-down meal with the family.

According to the research firm Packaged Facts, Rockville, MD, only 60 percent of meals today are prepared and eaten in the home; with the increasing number of two-working-parent and single-parent households, there is less time to cook.

More supermarket delis are capitalizing on this trend by offering portable foods in packaging that is specifically made so these items can be consumed easily and quickly, with minimal mess.

"We continue to see double-digit growth in all our handheld business," says Bill Parker, executive vice president, Don Miguel Mexican Foods, Anaheim, CA. "It is a little slower in the refrigerated case. I don't know if that's because the frozen appetizer business just lags, but we're still seeing growth."

## The Segment

At the recent National Restaurant Association (Washington, D.C.) Show, George Kashou, vice president and owner, Kangaroo Brands, Milwaukee, WI, noted all types of operations, from large fast-food chains to family dining operations, were interested in handheld foods. "This is a significant change from two to three years ago," he says.

Today's handheld foods have a more healthful profile. The company's pita bread lines have benefited from the sustainable trend toward healthful eating that started about two years ago, Kashou explains. "This is the strongest healthful eating trend in 30 years. It started toward the end of low-carb craze when people recognized fad diets were not the answer, but well balanced eating with portion control was really the key to sustainable, healthful eating over the long term."

It started with Italian and Asian cuisines, and then moved on to Mediterranean. "People are now more educated about ethnic foods and whole grains. People are looking for more healthful choices with handheld





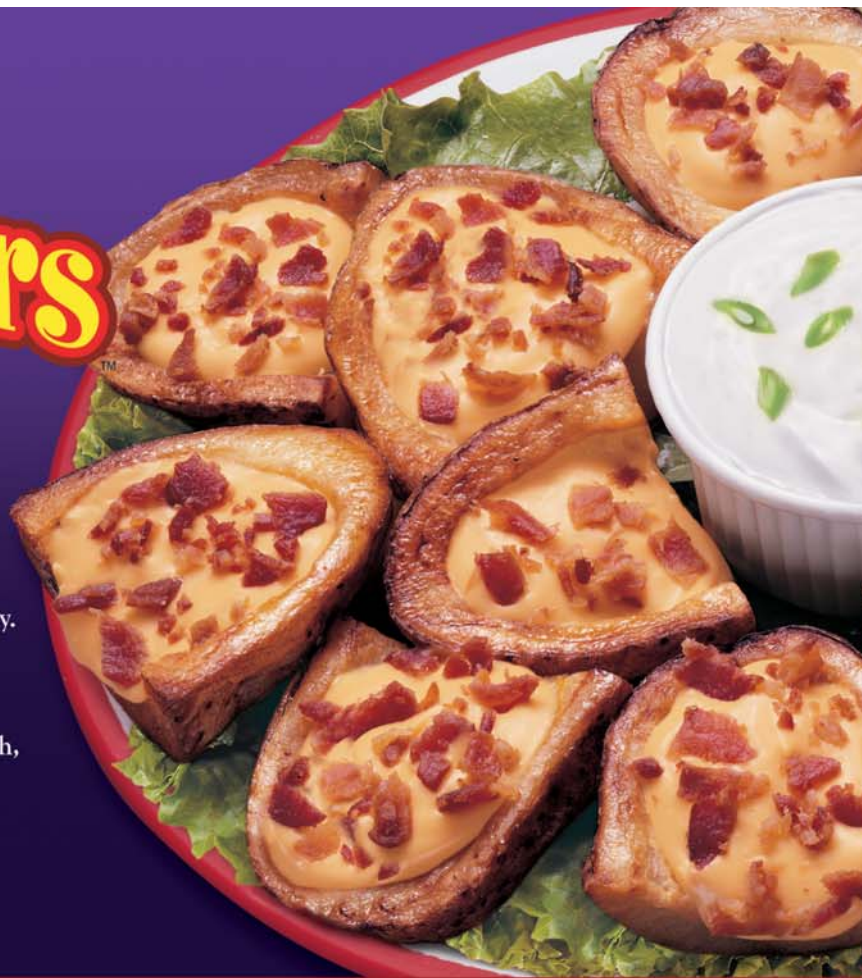
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foods, and manufacturers are responding,” Kashou says.

According to Alan Hamer, vice president of sales and marketing, Stefano Foods, Charlotte, NC, there has been significant growth in handheld foods. “The area we’re seeing the greatest growth in is an extension of these foods into the breakfast segment. Supermarket delis are seeing increased growth in quick-serve breakfast items and are looking for ways to capitalize on this.”

As a result, some supermarket chains are looking for ways to use chicken warmers to provide products in the morning and early afternoon, not just late afternoon and evening. “Foods that are easy to heat and easy to eat are big in this segment,” Hamer says. “They offer a good balance between protein and carbs. People don’t want fattening foods — they want something that has good nutritional value to fill them up.”

Warren Wilson, president, The Snack Factory, Princeton, NJ, concurs, saying the trend now is all about handheld snacks that are not only filling and satisfying but also healthful and nutritious. “People are responding to the obesity epidemic in our country, and they want to live longer, healthier lives. But although they seek out more healthful snack options, these consumers are determined not to sacrifice taste.”

In this respect, consumers are very loyal to companies that make the effort and deliver it, Wilson notes. “Pricing, packaging and merchandising are key components in the handheld segment, but taste will always be the most important attribute. The deli can benefit by identifying unique, high-quality snack foods with gourmet flavor. Consumers are looking for something a little better, more healthful and tastier and the deli department is positioned to capitalize on this trend.”

### What’s New?

A number of new product introductions in the handheld segment work well in supermarket delis.

According to Kathy Lenkov, communications manager, Nestlé USA, Glendale, CA, the company has introduced a variety of portable, hot to-go product lines. “We have a couple new things coming out. One is Croustade, a light, flaky dough with filling. It comes in a spicy sausage, egg, cheese and bacon flavor and egg and cheese with maple-flavored crust.”

Nestlé also introduced the Hot Pocket Supreme Calzone, featuring pepperoni and sausage sprinkled with cheese and herbs. She describes the line as crispy and savory with both flavor and texture. It can be baked and served hot as a grab-and-go item.

The company is focusing on offering

handheld foods that help supermarkets increase traffic and breakfast profits. “This line is baked from either a frozen or thawed state in the deli and served hot as a grab-and-go item,” she says.

Handheld foods have benefited from the grab-and-go trend spurred by consumers on the run. “Customers can find these items in the hot case to grab and go or get them in the cold case to heat at home. For this reason, flexibility in packaging is important,” Lenkov notes.

Nestlé’s Hot Pocket line is available with

## “PRICING, PACKAGING AND MERCHANDISING ARE KEY COMPONENTS IN THE HANDHELD SEGMENT, BUT TASTE WILL ALWAYS BE THE MOST IMPORTANT ATTRIBUTE.”

— Warren Wilson  
The Snack Factory

branded sleeves for hot to-go deli programs. “Branding is important, so customers can see quality on the retail side,” she explains. Both 3- and 8-ounce sizes are available. “Delis can put together meal packs for kids or adults. A lot are grab-and-go items that don’t need much extra merchandising.” Still, she recommends signage to market the items.

Stefano Foods also is developing breakfast sandwiches geared for supermarket delis. According to Hamer, the croissants and biscuit sandwiches contain sausage, Canadian ham and cheese. In addition, the company offers a line of paninis with a two-hour hold time that come in packaging suitable for both hot and cold merchandising.

Hamer recommends delis offer both quick-serve and to-go items to give their customers options. “Supermarkets can use existing merchandising equipment for products that capitalize on the breakfast day part.”

Kangaroo’s pitas are designed for handheld food. “Our pita pocket breads, which have always been perceived as healthful because they are all natural and made with healthful grains, allow consumers to control

portions,” Kashou says. The 6-inch pita holds the correct amount for one serving.

Kangaroo recently introduced an all-natural breakfast sandwich, the Omelet Pita, with all-natural ingredients in a fresh-baked pita pocket. The frozen product can be microwaved. “It tastes like homemade. Plus, it has a lot of attributes today’s consumers are looking for. It is all natural without a lot of preservatives or fillers. This line also is low in both sodium and fat,” he notes.

Kashou believes people are becoming savvier about nutrition and reading ingredient labels, so they are demanding better quality. “Retailers can capitalize on this by offering quality products and informing their customers about key attributes, such as all-natural, minimally processed or low in fat.”

Parker concurs quality is key in this food segment. “For Don Miguel, it is all about quality. We use only premium cuts of steak and chicken and blends of Monterey Jack and Cheddar cheeses. Convenience is second on the list and packaging is third.”

Authenticity is also important. Don Miguel’s products are hand butcher-wrapped but will soon undergo a transition to paper that better performs in the microwave. “This change hasn’t impacted us yet but will take place over the next year or so,” Parker notes.

In the meantime, the company has introduced a new empanada line, featuring pockets crimped around the edges and filled with steak and cheese, chicken or ground sirloin.

Don Miguel is involved in both service and packaged deli, and Parker sees a lot of cold-case growth. “In the past, we would target our product in the hot case, where it was displayed already heated. But now more consumers want cold-case products to take home and prepare with their chosen side dishes. It is more convenient — they can eat it at their leisure and participate in preparing their meal. That will be our focus.”

Parker believes the biggest challenge is maintaining adequate space for a handheld food program. “We see movement that affects us on a weekly basis. We are currently putting together a plan that focuses on promotions around key holidays, snacking and grazing, and grab-and-go, which our products are ideally suited for. This also will maintain a sales balance for the rest of the year.”

Unique, high-quality handheld foods are best merchandised in their own displays so they stand out and the consumer can understand the brand even before tasting the product, says The Snack Factory’s Wilson.

What will the future hold for handheld foods? Wilson predicts the category will keep on growing and expanding. “Innovation will continue, and we look forward to helping drive the growth in this category.” **DB**





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# Pâté for The Holidays And Beyond

Pâté sales heat up over the holidays.

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

**Y**vette Etchepare, director of marketing, Marcel et Henri, South San Francisco, CA, estimates about 40 percent of the company's pâté sales happen over the holiday season "because people entertain and they're busy. Pâté is easy and goes well with wine. When there's pâté at the party, people think, 'This is really special,'" she says.

Laurie Cummins, president, Alexian Pâté and Specialty Meats, Neptune, NJ, also sees about 40 percent of pâté sales occurring over the holidays. "I think pâté has the reputation of being a special treat ideal for holiday entertaining. I suspect this is because it is not a typical American food and, until recent years, had to be imported, so it was not readily available to be consumed on a daily basis. It was, and still continues to be, a novelty to those who have not yet sampled the epicurean delights of French or European cultures." However, she adds, "We are always trying to tell our customers they don't have to wait to have a party to share the pleasures of pâté! There are many ways to enjoy pâté and we share these with our customers at every opportunity."

"It's fancy, yet it's very simple. You just put it out. You can dress it up as much as you want by putting cornichons or cocktail onions with it. Or you can just put it out by itself and it just seems to disappear," says Etchepare.

During the holidays, notes Etchepare, "There's not any one particular pâté you need to have out. Some people like coarse and some like smooth. So if you can have some of both, that's wonderful. There are a lot of different ones available. You do not need to have six in your case. Three or four will give you a nice selection."

"I would not single out any varieties, but I would suggest the following: An assortment of four to six SKUs should include a duck or a truffle mousse, a coarse country-style pâté and perhaps a salmon and a vegetable offering," says Cummins. "It should be fresh — never frozen — within 'code,' and the quality should be excellent. Shoppers want to know they are getting the best for entertaining."

Meatless options are ideal for customers on restricted diets or who are entertaining



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALEXIAN PÂTÉ AND SPECIALTY MEATS



and wish to offer several options for their guests. "I think it's important to the category as an option or line extension," she continues. "Certainly we consider vegetarians and vegans important customers and over the years we have developed terrines specifically for this segment. But, as a retailer, I would not chance missing any sales opportunities by not also offering one or two meat pâtés."

"A lot of pâté companies do a vegetable pâté, and we have one as well," says Etchepare. "We also have a pâté that doesn't have pork in it."

"A lot of people don't eat pork," agrees Sebastien Espinasse, vice president of sales and marketing, Fabrique Delices, Hayward, CA. He believes that may be part of the reason Fabrique Delices' goose liver mousse, duck liver mousse and truffled chicken liver mousse sell better than country pâtés this time of year. "Country pâté is made with pork meat and pork liver," he says.

"We also have a smoked salmon and spinach mousse, and we have a vegetable terrine. People buy these, but they're not our most popular items," he relates. "The most popular item is our chicken liver mousse with truffles."

### Bulk Vs. Pre-Packed

"We sell much, much more in pre-packed slices," reports Marcel et Henri's Etchepare. "We do foodservice and generally those are the 5½-pound loaves. But the slices are so nice because they're grab-and-go."

"In the last five years pre-packaged slices have grown to be nearly 75 percent of our pâté business," reports Alexian's Cummins. "The greatest benefits are the reduction of shrink and waste that typically occur from mishandling, drying out or sitting in display cases for over one week. Another desired benefit is preventing foodborne illness from contamination by physical contact and exposure to environment."

The vacuum-packed slices last longer in the store. "They have an 8-week shelf life. With the bulk package, once they're opened, they last about a week," says Marcel et Henri's Etchepare. "With the slices, there's no waste. And people can buy them a week in advance and keep them in their refrigerator."

"Our prepackaged 7-ounce slice has a shelf life of up to 56 days from date of production, depending on the variety," says Cummins. "The package is visually appealing and tells the customer how to use and take care of the product. This eliminates the need to rely on personnel who are knowledgeable about pâté to answer questions, and it eliminates the customer having to wait to be served. Consumers and servers wish to avoid time-consuming activity during the hustle,

bustle and rush of the holiday season."

"The end of the year is the busiest season in the deli department. You can still have the bulk, but you can add a couple of selections in the grab-and-go to get more sales," advises Espinasse. "Customers want to get everything as fast as possible. The parking lots are full. If you don't have the grab-and-go, you may lose the sale."

"It's much less labor-intensive. The staff is freer to do slicing and other things. It's hard, sometimes, for delis to keep all their

workers educated. If they're not cutting this, that's one less thing they have to be educated on," adds Etchepare.

### Add More Sales

Pâté is growing in popularity. "At one time, people were not familiar with it. But people are becoming a bit more familiar with it, because they're traveling a lot more. It's in restaurants more, too. People are going to a lot of wine tastings, and it goes well with wines," says Etchepare.

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## Natural Options

**A**s natural and organic foods gain popularity, more natural pâtés are becoming available.

"We are coming out with a natural pâté," reports Yvette Etchepare, director of marketing, Marcel et Henri, South San Francisco, CA. "Hopefully, it will be available by the holidays."

"Pâté isn't eaten every single day," she explains. "It's not something you eat a lot of. I don't think a little bit of nitrite is going to be a big problem. It's not going to be the make-it-or-break-it of pâté sales. But you have to go with the flow, and right now the flow is saying people really want natural products. If you don't have a natural product, they won't look at you."

Some companies, including Fabrique Delices, Hayward, CA, and Alexian Pâté and Specialty Meats, Neptune, NJ, make only all-natural pâtés. "People are looking more and more for organic and all-natural products," says Sebastien Espinasse, vice president of sales and marketing, Fabrique Delices.

"It's like if you were making it at home. It's very popular now because we are going back to our roots," he adds. "I grew up on a farm in France and I could not sell a pâté with all those chemicals in them."

"The next step might be to launch one organic pâté," Espinasse muses. His only concern is customers might not be willing to pay the significantly higher price. As it is, natural pâtés come

at a higher cost than conventional.

"When we do come out with a natural product, it's going to cost substantially more," reports Etchepare. "It costs a bit more because of the ingredients. Free-range chicken is going to be more expensive than conventional ingredients."

Some worry the gray color of natural pâtés is less appealing to customers. "Right now, the only non-natural ingredient we use is nitrate. It gives it that nice fresh pink color," she explains. The natural pâté will use natural dye, although the company is still determining what that will be.

"They get used to the color," argues Espinasse. "I don't think it bothers them much. If you want an all-natural product, it's going to oxidate more. You can't have everything. But I don't think the color is a big, big deal now."

All-natural pâtés also have about half the shelf life of conventional pâtés – something to consider if turnover is slow. But despite these considerations, many see a great deal of potential in the natural category.

"My own personal opinion is we want all of our food, including pâté, to be 'clean' and free of ingredients that do not contribute to good taste," relates Laurie Cummins, president, Alexian Pâtés and Specialty Meats, Neptune, NJ. "Put another way, I think 'natural' is important to every category of food!" **DB**

"First and foremost retailers must be sure to let their customers know they have it. It should be visible and prominent in the case. This would be nicely complemented with

signage," says Alexian's Cummins.

"The first step is to get it in the store and put it where it can be seen," agrees Marcel et Henri's Etchepare. "In the cheese case

works really well. Have it with the party food, not with the lunchmeat.

"My second suggestion is to sample, sample, sample. Just get it out there on a plate with toasts and/or toothpicks. We offer free samples to our customers who are willing to 'passive' sample over the counter. Slices are not expensive," she adds. "Open one up and have samples. Let them taste it once and they'll come back."

"Demos are also helpful where the demonstrator is prepared to offer creative serving suggestions," says Alexian's Cummins. Many items are ideal to cross-merchandise. She suggests crusty bread, salt-free or lightly salted crackers or mini toasts.

"Put cornichons and crackers with it. If you're featuring a wine, have a pâté to go along with it," advises Etchepare. She says many California wineries request the company's pâtés to offer with their tastings.

"There are wine bars opening everywhere," notes Espinasse, where many people are learning to enjoy pâtés with wine. "We have to target is the younger generation. The wine bar attracts people 25 to 30."

Champagne is a good wine to cross-merchandise with pâté, in addition to the typical reds and whites, according to Cummins.

"Wine is made to go with meat, much more so than cheese," says Etchepare. "It's so much simpler. And all of our pâtés have champagne, brandy or port in them. In wine shops, they have a case where they have different cheeses and things to go with the wines, and they'll definitely have pâté." **DB**



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Reader Service No. 133



# Five Top Soup Trends

Capitalizing on this growing category adds dollars to the bottom line.

BY LISA WHITE

**T**he soup category is going strong. Between new and innovative ingredients, an emphasis on healthful varieties and reusable packaging, there is a lot happening in this segment.

According to Information Resources, a Chicago, IL-based research firm, the scan soup sale category totals more than \$4 billion in sales.

"The soup category has grown 20 percent in the last year," says Doug Johnson, vice president of business development at Portland, OR-based Harry's Fresh Foods. "People are mainly looking for fresh, high-quality and good tasting products."

Retailers, in particular, can capitalize on this growing segment. There is opportunity for soup sales both in the cold case and hot-to-go behind-the-service counter.

Here are the top soup trends driving sales in today's supermarket delis.

## 1. A Focus On Ingredients

Jerry Shafir, president and founder of Kettle Cuisine, Chelsea, MA, is seeing more ingredient-based soups and concepts. "For instance, Grilled Chicken and Corn Chowder or Thai Chicken and Red Curry are examples of varieties where the focus is on the ingredients," he says. The company also recently launched a shrimp and roasted corn chowder and Spanish fish soup.

Some of the more prominent ingredient trends for the soup category focus on using upscale ingredients, says Frank Carpenito, president and CEO of Fairfield Farm Kitchens, Brockton, MA. "Examples include Pecorino Romano cheese, wild caught salmon and shiitake mushrooms."

There also are manufacturers finding locally sourced ingredients for their soups, which helps support sustainability, Carpenito notes. "Restaurateurs, retailers and consumers also will add their own ingredients to a base soup for customization."

According to Mark Sandridge, president of Medina, OH-based Sandridge Food Corp., although consumers want a lot of flavor in their soups, they are looking for fewer



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Reader Service No. 103



## Innovative Soup Marketing And Merchandising

**N**o matter what varieties of soup are available, without the proper merchandising and marketing, customers will be unaware of a store's offerings and sales will be negatively affected.

Frank Carpenito, president and CEO of Fairfield Farm Kitchens, Brockton, MA, recommends introducing self-serve soup stations into the deli, so customers can ladle their own soup bowls, quarts, etc. "Retailers also should offer a broader soup selection, such as organic, vegetarian and low-sodium options. Incorporating branded soups into the selection alongside stores' in-house soups is key," he says.

Other effective ways of getting the word out are using point-of-sale signage to convey product names and ingredient make-up, cross-merchandising soups with salads and sandwiches, and incorporating refrigerated retail soup containers into the deli case, he advises.

"Supermarkets that show the most commitment in the category are doing the best as far as sales," according to Jerry Shafir, president and founder of Kettle Cuisine, Chelsea, MA. He believes the most successful programs are a combination of hot-to-go and packaged refrigerated soups. "These cases are often placed adjacent to one another or are located in one large island unit that contains a soup bar on one side and refrigerated shelves for soup on the other."

In terms of hot merchandising, the most successful retailers are offering four or more soups per day, Shafir says. "Signage is important. Hanging signs should designate a soup bar or island. Sampling also should be offered. Displays should be kept clean and full."

A few Whole Foods Markets, based in Austin, TX, merchandise hot soup in both the deli and seafood departments. "For manufacturers, the trick is to do something that will broaden consumers' interest in soup, rather than just offering a soup of the day," Shafir says.

According to Doug Johnson, vice president of business development at Portland, OR-based Harry's Fresh Foods, today's consumers consider hot soup stations and prepacked cold soup to be an option for takeaway meal purchases. "Today, many retailers have full soup kiosks and people can sample different varieties or purchase soup for immediate consumption and then get it

prepackaged to take home."

Cross-merchandising is effective when marketing soups. "New Whole Foods formats do the best job in making soup accessible to consumers," relates Patrick Gabrish, director of foodservice sales for Pacific Natural, Tualatin, OR. He says the stores' island displays are inviting to customers.

"Safeway also offers a signature soup program where products are merchandised as part of an overall take-home meal program," Gabrish notes, adding that retailers may be missing other cross-merchandising opportunities to tie soup in with dry grocery items.

Bob Sewall, vice president of sales and marketing at Fall River, MA-based Blount Seafood, advises retailers to focus soups as a meal replacement that allows homemakers to put something healthful on the table in minutes – without the need for cleanup. "Soups are moving into the prepared food section, along with sandwiches. Some retailers are selling rotisserie chicken and giving dollars-off coupons for soup, positioning it as a meal," he explains. "And the culinary explosion on the Food Network and other cooking and food shows has really helped the soup segment."

The most important thing is not to have soup displayed in a hard-to-find location where consumers will have difficulty finding it. Mark Sandridge, president of Medina, OH-based Sandridge Food Corp., says Supervalu's Midwest stores are the best example he has seen of successful soup merchandising. "The soup is in a kiosk with eight bulk wells, so customers can ladle it into containers. There is a small, refrigerated stand-up case nearby that contains 12- and 16-ounce soup packages. The stores also offer soup and sandwich combos and two-for-one offers."

Retailers can take advantage of a variety of soup display options. For example, Tomlinson Industries in Cleveland, OH, offers a line of soup kettles geared for supermarket deli operations. According to Jeanne Engle, director of marketing, the company's Frontier Kettle can be used in a soup bar. "Its design prompts people to look and ask questions. It is a great merchandiser for soup," she says. The kettle is offered in 8- and 12-quart sizes. "Retailers can cook and heat in it. The kettle has an insert where the soup is placed that can be pulled out and put in the refrigerator for storing. It's a great transportable feature." **DB**

ingredients. "This may be because of the soup-buyer demographics. These consumers are a more mature crowd that is looking for simple labels from a health standpoint. They don't want a lot of additives or preservatives."

### 2. Small And Large Sized Packaging

Today's soup comes in both large packaging geared for families and groups and small packaging designed for single servings.

Mike Traxler, co-owner of Captain Ken's Foods, based in St. Paul, MN, says soup for service delis typically comes in bulk sizes. "Other delis are looking for smaller sizes with individual portions for single-serve control. But the cost is higher for individual sizes, so retailers have to gauge how much their

customers are willing to pay for individual packages versus buying by the pound."

Kettle Cuisine's Shafir continues to see increasing interest in single-sized refrigerated packaging. "Different operators have different ideals, but we're seeing sizes from 10- to 32-ounce. Single servings are between 10- and 12-ounce, a double serving is 20-ounce and a family size is 24-ounce. We like polypropylene cups because not only are consumers familiar with this packaging but it can be

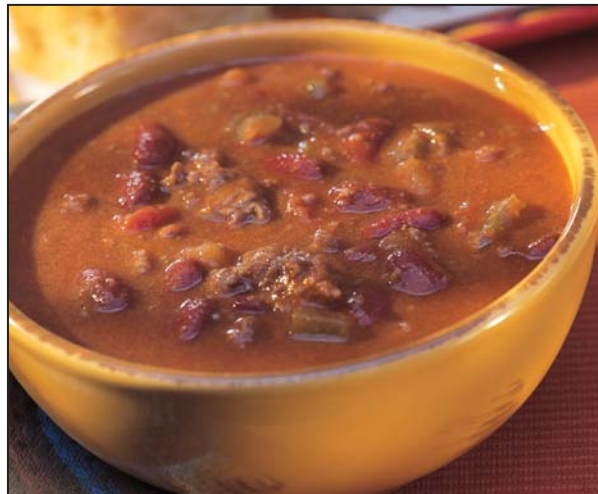


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microwaved.

"Some packaging trends that we've recognized are single-serve and two-serving reusable and microwavable retail serving containers," Fairfield's Carpenito adds. "In addition, we're seeing more refrigerated offerings, which ties back to the freshness of ingredients, and hand-held packaging, which is mostly available as shelf-stable items.

Aseptic boxes and microwavable bowls for single servings are the newest packaging trends, according to Patrick Gabrish, director of foodservice sales for Pacific Natural, located in Tualatin, OR. "However, there is still big volume with conventional, natural and organic soups in a can."

Although deli operators like to offer a variety of soup packaging, Gabrish believes storage space for refrigerated and frozen soups is strained in many stores. "We need to solve this problem by creating high quality soups that don't need refrigeration."

Eight years ago, Fall River, MA-based Blount Seafood, a clam harvester and seafood soup producer, purchased a local fresh soup company and began producing non-seafood recipes. Two years later, the company began offering retail packs for hot-to-go and cup soup programs. Bob Sewall, vice president of sales and marketing, says its

individually quick frozen (IQF) technology cools and freezes soups, which provides more than a 60-day shelf life.

### 3. More Variety

Today's soup manufacturers are offering more variety and line extensions of their soups, whether they are specialty, traditional, organic or healthy versions.

"As is consistent with everything in the deli, the quality of soups is improving," Traxler notes. "Consumers are looking for ready-to-eat foods that taste good and are not a commodity product." Captain Ken's line is fully cooked and packed frozen for serving hot out of the deli service case or in a soup bar.

Varieties are inspired by recipes and famous chefs like Wolfgang Puck. "Restaurant-inspired brands are beginning to corner the market," Carpenito relates.

### 4. Ethnic And Spicy

From a flavor standpoint, ethnic and spicy soups are hot these days. "The ethnic varieties continue to be big, especially Caribbean, Asian and Latin. Latin has a lot of segmentation and it is difficult to pin this category down," according to Kettle Cuisine's Shafir.

The company offers a black bean soup with chorizo sausage that Shafir classifies as Cuban-style. "Asian soups also are becoming more specific and segmented. For example, there are Thai, Chinese and Vietnamese varieties."

Pacific Natural's Grabish believes that soup flavor trends tend to mirror other segments, so ethnic, spicy soups are highly sought after. "People today are not as afraid of bold flavors as they were in the past. Our popular soups include Curry Red Lentil and Cashew Carrot Ginger, but our tomato and butternut are still popular. Consumers always come back to what is familiar and comfortable," he notes.

"Consumers are looking for more Asian options this year versus last year when they focused on Mexican soups," Sewall says. The bold flavors of Blount's Mexican Meatball, Chicken Tortilla and Chicken Poblano soups made them big sellers, he adds.

Captain Ken's Traxler concurs the population is predominantly more accepting of spicy and hot food. "The general trend is that more people like spicy or hot chilis. "Even if a soup opts for a more mainstream approach to spiciness, "They can always add their own spices to liven it up," he adds.

### 5. Healthful And Organic Alternatives

The focus on healthful eating has affected the soup category, just as it has most other food segments. As a result, many manufacturers are altering recipes and ingredients to create more nutritious and lower fat lines and line extensions.

Gabrish says an increasing number of people also are asking for low sodium soup versions. "We attribute this to baby boomers who are more concerned about health issues and sodium. Still, people don't want to



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sacrifice taste."

Blount Seafood has ventured into low-fat, vegan and organic soup lines. "People are eating more healthfully, so we've done a lot of work using alternative ingredients. For our lower sodium soups, we are using lower sodium sea salt instead of regular salt," Sewall explains.

The company also is reworking recipes for its line of 20-ounce fresh retail soups. "We make three all-natural and lower sodium versions," he adds. "We are developing cleaner, better and more natural soup to cover all the bases."

He believes today's consumers are more educated about the food they eat, so they are looking for soup lines made with all-natural ingredients. Creating organic varieties, however, is more challenging. "Making organic soup comes down to securing enough of the necessary ingredients, and this can be difficult," Blount offers a cream of broccoli and a tomato basil soup, which are both organic. "We also use organic ingredients in our all-natural soup. As the demand grows, we will add to our organic line."

Fairfield's Carpenito also notes that more consumers are seeking more healthful soups, including low-sodium options, as well as

organic varieties. The company's Moosewood line offers refrigerated, organic soup varieties including Tibetan Curried Lentil, Savannah Sweet Potato Bisque and Hungarian Vegetable Noodle. Organic Classics Refrigerated French Onion Soup with Organic Croutons also is available.

"The soup segment, like other food segments, is being positively influenced by the trend toward healthful food. But because soup has always been perceived as healthful, this trend has fueled consumer interest in soup and helped this category gain even more momentum than in the past," Carpenito adds.

The increased availability of fresher soup options, as opposed to traditional canned or jarred soup, also has propelled this category's sales.

### Predictions For The Future

Kettle Cuisine's Shafir predicts the soup segment will continue its pattern of growth. "It is an efficient way to consume calories and different nutrients, such as the required vegetable servings, fiber and protein. Soup can be very satisfying, yet it is a good way to help people control their weight. It is a bull market going forward."

And the supermarket deli will be the place where consumers can explore new flavors, claims Pacific Natural's Gabrish. "Consumers will become more aware of ingredients and will be demanding options that are high quality. Also, natural and organic will mean more to them in this segment. It will be all about the ingredients, which consumers will want to know more about."

He also foresees more kid-friendly soup varieties as well as more growth in organic and natural lines. "These soups are growing at a faster pace than conventional soups," he notes. "In general, retailers need to offer a continuous variety of soups but maintain the same level of taste and quality."

With significant growth continuing in the refrigerated and meals-to-go categories, Fairfield's Carpenito forecasts an increase in the availability of fresh, refrigerated soups. "And there will be a strong presence of organic soup offerings in both retail packages and foodservice containers."

Sandridge's Sandridge agrees. "Fresh soup is growing because consumers are starting to understand fresh. It has a big potential for sales that is evident from the interest level of retailers." **DB**

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# American Specialty Cheese

By Karen Silverston

**T**he depth and breadth of American specialty cheeses is growing at a mercurial pace. This year's conference of the American Cheese Society (ACS), Louisville, KY, was held in early August in Burlington, VT. More than 1,200 cheeses entered the annual competition that showcases the best of this burgeoning category, with the aged Raclette from Leelanau Cheese in Suttons Bay, MI, taking home the coveted Best of Show title.

"To me, American cheeses present one of the biggest opportunities in retail right now, bringing excitement to both the merchant and the consumer. American specialty cheeses have undeniably pulled away from the pack," proclaims David Grotenstein, general manager, Union Market, Brooklyn, NY.

"We are still fighting the aura of the imported product, but when it comes to intrinsic quality and the reality of taste, people find our cheeses excellent. We have the techniques, aging, care, recipes and very clean up-to-date plants. The key will be in a blind comparison, as in the [1976] wine tasting in Paris when California wine was judged better than French wine, because our cheeses in terms of taste and flavor are as good as or better than the imports," notes Errico Auricchio, president and founder, Bel-

Gioioso Cheese, Inc., Denmark, WI.

According to Neville McNaughton, president of CheezSorce, LLC, Davisville,

**Quality, variety and supply  
rule the category.**

MO, "The growth in non-commodity cheese is being driven by an informed and intelligent consumer who understands the value of grass-fed. If you want to feel comfortable about your food, the ultimate certification is the ability to link food back to a specific animal and a specific piece of land. There are tangible health benefits where the animals are eating grass, so anything utilizing pasture is a huge opportunity long term. Down the road, there will be major growth in import substitution."

"The goat specialty cheeses are experiencing tremendous growth," says Ken Strunk, CEO, Jackson-Mitchell, Inc., manufacturer of Meyenberg Goat Milk Products, Turlock, CA. "This is fueled by expanded sets in the stores and menu offerings at fine restaurants. Goat specialty cheese offers even more differentiation to a category once

packed with commodity products."

## Geography Matters

Europe has long prided itself on the terroir that creates each cheese's characteristics, and American cheesemakers have begun to tout the geography that make their cheeses so special.

Marilyn Wilkinson, director of national product communications, Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board (WMMB), Madison, WI, explains, "Wisconsin specialty cheese production was 387 million pounds in 2006, or 16 percent of total Wisconsin cheese volume. We're seeing growth in niche cheeses. We have been doing aged cheeses for small distribution for a long time."

"The California Milk Advisory Board [CMAB, Modesto, CA] reported California produced 2,136,700 pounds of cow's milk cheese in 2005, of which around 242 million pounds, was specialty," states Bob Kenney, president of Context Marketing, Sausalito, CA, and CMAB spokesperson.

"Many imported cheeses bear little resemblance to their famed original versions. To keep up production during the tremendous growth in the U.S. and world markets over the last couple of decades, some classic cheeses have clearly been compromised. Those new-wave, mass-market versions still get authentication, but to me that's a softened stance. Integrity-driven cooperatives are now just factories. So for the consumer, the opportunity to pick up genuine farmstead or artisanal cheese comes courtesy of American cheesemakers," says Grotenstein.

"You're seeing a whole host of cheeses that aren't available from foreign countries, and they fit the trend right now. They're original, more local, more seasonal and easy for retailers to promote," relates Wilkinson.

"We have obvious advantages in the fresh cheeses such as crescenza, fresh mozzarella and burrata because of closeness to the market. The limited time and handling makes our cheeses fresher," says Auricchio.

"Buyers can buy what they need every week. That's important in managing the business inventory and cash flow. With imported cheese, when it will be released from customs, whether it will be pulled for sampling or simply having problems at the



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROGUE CREAMERY

**There are American specialty cheeses to appeal to every palate.**

border makes for a less predictable ordering process. We don't have that problem," states Allison Hooper, co-owner and co-founder of Vermont Butter and Cheese Company, Websterville, VT, and ACS president.

American cheesemakers are poised to take advantage of the buy-local phenomenon that is catching on in this country.

"American cheeses resonate in the marketplace that is interested in buying local products, understanding the integrity of ingredients and knowing who the producer

is. Chefs who are taking the pledge of educating consumers about food and sustainable production and the environment need to find their ingredients locally and regionally from the United States," Hooper continues.

"Retailers are starting to embrace buying locally. American cheeses are getting a lot of press and including them makes the retailer timely — with or ahead of the curve," notes Tim Smith, specialty cheese and gourmet foods category manager, The Kroger Company, based in Cincinnati, OH.

"Bringing the domestic producer closer to the consumer creates the ultimate contract — you can come to the farm and see that everything was true," says Cheez-Sorce's McNaughton.

"On the other hand, we are up against generations of experience, knowledge and infrastructure. The thing we hear more and more is, 'Why are American cheeses more expensive than European? They should be less.' The cost of producing the alternative milk — goat, sheep, water buffalo — is more than in Europe, so raw material cost is higher. The scale of operation in Europe allows the per-pound cost of cheese to be less. There's a difference of many years of financing and investment and a different economy of scale," explains Hooper.

### The Art Of The Sale

"I call pricing the elephant in the room, and it doesn't go away. When [American] cheese is priced substantially above imported cheeses, it requires hand selling. Someone has to stand in front of the consumer in the store and tell the story," states Carole Palmer, owner, Good Taste Marketing Services, Bethesda, MD. "Success for small-production artisan and farmstead cheeses begins with chefs in high-end restaurants who are naming or 'branding' them on their menus. When it comes to cheese, local means American artisan cheese, and supporting local means being inclusive of the fantastic cheesemakers throughout this country," says Palmer.

"As long as we remain a niche product, our first relationship has to be with the trade, where there is still a fear factor of not knowing how to pronounce a name or not knowing the cheese type. The cheese demo tasting opportunity remains the most effective way to gain sales in retail," states Vermont Butter and Cheese's Hooper.

"Offering customers a taste of cheeses at the counter — especially those they have not had before — is likely to increase sales," says Context Marketing's Kenney. "Fifty-three percent of consumers CMAB surveyed said the ability to sample a cheese is the most important factor influencing their purchase of specialty cheese for the first time."

"Create occasions to pique consumer interest," advises Wilkinson. WMMB just unveiled a toolbox offering retailers themed promotions through the year. "Meet the Cheesemaker brings a master cheesemaker into stores. Bringing in a Mammoth Cheddar — they are at least 75 pounds — is a show stopper for shoppers. HEB's Central Market [Austin, TX] featured a 12,500-pound Mammoth Cheddar at its recent Southlake store opening."



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## What's In A Name?

**T**he key to naming a cheese is creating a moniker that customers remember.

"Naming either follows a company or brand name as a focus, differentiated by flavor or type, or an original name, perhaps quirky. Either approach can work well. The key in the specialty cheese category is quality," according to Ken Strunk, CEO of Jackson-Mitchell, Inc., manufacturer of Meyenberg Goat Milk Products, Turlock, CA.

"Twenty years ago, those of us who started making goat cheese called it chèvre because there was no American point of reference for goat cheese," says Allison Hooper, co-owner and co-founder of Vermont Butter and Cheese Company, Websterville, VT.

Naming a cheese after its European cousin

today "can be a mistake, disrespectful even. Many cheeses are quite different from their inspiration — you wouldn't recognize them as the same cheese," notes Neville McNaughton, president, CheezSorce, LLC, Davisville, MO.

"By having an original name, you get away from that expectation and the consumer appreciates a cheese for its own merits," explains Marilyn Wilkinson, director of national product communications, Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board (WMMB), Madison, WI.

Gorgonzola is an E.U. protected name, but legality aside, blue cheese production has grown so substantially the Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association, Madison, WI, created a competition class exclusively for Gorgonzola.

"Except for a few cheeses so widely in cir-

ulation that to name them something else would really be inaccurate, I think names should be original. These are items produced in the United States and they shouldn't be afraid of having that out there," claims Tim Smith, specialty cheese and gourmet foods category manager, The Kroger Company, based in Cincinnati, OH.

"An original name is an opportunity for the cheesemaker to provide information on the label. It is also an opportunity for retailers to sample these cheeses and cross-merchandise them. There are great benefits for cheesemakers to build their brand, but it takes marketing and product promotion. Those can be cooperative between the retailer and cheesemaker," says Wilkinson. **DB**

"Everyone wants to know 'What's this food and where does it come from?' and it is the perfect trend for the cheese industry. The cheesemaker coming into the store to meet people, bringing pictures of the farms and animals emotionally involves consumers. That connection sells cheese," says Sara Hill, national sales manager, Carr Valley Cheese,

La Valle, WI, and board member of the Dairy Business Innovation Center, Madison, WI.

"We show European cheese as cheese we've always loved, and say, 'Now try this.' We compare traditional cheese styles side by side with American artisanal cheese because we want people to realize the caliber of cheeses coming out of the United States.

We do vertical Cheddar-tasting with cheeses such as Fiscalini from California, Carr Valley from Wisconsin, Cabot and Crafton from Vermont — all the same age. It shows people what the differences are. Retailers can teach the customer about these nuances of flavor," she explains.

"Stores that do a good job inviting con-

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sumers into their cheese departments understand it takes more than a passive demo to acknowledge the passion that went into the cheese," states Jay Allison, vice president of sales and marketing, Tillamook County Creamery Association, Tigard, OR. "One of the advantages of American specialty cheese is it is somewhat regional. You can enhance sales by getting to know the cheesemaker or cheese distributor — they are really helping the specialty cheese to market."

A new book by Jeff Roberts, the *Atlas of American Artisan Cheese*, profiles 345 artisan and farmstead producers in 43 states. "There used to be only Steven Jenkins' book. Today we have Laura Werlin, Max McCalman, Janet Fletcher and now Jeff Roberts doing the Atlas," says Carr Valley's Hill.

### Unsurpassed Variety

"We see growth in the areas of exotic flavors in cheese such as savory spices, fruits, salts, smoke flavor and herbs. Washed rinds are also a very popular trend. The American palate is embracing complex, sophisticated tastes when it comes to cheese," says Linda Hook, vice president of marketing, DCI Cheese Company, Richfield, WI.

CMAB research supports the power of flavor. "The single biggest thing that drives purchase is flavor. Consumers like big flavors — very different from what you would have found 10 years ago," says Context Marketing's Kenney.

"Having a commitment and a broad array requires knowledge behind the cheese. Each is different and has qualities unique to its place. The challenge is to understand and be connected to each and every one of those cheeses that you choose to offer. Packaging can be a challenge. I've seen some innovative packaging alternatives that are aesthetically pleasing and healthful for the cheese, allowing it to breathe," says David Gremmels, co-owner and co-cheesemaker of Rogue Creamery, Central Point, OR, and ACS vice president.

"Don't feel obligated to have every cheese in your store — the price for choice is low turnover. The goal should be high volume and high turnover so every cheese is great by the time the consumer gets it. There is also room for salesmanship. I'm a big fan of Ari Weinzweig [Zingerman's, Ann Arbor, MI] because Zingerman's has such a good way of interacting with its clientele, but you need salespeople who are well versed," says CheezSorce's McNaughton.

"Being focused is very important. You have to be able to sell the things you buy. The key to being successful at retail at any level is not stepping outside your capabilities," says Union Market's Grotenstein. **DB**



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# Specialty Cheese World Update

By Jacqueline Ross Lieberman

Specialty cheeses from around the world continue to grow in popularity here in the United States, despite rising prices.

"From the numbers I've seen, the marketplace seems to have a growth of 15 percent a year, which is pretty healthy growth," says Michael Domingues, vice president of marketing for Woolwich Dairy, Inc., located in Orangeville, ON, Canada.

Jean-Louis Carbonnier, representative for the Comté Cheese Association in the United States, believes the number of upscale supermarkets increasing their selections of specialty cheeses has much to do with that. "The landscape has changed dramatically when it comes to the finer cheeses," he says. Not only are consumers finding a more choices but also, he says, "These stores are, in some ways, playing a role in educating consumers about these products. Whole Foods and stores like these are very keen on educating their consumers. At Trader Joe's, they have very good signs in their stores so that consumers will have a little bit of guidance."

And, he adds, "There are more and more cheese classes and seminars available around the country."

At the same time, "There's been more

initiative from the European community in educating the American public," according to Cesare Gallo, president, Savello USA,

**An increasingly sophisticated buying public has spurred the growth of this important category segment.**

Inc., Hanover Township, PA, importers of Italian cheeses and fine Italian foods.

"Their palates are definitely becoming more sophisticated," says Domingues of American consumers. "That has a big impact. Customers are more traveled today, better educated. The Food Network is popular. People are entertaining more at home and sharing the experiences they've had abroad with their friends. It's great to see they're willing to spend more and get a higher quality cheese."

Some argue that, although more Americans are educated about specialty cheese, most still have a lot to learn. "We come from an industrial food mentality, where quality and consistency are equated. That is not

what an artisanal product is," says Nancy Radke, president, Ciao LTD, Syracuse, NY, and director of the United States Information offices for the Consorzio Parmigiano-Reggiano and Cooperative Produttori Latte e Fontina. "Until Americans truly understand that artisan food has a range of possibility, you're going to be fighting an uphill battle."

This is not necessarily bad news, as the market for specialty cheeses could potentially grow for a very long time, assuming more Americans will learn to appreciate them.

## The Cost Of Importing

The weakening American dollar makes importing cheeses more expensive than in the past. "Clearly, the dollar has lost a lot of value against the Euro. It means all European cheeses have become more expensive for importers," says Carbonnier.

"The closing gap between the Canadian dollar and the U.S. dollar has had a huge impact on us," reports Domingues. In order to combat high prices, Woolwich recently added an operation in Wisconsin. "It's been a big challenge for us, as it has been for many here in Canada. It doesn't impact sales as much as it impacts the cost of doing business. It forces us to run a leaner operation."

"Sales are not dropping back, but it does put a lot more pressure on the companies," says Radke. "Importers are not buying in the quantities they have in the past, just to make sure they don't get burned."

Many retailers choose to keep the cost of imported cheeses relatively low for consumers in order to make sales. "When the prices are higher, the margins are lower," notes Gallo.

On the other hand, the weak dollar means many foreign cheesemakers and associations can get more bang-for-the-buck when it comes to advertising and promotion, prompting more campaigns like EAT European Authentic Tastes, which sought to educate Americans about European geographical designations. "Advertising is definitely on the upside," says Paolo Grandjacquet, president, Saratoga Marketing Group, Saratoga Springs, NY, representative of Grana Padano in the United States.

*Continued on page 58*



Even a weak dollar cannot dampen U.S. consumers' desire for imported cheese.



# CONSORZIO PER LA TUTELA

## The Importance Of Maturing The Cheese

**Grana Padano** is the most popular Protected Designation of Origin (PDO or DOP in Italy) cheese in the world. It is still made only with milk from the Po Valley, in Northern Italy, following a traditional recipe first created by the monks that lived in the region around 1000 AD. The monks first started producing **Grana Padano** as a way of using left-over milk. After months of ripening, the cheese became harder in consistency and grainy in texture and, in the process, the flavors and aromas developed.

There are a number of strict quality checks in place while the cheese is maturing in the facilities. Each and every wheel is inspected, cleaned and turned every 15 days. Only after a minimum of nine months and subject to a number of strict tests can the wheels that pass be granted **Grana Padano** status and be branded with the logo.

## Age Sementation: A New Chapter

When making a great cheese, aging is important; as time passes it undergoes a range of physical, chemical, and microbiological changes that affect flavor and taste.

**Grana Padano** PDO takes at least nine months to mature, but it often arrives in stores around the

world at 15 or 16 months.

For many years, only cheese sellers have been educating the consumers on the difference in taste, flavor and texture between the different stages of maturity.

Recently, the Consorzio Tutela **Grana Padano** established the **Grana Padano** PDO "segmentation", backed by Italian and European Community authorities to help consumers chose the right age profile according to their particular taste.

Now it will be easier to choose broadly from three different age profiles depending on personal taste and usage - **Grana Padano** PDO, **Grana Padano** PDO aged over 16 months, and **Grana Padano** PDO. "Riserva" (over 20 months).

## How Will These Grana Padano Cheeses Be Branded?

**Grana Padano** PDO: 9 to 16 months



The trademark on the cheese wheels identifies them as **GRANA PADANO** PDO. Without this mark, the cheese is not allowed to be called or sold as **Grana Padano** PDO.

The popular, yellow-diamond-shaped mark must also appear on the packaging of wedges and grated cheese so that consumers know they are purchasing genuine **Grana Padano** PDO. This logo can be reproduced only by approval of Consorzio di Tutela **Grana Padano** and guarantees that the content of each

package originates only from genuine whole wheels.

The most noticeable characteristics of this type of cheese are its grainy texture and pale color; it has quite a delicate creamy taste.

**Grana Padano** PDO is usually served in chunks during a meal or as an appetizer but it can also be used grated on a variety of dishes. This age of **Grana Padano** matches perfectly with young, fruity chilled white wine.

**Grana Padano over 16 months** **OLTRE 16 MESI**

Consumers who prefer a more mature cheese must look on the packaging for the **Grana Padano** PDO logo and the specific age indication "Oltre 16 mesi" (over 16 months).

For this type of cheese, aged well beyond the minimum allowed for **Grana Padano** PDO, production costs rise, which justifies a higher price.

It reveals a soft straw-yellow color and a more significant grainy texture. With the aging process, there is less internal moisture so the cheese becomes more crumbly which means it can easily be used as shavings or slivers. This cheese contains scents of milk, cream and butter, but also of dried fruits. The **Grana Padano** ripened beyond the 16 months calls for a slightly tannic wine, a red with a moderate intensity and character, yet still young and fresh.

**Grana Padano Riserva**



**Grana Padano** RISERVA is aged for at least 20



# DEL FORMAGGIO GRANA PADANO



months but can reach a maturing time of 24 months.

**Grana Padano RISERVA** is the most mature of the segmentation and aimed at the most food savvy consumers who are looking for the very best in quality and taste.

Since 2005, **Grana Padano** PDO wheels will receive the extra branding "RISERVA" only after extra tests on its external appearance, the cheese's structure, color and flavor have been requested by the producer.

As for the best **Grana Padano** the guidelines and additional checks for the RISERVA cheese needs to display very specific characteristics which include:

- "Scelto sperlato," indicating that the wheels is immune from any type of external and internal imperfection
- Evident grainy texture with a clear flaky structure
- Pale yellow, hay-like, homogeneous color
- No abnormal smell
- Delicate and fragrant, yet distinctive, taste

Either grated or used as part of recipes, **Grana Padano RISERVA** is the 'guest of honor' at any dining room table. The **Grana Padano "RISERVA"** looks more mature than its younger counterparts as it is slightly darker in color. Increased aging gives it a richer and fuller taste though never overpowering. Also, it reveals aromas of nuts,

fruit and hay.

The wine to accompany **Grana Padano "RISERVA"** should emphasize the unique characteristics, but not overwhelm it, wines that are soft but tannic, with medium alcohol content work well.

RISERVA works very well to round off a meal particularly when paired with sweet dessert wines ("passito" for example) or served as part of a cheese board with nuts, fruits such as figs and chutneys.

## Other Elements On The Packaging

Beside the yellow mark of **Grana Padano** PDO and information relating to its age, the following should be displayed on the packaging:

- The authorization number for such type of packaging allowed by the Consorzio di Tutela **Grana Padano**
- The mark D.O.P. (PDO) with which the European Union recognizes **Grana Padano** PDO as a quality product and guarantees its origin and production method.



- The term "Garantito dal Ministero delle Politiche Agricole Alimentari e Forestali ai sensi dell'art. 10 del Reg (CEE) 501/06." (Guaranteed by the Ministry of Agricultural Food and Forestry Art. 10, CEE Registry 501/06).

*According to the Grana Padano Consortium data compiled in 2006, Grana Padano is the most consumed PDO cheese in the world, with close to 30,000 tons exported annually.*



For more information on  
**Grana Padano,**  
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PHOTO COURTESY OF WOOLWICH DAIRY

**Most imported cheeses are characterized by tradition and quality.**

*Continued from page 55*

But Woolwich's Domingues argues smaller margins have meant less money is available for companies like his to spend on promotion. "You definitely become more efficient at spending your promotional dollars," he says.

### More Americans Understand PDOs

The promotional dollars companies and associations have spent appear to be paying off. "Americans are becoming more aware of the PDO [protected designation of origin] system," says Ciao's Radke. "The EAT program, in three years, did a lot of work to increase people's awareness."

Still, says Comté's Carbonnier, "I think there's a lot of education to be done."

"American consumers are just starting to learn about PDO," Saratoga's Grandjacquet believes. "The trade knows what they're buying. The consumer will spend more for certain names, but unless you're a foodie, you don't know what PDO is."

There is a great deal of incentive to continue educating the American public. "The Europeans are really frustrated over the infringement of intellectual property. It's kind of an insult to have that name ripped off," notes Radke.

But while cheesemakers may complain, some argue the public does not suffer from buying similar cheeses made in other regions. "I don't think it's as much a consumer issue as it is an economic issue for that region," says Domingues. "It's all part of the marketing. As a consumer, to me, it's really not rele-

vant where it's made — unless that affects the end flavor."

But, says Grandjacquet, "It confuses the consumer."

"The PDO system is not just what you call it. It also has the quality standards," argues Radke. "It shows that it has met certain quality standards that are up held by the European Union."

"The consumer should have a right to know what he buys, if it's a regional product or it's not. Asiago and other cheeses made outside of Europe — they really don't represent the product that's made in Italy," argues Savello's Gallo.

"We would be outraged to see somebody in Sicily growing 'Florida' oranges. If you look at it that way, it seems very absurd," says Radke. Some artisan cheesemakers in the United States agree and, in fact, would rather be known for their unique cheeses, instead of lumping them together with similar styles from Europe. I think, among American cheesemakers, there's a real thrust to come up with an original name. I think that's really a ter-

rific development among America products," says Radke.

Europe is just beginning to recognize and protect non-European products sold in Europe, such as Napa Valley wines. "They want to make it [PDO] open to everybody, and I think that's very positive," says Radke, noting the European Union is not the only place to protect the names of products from other areas. "The other one is Colombian coffee. Their office is open to the world."

If Europe begins protecting the names of American cheeses, "I think we'll see more companies taking advantage of this over the next few years," predicts Radke. "Especially if they feel they want to export."

### The Ripple Effect Of Food Scares

Due to recent outbreaks and recalls of many trusted foods, some wonder if Americans are becoming more worried about the safety of imported cheeses. "It's still something that's not completely on consumers' radar," says Radke. But, she believes, "We will see Americans become more and more aware of it. If there are many more food outbreaks — and there probably will be — we're going to hit critical mass. Things like peanut butter? Dog food? The more things like this happen, the more aware we are."

"Food scares have opened the eyes of not only the end-users but also of the retailers," adds Woolwich's Domingues. "Retailers have realized it's not just the company's or manufacturer's problem when that happens. They're very careful about what they put in their stores."

So far, there have not been large-scale recalls of cheese. "We haven't seen any particular issue, knock on wood," says Comté's Carbonnier. "But everyone is very aware of food safety."

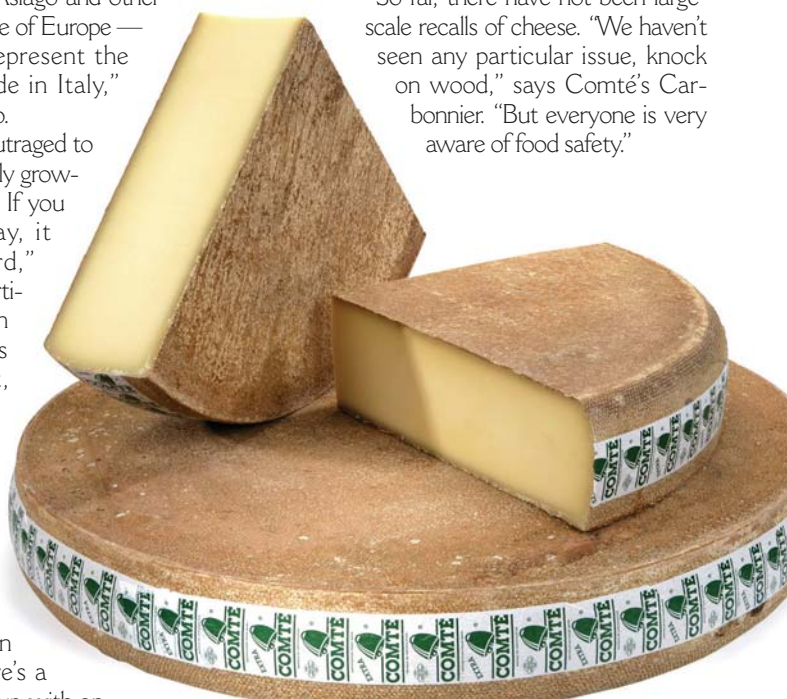


PHOTO COURTESY OF COMTÉ CHEESE ASSOCIATION



"Cheese has really been shown as a safe food," says Ciao's Radke. "Aged cheeses are really very safe. The worry with soft cheeses is listeria, and that goes for raw as well as pasteurized."

**EUROPE'S PDO PRODUCTS, WHILE USUALLY NOT CERTIFIED ORGANIC, CERTAINLY APPEAL TO CONSUMERS LOOKING FOR NATURAL CHEESES.**

Although PDO cheeses from Europe are often made with unpasteurized milk, they have strict regulations to prevent the bacterial growth that could cause illness. For example, says Radke, "With Parmigiano-Reggiano, the milk has to be used within two hours of milking. When the European Union was established, they came down on a lot of things."

"If the product is imported and it has the right certification, I don't see why it should be a concern," says Savello's Gallo.

In general, the high quality of specialty cheeses has meant fewer food-safety issues. "Consumers who buy Comté and other artisanal products are sophisticated for the most part. They are looking for quality products," says Carbonnier.

This is especially true for European cheeses. "Europe still doesn't have the mass-scale agriculture that creates situations where you don't have as much control and oversight," according to Radke. "With Parmigiano-Reggiano, you'll have a cheese-making dairy and maybe five family farms that supply it with milk. There's this really close relationship."

#### **Tightening Borders**

While inspections aimed at stopping terrorist activity have slowed the importation process somewhat, most agree the tightening U.S. borders do not have much of an effect on the availability of specialty cheeses. "I remember when they first introduced the bio-terrorism act and it made all the Europeans crazy, but I haven't heard much since,"

## **The Rise Of Localism**

**L**ocalism has taken hold as the latest trend in ethical eating, and those in the know have several reasons to want food that has not traveled the globe to reach their plates. "Personally, it's really worrisome to me to find out how much of our food is coming from another country. When we don't have the ability to feed our population in a time of crisis, we're really in trouble," says Nancy Radke, president, Ciao LTD, Syracuse, NY. "However, I think it's a very small percentage of people who are aware of that."

At the same time, she says, "I don't think it's completely sinful and rotten to get food from other countries. It's a real balancing act. There is no black and white — there are shades of gray. I think this is an issue that we have to kind of grapple with."

When it comes to artisan cheese producers in the United States, "I think localism could be very good for them," says Radke. "But I don't think it's going to cut out Parmigiano-Reggiano or other European cheeses."

"Sure, local cheese has to be taken into consideration," says Cesare Gallo, president, Savello USA, Inc., Hanover Township, PA. "It's good to have choices for the consumer. But imported cheeses have a tradition, a quality that is important. Each product is different and has to be recognized for what it is. I truly believe in the originality of each product. Each one has the characteristics from where it's made."

Consumers also tend to stay loyal to the products they know and love, says Michael Domingues, vice president of marketing, Woolwich Dairy, Inc., Orangeville, ON, Canada. "Just because something is locally produced, that's not going to overshadow that you've built a relationship with the customer."

"Customers, as much as they want to eat locally and support the local economy, they want a product that's superior," he adds. "At the end of the day, that's the most important factor — having a great product."

**DB**

says Radke. "Everyone figured out a way to comply."

"It takes some extra time for a product to be cleared," by customs, says Gallo. "Our staff also takes an extra step to make sure our facility is extra safe," he adds, by keeping track of all the people who come into the facility.

"It has definitely become stricter at the U.S./Canadian border, and it's more time consuming to get things across," says Woolwich's Domingues. "But if manufacturers have all their papers in place, then it's not that bad. Unfortunately, that's just the way of life today."

#### **Organics Gain Ground**

While small, the demand for organic and natural cheeses continues to grow. Europe's PDO products, while usually not certified organic, certainly appeal to consumers looking for natural cheeses. For example, "Parmigiano-Reggiano's production is fairly organic. There are no additives or preservatives. If the cows have to be treated with antibiotics, they'll pull them out for a month," says Radke. "Places like Whole Foods look to PDO products as a standard of how to produce food."

For the few European producers who do

become certified organic, "They use it as a marketing niche," she adds.

Many companies are just beginning to add organic offerings to their lines of specialty cheeses. Savello USA recently began importing organic sheep's milk cheese from Sardinia in addition to an organic Trentin Grana it has been selling for years. As more organic cheeses become available, the company plans to add more to its offerings.

However, Gallo agrees organic consumers are a niche market, especially because organic cheeses automatically cost more to produce. "It has a premium. It depends on the product. The products we have cost about 20 percent more."

"I don't think organic is one of those things where it's more hype than reality. It's definitely something we're looking at for the future," says Domingues. "Consumers have more disposable income and they're willing to pay extra money for organics. It has to do with people being better educated and paying more attention to what they're putting into their bodies. I think it's just going to continue to grow. The biggest obstacle is a supply issue. You have to get organic milk to supply that niche market, which is really growing so rapidly. It's really going to be a challenge in itself, I think."

**DB**

# IDDBA Report: Best Basics And Beyond



By  
Sharon Olson

*President  
Olson  
Communications  
Chicago, IL*

The IDDBA show was a wonderland of choices for delis looking for ways to cater to today's fly-by shoppers — those more interested in finding fabulous options for tonight's dinner or grabbing a quick snack than in stocking up on a week's groceries.

Today's deli consumers have redefined cooking, continually raising the bar on the foods that intrigue them.

Exhibitors were ready to please, offering a myriad of options.

**Fresh Chilled:** Consumers seeking convenience are unwilling to compromise on fresh. Refrigerated fully prepared entrées and side dishes fit the bill. Component kits make it easy for delis to create unique recipes for many of the most popular salad items. Some suppliers also offered small-batch products to create special signature dishes that let delis give the impression they have a chef on-premises.

**Fresh, Fast And Handheld:** A vast array of choices was available for deli operators to offer handheld convenience foods with healthfulness and appetite appeal. Hummus and pita chips, sushi, and a wide variety of wraps are perfect for customers looking for a healthful alternative to quick-service restaurants. Fresh, healthful and handheld Asian foods, in particular, appeal to mainstream consumers.

**Classic Comfort:** Varieties of meat loaf, mashed potatoes and tomato soup — from organic to super indulgent — were anything but basic. Real food with authentic ingredients topped the list of items destined to be a hit. Organic products proved healthfulness doesn't mean compromising on real flavor. Spectacularly indulgent gourmet mac-and-cheese varieties made indulgence worth the splurge.

**Handcrafted, Housemade And One Of A Kind:** The appeal of handcrafted artisan cheeses created excitement and energy. Buyers clearly responded to cheesemakers talking about their craft and the distinctive flavor profiles of their cheeses. Operators sought distinctive cheeses in fresh, flavorful, soft-ripened and aged varieties to please a wide range of customers. Premium sliced cheeses and cured meats became a new opportunity to make deli sandwiches a cut above local restaurant menus.

Deli operators had a wide range of resources to offer the appeal of "homemade." Exquisite individual desserts offered a touch of indulgence. Organic speed scratch items like pie shells and broths presented delis with easy ways to create signature natural and organic prepared foods.

**Home Meal Experience:** It's always been about the food; now it's also about the experience. The show offered a wide range of products to help delis compete with meal

assembly centers (MACs), those new competitors that are finding customers eager for their unique offerings of convenience, control and satisfaction in creating a delightful meal experience. MACs market the experience, but consumers return for the convenience.

Delis have the opportunity to match that convenience — providing no-assembly-required meal solutions on a rotating basis for customers who don't even have time to plan a trip to their local MAC. Piggly Wiggly has incorporated Dream Dinners on-site, and McCaffrey Markets has created a meal assembly program called Studio Gourmet.

**Right Size Portions:** Deli operators found many innovative ways to offer the magic of 100-calorie snack portions. Consumers are craving flavor, but they welcome the nutritional and low-cal payback that comes with skipping the temptation of multiple portions in the grocery aisles. Organic soups like creamy tomato and creamy roasted carrot, and natural cheeses in individual portion packs also hit the mark.

Mini-meals and "portions for one or two" bring gourmet sensibility to smaller households craving a restaurant quality meal at home. By filling this niche with small plates, delis can gain a unique advantage over club stores and restaurants.

**Going Green — Balancing Dollars and Desire:** The decision to "go green" is easy from an ethical standpoint. Making it happen can be confusing and difficult, but operators shared ideas and exhibitors presented a range of solutions. It is not necessary to be a mega-company to make a difference. However, any green initiative needs to be credible, appropriate to the company and implemented consistently. If consumer support for companies that are good environmental citizens continues to grow, "going green" is looking like the way to green up the bottom line as well.

**Organic Goes Mainstream:** Organic is going mainstream; savvy operators are marketing great taste and stealth health. Operators found a wide variety of products that allowed delis to offer organic and fair trade products. These options offer consumers added value that is both relevant and reasonably priced.

**Foods With Integrity:** Consumers want to know what's in their food — not just the ingredients, but the entire process. They are willing to pay extra for high-quality food with "integrity." In the deli, the retailer's brand is the one consumers trust. They expect their local store to scrutinize the ingredients and the process. Many exhibitors featured their company's philosophy, farming practices and commitment to sustainability, thus demonstrating their understanding of the importance of consumer trust.

**DB**

The IDDBA show was a wonderland of choices for delis looking for ways to cater to today's fly-by shoppers.



## FDA Takes Steps To Reduce Tomato-Related Foodborne Illness

FDA is beginning a multi-year initiative designed to reduce tomato-related foodborne illness. Over the last decade, fresh and fresh-cut tomatoes have been linked to 12 foodborne illness outbreaks, resulting in 1,840 confirmed cases of illness. The initiative is a collaboration between FDA, state officials in Florida and Virginia, academia, and the produce industry.

Press release:

<http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/NEWS/2007/NEW01651.html>

— Tomato Safety Initiative:

<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/tomsafe.html>

## Bipartisan Bills Would Tighten Food Safety Rules

21. June 07

MLive.com (MI)

David Eggert / Associated Press

<http://www.mlive.com/newsflash/regional/index.ssf?/base/news-45/118246194265610.xml&storylist=newsmichigan>

LANSING, Mich. — Bipartisan bills introduced in the Michigan state legislature would, according to this story, tighten food-safety rules that came under scrutiny when diners got sick from norovirus outbreaks at Michigan restaurants.

The legislation would put model federal food safety guidelines into state law.

Changes include:

- requiring restaurants to have at least one manager who has passed an accredited food safety exam.
- clarifying when ill employees can return to work. Someone with vomiting, diarrhea or a sore throat with fever could not return until 24 hours after the symptoms are gone. An employee with norovirus could not come back until getting permission from regulators and waiting 48 hours after symptoms disappear.
- tightening controls of bare-hand contact with food.

State Rep. Jeff Mayes (Dem., Bay City) sponsor of the bills along with Sen. Gerald Van Woerkom (Rep., Norton Shores), was quoted as saying, "We will help squash the types of high-risk practices that can result in food-borne illnesses such as norovirus outbreaks."

The legislation also would let the Michigan Department of Agriculture create rules for hiring managers and track certification of restaurant managers.

The story notes that in December, at least 52 people got sick from norovirus after eating food catered by a popular Ann Arbor restaurant, Afternoon Delight Cafe.

Lansing-area diners became sick from

norovirus in the past 18 months at an Applebee's, Bravo Cucina Italiana and Carrabba's Italian Grill.

In 2006, the Michigan Department of Community Health recorded 145 norovirus outbreaks that sickened more than 5,000 people. That was about four times the 36 norovirus outbreaks reported in 2005.

## Prevention With Inspections Are Key To Food Safety

21.june 07

FoodProductionDaily USA

George Reynolds

<http://www.foodproductiondaily-usa.com/news/ng.asp?n=77580-asq-inspections-training>

Food safety can only be fought by prevention as well as inspections, according to a report by an influential quality safety body.

The American Society for Quality (ASQ) report could apply pressure to legislators, resulting in more mandatory food safety requirements for processing plants.

## U.S. Government Says It Is NOT Fully Prepared For Possible Bird Flu Outbreak

26 June 2007 10:48:00 GMT

USDA is not fully prepared to cope with an outbreak of the highly pathogenic bird flu virus, a government report said on Monday. "While USDA has made important strides, incomplete planning at the federal and state levels, as well as several unresolved issues, could slow response and delay recovery from an outbreak," the Government Accountability Office said in its 60-page report. Worldwide, the highly pathogenic H5N1 avian influenza virus has killed 191 people since 2003, according to the U.N.'s World Health Organization. The strain has not been found in the United States.

In an effort to prepare for H5N1, USDA rolled out a series of measures including surveillance programs, response plans to the virus and new rules that aim to prevent infected birds and products from being imported. Still, GAO investigators said there is uncertainty between USDA and the Department of Homeland Security as to what role each would take during an emergency. The lack of coordination between the two departments would slow initial responses as they work to figure out their jobs. The report also found that 14 of the 19 state response plans for bird flu reviewed by GAO were incomplete. For example, state plans often failed to include important time frames needed to assess whether they were controlling the virus.

USDA said it accepted the recommenda-

**M**artin Mitchell, technical director of the Refrigerated Foods Association (RFA) and managing director of Certified Laboratories compiles TechNews.



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

tion "to develop additional clarity and definition" between the department and Homeland Security. The agency also vowed to more closely monitor high-pathogenic bird flu response plans to ensure they are appropriate should an outbreak occur. It noted a new rule that required states to develop low-pathogenic plans that must then be reviewed and approved by USDA. Some of the more mild strains can develop into the highly pathogenic virus. GAO said the incomplete state plans were particularly troublesome since states typically are the first to respond to a suspected outbreak.

Christopher Doering, Reuters

## FDA Issues Alert On Chinese Seafood

June 29, 2007

By Andrew Martin

FDA today issued an alert challenging imports of five major types of farm-raised seafood from China, including shrimp and catfish, because testing found recurrent contamination from carcinogens and antibiotics.

The alert means the fish will be allowed for sale in the United States only if testing proves that it is free of those substances.

While the federal agency stopped short of an outright ban, the alert is hugely significant because China is a major source of imported seafood in the United States, accounting for 21 percent of total imports.

The United States imports 81 percent of the seafood that is consumed here.

"There's been a continued pattern of violation with no signs of abatement," said David Acheson, the FDA's assistant commissioner for food safety. He insisted that there was no imminent danger to human health but that prolonged consumption could cause health problems.

Other varieties affected by the ban are eel, basa (related to catfish) and dace (related to carp).

# Blast From The Past

**I**n the early 1800s, Innocenzo Fiorucci opened a store in Norcia, Italy, in order to pursue a dream of providing the finest quality specialty meat products to his community. Using long cherished family recipes and, with the help of old-world artisans, Innocenzo and his family produced what have become the best-loved, and No. 1 selling, deli meats in Italy.

His grandson Ferruccio Fiorucci — at 81 he is still involved in the day-to-day-business — remains faithful to Innocenzo's passion for the old-world artistry. Although Fiorucci Specialty Meats, now also made in the United States, uses the latest tools and technology to maintain strict quality control, it still uses premium hand-trimmed meats, seasoned with imported spices and carefully aged to create delicacies like their sweet Riserva prosciutto, rich mortadella and delicious salami.

The industry leader in both Europe and North America, Fiorucci recently introduced a collection of premium cooked and roasted products that not only would make Innocenzo proud but also address today's consumer's demand for "real" food — meaning traditional, home-made-style items with authentic or natural ingredients. Sold under the Rostello brand, these new products continue the tradition of quality that has established Fiorucci as Italy's No. 1.



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

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