

# DELI BUSINESS

MARKETING MERCHANDISING MANAGEMENT PROCUREMENT

DEC./JAN. 2009 \$14.95

## Retail Trends Reflect Changing Economy

### ALSO INSIDE

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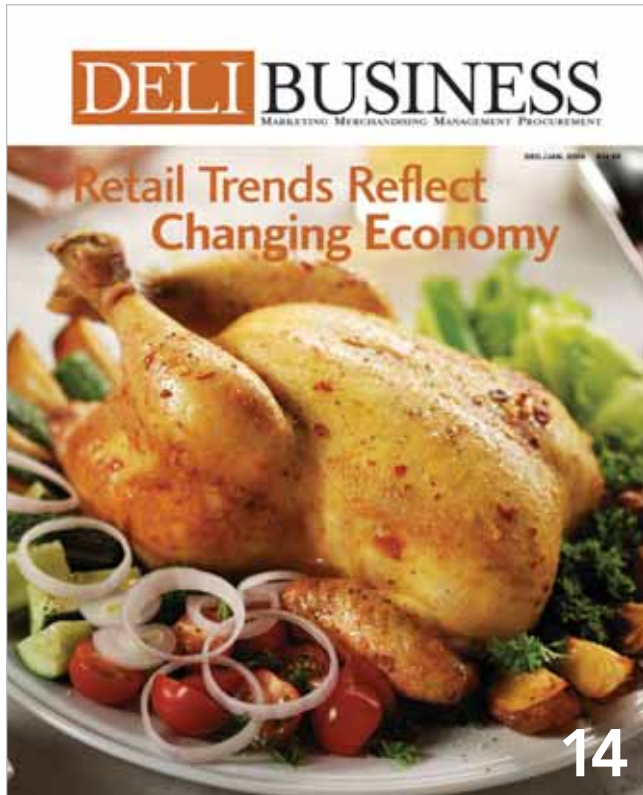
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## ANNOUNCING CHEESE CONNOISSEUR



Bundled with DELI BUSINESS is the first issue of Cheese Connoisseur, a lifestyle publication providing sophisticated, well-educated foodies and industry professionals with information about specialty cheeses, celebrity cheesemakers and chefs, wines, travel opportunities and complementary foods and beverages.

In addition to distributing to consumers exclusively through food retailers, the unique strategic distribution model offers access to upscale and affluent homeowners, consumers and professional decision makers.

For more information or  
your own personal subscription go to  
[www.cheeseconnoisseur.com](http://www.cheeseconnoisseur.com) or call  
Lee Smith at 561-994-1118.

## COMING NEXT ISSUE IN FEB/MAR 2009

### CONSUMER RESEARCH

DELI BUSINESS magazine's second consumer research study reveals interesting trends and statistics on brand loyalty among deli customers and examines the effectiveness of sampling and suggestive selling by deli workers. Learn how store- and private-label brands stack up to national brands and how consumers view the difference.

### FEATURE STORIES

Asian Foods  
Grab and Go

### PREPARED FOODS

Barbecue

### MERCHANDISING REVIEWS

Salsa  
Fresh Pasta  
Indian Foods

### DELI MEATS

Pre-sliced

### PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES

Packaging  
Food Bars

### SPECIALTY CHEESES

Cheddar Cheeses  
Dutch Cheeses

### COMING IN APRIL/MAY 2009

Read about the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association's 45th Annual Seminar & Expo complete with aisle-by-aisle directory of exhibitors and complete information about seminars and speakers.

### SUBSCRIPTION & READER SERVICE INFO

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## Announcements



### SUPPLIER OF THE YEAR

PWP Industries, a food packaging thermoformer with plants in California, West Virginia and Texas, received the Supplier of the Year for 2007 award from Bunzl Distribution North America. Bunzl, a leading supplier of outsourced food packaging and cleaning and safety products, evaluates vendors on several criteria, including customer service, logistics and sales representation. To be eligible, a vendor must be national in scope and cross several Bunzl business segments.

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



### REGGIE AWARD

Lactalis USA, New York, NY, received a prestigious silver Reggie award for its summer 2007 Bon Appetit and Bon Voyage Rata-touille cheese promotion. The Reggie awards, sponsored by the Promotion Marketing Association (PMA), New York, NY, recognize integrated marketing campaigns in the areas of creativity, execution and results. Lactalis USA mixed point-of-sale materials, online entries and television ads to reach brokers, retailers and consumers.

[www.lactalis-usa.com](http://www.lactalis-usa.com)



### MEDAL WINNER

Sartori Foods, Plymouth, WI, captured three medals at the World Dairy Expo Championship Dairy Product Contest, sponsored by the Wisconsin Dairy Products Association, Madison, WI. Sartori Reserve SarVecchio Parmesan and Sartori Reserve Rosemary & Olive Oil Asiago received first-place awards, while Sartori Reserve Dolcina Gorgonzola earned a third-place ribbon. SarVecchio Parmesan has won 17 awards since 2000, making it the most decorated American-made Parmesan cheese.

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



### ENGLISH CHEDDAR AVAILABLE IN MIDWEST

Wyke Farms, Somerset, England, the largest independent British cheesemaker, is now marketing its products in the Midwest, the first time the award-winning cheeses and butter have been available this side of the pond. Retailers in Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Ohio and Wisconsin now carry the company's traditional farmhouse Cheddar and butter, developed more than 100 years ago by family matriarch Grandma Ivy.

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

## New Products



### A SPECIAL PIZZA MIXER

Globe Food Equipment Co., Dayton, OH, unveils the SP62P Pizza Maker, a 60-quart machine that can handle up to 50 pounds of flour (75-pound batch size) and can maximize mixing time. It features a 3-horsepower engine, rigid cast-iron body ensuring years of durability and stainless steel bowl guard with built-in ingredient chute. The SP62P offers two fixed speeds, power bowl lift and 15-minute timer. Also ideal for mixing bread and roll dough, it comes with a 2-year warranty.

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



### NON-STICK FOODSERVICE FOIL

Reynolds Food Packaging, with main offices in Richmond, VA, and Lincolnshire, IL, brings to market Reynolds Non-Stick Foodservice Foil. This revolutionary foil is cured with a food-safe coating, which precludes the need for manual spraying or oiling. The new foil is designed for efficient, convenient use in foodservice kitchens: It's easy to dispense, reduces cleanup and is safe for serving, storing, freezing and cooking up to 650° F.

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



### TAMPER-PROOF GREEN PACKAGING

Wilkinson Industries, Fort Calhoun, NE, hopes to revolutionize single-serve portions of fresh fruits, vegetables and other foods with its tamper-resistant FreshServe to-go cups for deli applications. The environmentally friendly containers are made from a sustainable natural plant biopolymer and can be topped with three different lid types. The patented, seal-lock closure precludes the need for shrink bands, saving on landfill waste and food processing time.

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



### PROBIOTIC CHEESES

DCI Cheese Co., Richfield, WI, launched the company's first probiotic cheese line under its County Line brand of specialty cheeses. The new probiotic cheeses come in four flavors: Pepper Jack, Colby Jack, Monterey Jack and Mild Cheddar. Probiotics work by introducing live bacterial strains into the digestive tract, restoring the balance of microflora in the system. Digestive health is a key nutritional trend that is becoming increasingly important to consumers.

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

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



# DELI WATCH

## Products



### MUSTARD/KRAUT FUSION

Renowned chef and nationally known produce representative Tony Merola presents his latest culinary creation, Must-A-Kraut, a unique blend of mustard, sauerkraut and horseradish. Available in both 13-ounce consumer and 1-gallon foodservice sizes, Must-A-Kraut makes a unique sauce for grilled fish, beef or pork roasts, as well as a topping for baked potatoes and other vegetables. It also turns an ordinary hot dog or sandwich into a gastronomic adventure. [www.cheftony.com](http://www.cheftony.com)



### SAVORY PANINI ROLLS

Norpaco Gourmet Foods, New Britain, CT, continues to add to its delicious appetizer line with its Panini Rolls. Produced in four flavors—prosciutto, pepperoni, sopressata and salami with sun-dried tomato and basil—the rolls are an exquisite combination of Mozzarella cheese and other ingredients to make pinwheel presentations when sliced and served. Panini Rolls are available in 6- and 8-ounce packages, as well as a 16-ounce foodservice size. [www.norpaco.com](http://www.norpaco.com)



### SPREADABLE OLIVE OIL

On the cutting edge of flavored olive oils for years, A L'Olivier announces its unique line of spreadable olive oils. A L'Olivier combines 88 percent olive oil with other all-natural ingredients to create a thick and healthy trans fat-free spread perfect to replace butter or margarine on breads, crackers, pastas and much more. Spreadables come in four tempting flavors: natural, basil, garlic and herbs and lemon and truffle. [www.demedici.com](http://www.demedici.com)



### SANDWICHES ON THE GO

Johnsonville Foodservice, Sheboygan Falls, WI, just made breakfast, lunch or snack time easier with its hand-held sandwiches, portable meals featuring two flavors of Johnsonville's famed sausage—Smoky Cheddar or Smoky Brat—enrobed in soft-baked rolls. Perfect for deli programs, hand-held sandwiches require only initial heating in a microwave. Their special packaging keeps the bun hot, soft and fresh up to four hours. [www.johnsonvillefoodservice.com](http://www.johnsonvillefoodservice.com)



### CHIMI ROLLS

Ruiz Foods, Dinuba, CA, offers consumers easy on-the-go eating with its dashboard-friendly El Monterey Chimi Rolls. The 4-ounce chimichangas combine quality meats and cheeses, Mexican spices and freshly baked tortillas in two authentic Mexican flavors: peppery steak, potato and cheese, and chicken, cheese and green chiles. Rolled tightly with a special end fold, the products are perfect for the grab-and-go hot case. [www.elmonterey.com](http://www.elmonterey.com)



### HISPANIC CHEESES

Castro Cheese Co., Houston, TX, presents La Vaquita brand Panela Fresca and Cuajada Fresca: flavorful, traditional and all-natural Mexican cheeses made-to-order daily. Panela Fresca is a mild, pressed-curd, non-cultured white cheese, and Cuajada Fresca is a fresh, crumbly cheese whose name means "fresh curd." Both resonate with the growing Hispanic population of the United States, as well as the increasingly adventurous palate of the American consumer. [www.castrocheese.com](http://www.castrocheese.com)



### BIODEGRADABLE PACKAGING

PWP Industries, Vernon, CA, has launched AgroResin Rainbow, a colorful new series of biodegradable packaging. Available in many shapes, sizes and colors, the line is water and grease resistant, permeable to air and microwavable. The spectrum of eye-catching colors will complement any food presentation, and the environmentally friendly packaging is perfect for perishable produce, quick service, frozen and deli service applications. [www.pwpindustries.com](http://www.pwpindustries.com)



### SAFETY STORAGE BIN

Rubbermaid, Huntersville, NC, a leader in productivity foodservice solutions, is showcasing a new line of durable ingredient safety storage bins. The system revitalizes the company's ingredient bins with additional end-user benefits, including two new smaller capacities, dual-position lids enabling one-handed operation, integrated safety portioning scoop and new safety storage cart. The patent-pending lids even allow the units to be stacked. [www.rubbermaidfoodservice.com](http://www.rubbermaidfoodservice.com)

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by Jim Prevor, Editor-in-Chief

## Small Formats And Ready-Meals

It is increasingly obvious the future of the supermarket in the United States rests, in no small part, on the future of prepared foods. Tesco, with the launch of its Fresh & Easy division in the United States, laid down the gauntlet: In its view, the future of American retailing was European. And, specifically, British.

As is the European practice, consumers would visit food stores almost daily to pick up fresh food; in line with the British practice, this vision sees American consumers buying "ready-meals" to eat that night or over the next 24 to 48 hours. Because visits would be so frequent, the stores would have to be very convenient — defined as very close to home and quick to shop for just that night's dinner. This logically implies many very small stores.

Thus we have Fresh & Easy. Its rollout is now slowed, but the concept is still clear: Lots of 10,000-square-foot stores given a distinctive *raison d'être* by ready-meals, even though they have produce and bakery, meat and poultry, sliced deli meats and cheeses and a core grocery offering.

Wal-Mart has jumped on the bandwagon with its Marketside concept. Slightly larger, more "Americanized" with a service deli built around Dietz & Watson product and a grocery offering built around the brands Americans grew up with, it is a concept with much to admire. Yet it is a concept whose reason for existence also hinges on consumer acceptance of ready-meals.

So do Americans want ready-meals?

To some extent, they have been buying them for years. Supermarket deli departments offer rotisserie chicken, fried chicken and pizza programs — and these items sell well. Indeed, one of the peculiarities of the Fresh & Easy concept is that it has virtually disregarded rotisserie and fried chicken as well as pizza.

Retailers in urban areas have long provided prepared foods of various types with the upscale Manhattanites not that dissimilar from their peers in London when it comes to eating and shopping habits. Across the country, upscale and specialty retailers, from Whole Foods to HEB's Central Market to the new Publix GreenWise, do a big business in prepared foods of various kinds.

Still, the vast majority of Americans have shown little interest in shopping as they do in London. The British shopper is different from the American shopper — and for some very understandable reasons.

Tesco is under the impression supply will create its own demand — or put another way, Americans don't buy ready-meals to the extent consumers do in the United Kingdom because Americans are not offered a large selection of high-quality ready-meals. There is something to this point: If every U.S. supermarket offered as extensive a ready-meal offering as the typical

U.K. Tesco, Sainsbury's, Marks & Spencer, Waitrose, ASDA or Morrison's, many more ready-meals would be sold here. But the reasoning is rather circular. After all, U.S. supermarkets don't offer a large range of these products because these products don't sell that well.

American demand for these products is constrained by the realities of the U.S. market. First, Americans have larger kitchens, refrigerators and freezers than the typical Brit, so shopping habits revolve around a weekly stock-up trip. Daily trips for ready-meals are perceived as an inconvenience. Closer stores may be less inconvenient but it is still an extra trip. Second, Americans have access to a far greater array of moderately priced restaurants, increasingly with curbside pickup. These restaurants specialize in high-quality food ready-to-eat. Ready-meals typically require at least heating, and few supermarkets are able to expertly produce food in the range of styles the restaurant industry can. Third, when Americans buy a lot of fresh ready-meals because they do not shop daily, they wind up with a lot of waste and are often unhappy, which leads them to buy frozen foods for stock-up and restaurant takeout for last-minute meals.

Wal-Mart is so big it can experiment with 10 or so Marketside stores and hope to pick up knowledge valuable in its Supercenters, regardless of what happens with Marketside. Other chains such as Safeway with its "the market by Vons," are dipping a toe in the small-format store wars as well.

Most chains have held back, watching Fresh & Easy but not directly responding. Without a vigorous market for ready-meals, these concepts lack justification; lots of consumer knowledge makes most chains think their customers want chicken and pizza.

One senses 2009 will be the year of decision. Either consumers will cotton to the ready-meals at Fresh & Easy or they won't. If it catches fire, count on thousands of small-footprint stores, by every major chain, catering to this new demand for ready-meals. If consumer response is unchanged, supermarket deli departments will remain triumphant, the preeminent practitioner of retail foodservice in the country.

If it does survive at all, Fresh & Easy will probably be thought of much as one now thinks of Boston Market, an idea that once seemed so important and yet survives as only a small chain with little impact on the mainstream of retail operations.

DB



*James J. Prevor*



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by Lee Smith, Publisher

## Life's Little Luxuries

By now, you've noticed another magazine, CHEESE CONNOISSEUR, came to you bundled with DELI BUSINESS. CHEESE CONNOISSEUR is a new magazine with a different outlook. It is a professional's magazine as well as a lifestyle magazine promoting fine living through fine foods.

Over the years, many people have wanted extra copies of DELI BUSINESS' annual specialty cheese guide for store associates, broker networks, family and friends. As it has often been pointed out, although specialty cheese is growing in popularity, it is often misunderstood. People who want to explore the wonderful world of fine cheese often find little information about what to buy or how to serve specialty cheeses. Store associates and sometimes even buyers have the same concerns.

In answer to all those inquiries, the concept of CHEESE CONNOISSEUR was born. It brings the world of cheese lovers, fine-food advocates and professionals to one place. Looking at education as a journey of passion, CHEESE CONNOISSEUR is a magazine for professionals and consumers alike. It will have a business-to-business distribution and if you currently receive DELI BUSINESS, you will also receive CHEESE CONNOISSEUR. CHEESE CONNOISSEUR is also being sold in retail outlets around the country because it is our mission to help retailers educate customers and develop pull-through merchandising programs.

Some people may question the wisdom of publishing a magazine devoted to fine cheese, wine and specialty food at this time of economic strife, but there may never be a better time. To illustrate why, I must use my own recent experiences coping with rising food costs, a desire to eat better and a love of fine food.

First, I have always loved fine food. I grew up in a family that relished new foods; there was always something new on the table my brother and I "had" to try. After college, my first job was with an upscale retailer where my knowledge expanded and passion emerged.

I live in South Florida, quite possibly the bastion of over-the-top conspicuous consumption. Hummers whose owners think off-road means pulling into a restaurant parking lot abound. In the last year, people have started to pull back the shows of wealth and a more conservative atmosphere is emerging. This is not an area where people are invited into each other's homes; it is an area where eating out is the No. 1 form of entertainment. But it reached a point where it was just too expensive to go out all the time.

Just down the road from me is a relatively small independent known for great produce at great prices. It has, however, one of the most difficult parking lots to

maneuver. Being big consumers of fresh produce, we decided to brave the crowds, save a little money and do more shopping there.

Unexpectedly, something wonderful happened. Since the produce is beautiful and very reasonably priced, we started buying more fresh vegetables and fruit. This store also has fresh meat, seafood, prepared foods, high-quality dry grocery, wine and a large selection of specialty cheese, so we started buying different items we couldn't find in local grocers.

Our weekly grocery bill was cut by about one-third. We started cooking more vegetables and less meat. We like to treat ourselves when we shop, so we bought some of the prepared food—which is not inexpensive—and were pleasantly surprised. Among the first things we bought were Cornish game hens and acorn squash stuffed with apples and cranberries. It was the best Cornish hen I ever had. After a month or so, the real treat was buying prepared food for dinner and not going out.

The end result is we now use only San Marzano tomatoes in our sauces, we're buying more specialty cheese than ever before, our dinners are filled with fresh fruit and vegetables and our favorite night out is when we have the take-out prepared food we buy there. We are eating much better and—surprise, surprise—I feel better and am gradually losing weight. We are eating at home more and have cut our monthly food bills in half.

The question is not whether consumers can save money by eating better and buying better food; it is whether retailers can offer consumers what they want. The answer is going to require a long, hard, critical look at merchandising and education. There are many ways consumers can save money, but the catch is that saving must be rewarding not punishing because we are looking to do more with less. And, unlike my example, it doesn't have to be with the upper echelon of food; it can be with down-to-earth comfort foods and everyday items.

First, however, retailers must be willing to accept a responsibility for educating consumers about cost-saving measures and for providing foods that are a treat to eat. A suggestion as simple as buy less but shop more often can cut down on waste and lower food costs. Buy-one-get-one-free is a tactic that will lower margins, not generate loyalty. We need to put the customer first.

DB







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# Retail Trends Reflect Changing Economy

BY LEE SMITH

**A** recession, tight credit, upside-down mortgages and massive layoffs coupled with high food costs and the looming threat of higher taxes and insurance payments have left consumers reeling. A retail executive for a regional high-end supermarket chain recently spoke about an executive management meeting where everyone was asked if they had cut back on their spending and all but one or two raised their hands, yet everyone in the room had a secure, well-paying job.



The reaction of one management team to the recession may well bode true for most people—even those who live within their means, have a stable income and maintain good credit. We live in a society that has been fueled by rampant consumerism, so a move to conservatism is a powerful force; the recessionary backlash means the average person is going to have to learn to do more with less and companies are going to have to change their thinking in order to survive.

According to Clarence Schwab, managing partner of Schwab Capitol Management, New York, NY, “It is impossible to sustain the level of growth we have seen. For example, in 2006, about 17 million new cars were sold, fueled by easy credit and low-interest financing. Experts believe the sustainable number of annual new car sales is approximately 12 million. The 5-million-car difference is not coming back—and the same phenomenon is being seen throughout the economy. Every industry is affected.

“We are in a time when consumer demand is returning to sustainable levels. This is not a temporary dip in demand,” Schwab contends.

## A Psychological Shift

The year 2009 will see a major shift in

the psychology of consumerism. Instead of a carefree attitude toward shopping, consumers will be looking to mitigate risk. People are thinking through the decision-making process rather than acting on impulse alone. This doesn't mean the end of high-quality, organics, prepared foods or specialty cheeses, but it does mean the ending of “bling” marketing where drama is the draw and the added value.

An upscale façade will not satisfy consumers looking for quality. Consumers' devil-may-care attitude toward spending is disappearing and price is becoming a more important component of the value equation. The undisputed leader is Bentonville, AR-based Wal-Mart and customers are flocking to its stores looking to reduce grocery costs. However, price is still important to those who can still afford small indulgences, so chains—such as Issaquah, WA-based Costco—that offer upscale products—such as specialty cheeses, fine wines and excellent prepared food—are also showing strong growth.

Trader Joe's, based in Monrovia, CA, is another bright spot in the consumer landscape. According to Schwab, “Trader Joe's offers excellent, high-quality prepared foods and fresh produce at reasonable prices and its private-label products are excellent. Peo-

ple's shopping habits are changing and that includes the traditional upscale shopper, but I think Trader Joe's will prosper. In fact, it is companies like Trader Joe's that will grow in this environment.”

On the other hand, high-end retailers that have pushed the market with expensive fixtures and sporadic and/or questionable quality will end up on the losing end. The marketing value of an upscale façade with lots of bling has fallen to zero. Consumers will be looking at value as it applies to the price, taste and quality, not the package or box an item was sold in.

Jeffrey Siegel, president of Farm Rich Foods, Comack, NY, and a manufacturer of prepared foods, including traditional salads such as potato salad and cole slaw, sees a dramatic shift in what customers are buying and where. “There is no doubt consumers are moving away from restaurants and going back to traditional grocers and retailers in general. Especially hard hit are family restaurants and restaurants that fall into the middle of the pack—that offer good food, but nothing really great. Consumers are looking at value differently.

“The restaurant craze is way off. People are trading down and buying less-expensive foods that they haven't bought in years,” he



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continues. "I'm hearing about growth surges in products thought to be dead—products such as Spam and Hamburger Helper. People are cooking at home more often and looking to stretch a dollar, at times giving up better nutrition for cost savings. In the salad industry, I predict we will see growth in 3-pound containers and for the first time, we will be offering 3-pound containers of our best-quality salads."

Customers want great taste at a value, and larger sizes offer convenience, taste and

better pricing, comments Farm Rich's Siegel. "I think we are going to see a resurgence of other traditions and product lines that have faded away due to more interesting restaurant fare. Good hearty soup and bread sounds like a great dinner right now, and the prospect of having a cookout at home with hot dogs, hamburgers, sliced tomatoes and potato salad sounds pretty appealing."

"On the other hand, I predict growth in specialty categories, but only at retail. One of the least expensive treats is food, and a piece

of great cheese, a bottle of wine or a special dessert equates to luxury at a reasonable price," he adds. "People with stable incomes will still have money to spend, but they are seeing the value of their homes decline and their investment portfolios crash. People, especially baby boomers looking at retirement, have become more conservative and are looking for ways to save and replenish dwindling resources. No one is as cavalier with his or her money today."

While consumers are looking for bargains, it doesn't mean everyone has magically learned to cook or two-income families have more time to spend preparing meals. Prepared foods are still part of the deli department's core offer, and deli categories are doing well.

### Soup

"Foodservice sales are soft and where people are buying is playing significant part in today's value economy," says Jerry Shafir, president of Kettle Cuisine, a soup manufacturing company in Chelsea, MA. "Retail soup sales are strong. We're seeing continued growth in private-label and fresh packaged soups. Retailers are getting the programs down pat and while there is still some debate about the best sizes to sell, packaged sales are growing."

"When soup centers began to grow in popularity, there was some concern about shrink, but retailers have gotten a handle on that part of the program and sales are now growing profitably. Retailers have also caught on to the techniques foodservice used for years to build sales—attracting the interest of consumers by offering more exotic flavors and relying on the sales of traditional standbys to bring in the dollars," he explains.

"The best sellers are traditional chowders and flavors such as chicken noodle, but there is growth in the more esoteric flavors, for example, soups with Southwestern profiles and single-ingredient soups based on products such as sweet potatoes or beans. Bean-based soups are big sellers right now," Shafir continues.

### Side Dishes

Another area for exploitation is side dishes, especially side dishes that incorporate fresh fruit and vegetables. While affluent times may have favored a steak with sliced tomatoes for dinner, Mom's old dictum of one green vegetable, one yellow or red vegetable, one starch and a salad was more healthful and more economical.

Side dishes that include a mix of fruit and vegetable dishes, starches and salads as well as seasonal sides are growing in popularity. Winter side dishes may include baked apples,

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grilled acorn and butternut squash, sweet potatoes and yam halves baked with a sauce of nuts and cranberries; today's consumer may not know how to prepare these tempting dishes, but they are tasty and offer good value.

Whether the deli department is looking to purchase side dishes from an outside vendor or in-house commissary or to make deli prepared foods in store, taste must be the first and most important part of the value equation. If prepared foods don't taste great, consumers will not be tolerant and will direct their purchases to another outlet.

### Commodity Salads

Commodity salads such as potato, macaroni and cole slaw may be headed for resur-

**All indicators are that consumers are getting more conservative, embracing traditional foods that were popular in the past—especially foods that have been viewed as “belly-fillers.**

gence in popularity, but it is too early to tell, says Farm Rich's Siegel. During the slow winter months, a few percentage points one way or the other don't indicate much of anything.

The changes in consumer purchasing habits have been dramatic. Usually a swing is gradual, often with restaurants leading the way. This time around, however, the change in buying habits has been swift and unpredictable. All indicators are that consumers are getting more conservative, embracing traditional foods that were popular in the past—especially foods that have been viewed as “belly-fillers.”

“We will know more once we get into the season and there is every reason to believe consumers will be looking for traditional favorites, but we need to take into consideration that takeout options are still viewed as restaurant alternatives and it will be the better-quality products that sell the best,” stresses Siegel. “As the economy continues to falter, new trends will develop and it is very difficult to accurately predict the future.”

### Deli Lunch Meats

The sleeper in the bunch may be lunch meats. The last few years have seen declining tonnage, while sales are flat-to-down due to a move by consumers to purchase better quality. However, retailers need to carefully examine their sliced meat programs to make sure they are meeting their customers' current needs. Anticipating an increase in brown-bag business lunches and sandwiches made at home may well pay off. This is not the time to let the core of the deli industry—

deli meats—take a back seat. Increasing shelf space for budget crunchers such as liverwurst, bologna, salami and lunch loaves could well produce increased sales. At the same time, whole-muscle meats will continue to be strong and offer a budget saver when purchased in the deli for made-at-home sandwiches.

### Chicken Entrées

Chicken will continue to dominate center-of-the-plate items sold in the deli, so rotis-

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serie and fried chicken will continue to grow. For a while, rotisserie chicken was forecast to be on a downward spiral as customers were looking for something new. However, in uncertain times, proven favorites will continue to draw an audience. And, if there are any prepared foods for which supermarkets are the true leaders of the pack, they are rotisserie and fried chicken. Chicken programs can be executed extremely well with great consistency, and they often outperform local restaurants.

Retailers should be looking to expand the category, adding new flavors and twists to increase trial and repeat sales. Fortunately, chicken is one category in which consumers have shown great faith in supermarkets' ability to market excellence.

### Pizza

Pizza is the other staple just waiting for supermarket delis to add their own flourishes. Chains such as Wegmans, based in Rochester, NY, have done an outstanding job offering

slices and whole pies in communities where independent pizza operators reign supreme—or at least until Wegmans enters the scene, showing that supermarkets can and do compete in highly competitive markets.

Chains that can't offer hot slices and pies-to-go should be looking at expanding the take-and-bake category with new, exotic twists. Just as retailers have found in the soup category, borrowing foodservice tactics of offering exciting and somewhat exotic varieties to draw interest can boost overall sales of the big sellers—cheese, pepperoni, mushroom and sausage.

### Specialty Foods

Specialty foods are, by definition, expensive and continuing marketing efforts to boost the sales of specialty foods may seem contraindicated; however, specialty-food sales are holding their own. Many upscale independents are looking at stable sales with one difference: Consumers are buying less but purchasing more frequently.

Possibly the biggest difference in marketing specialty foods is that they will no longer sell themselves just because the packaging is fancier and the price higher. Specialty foods, whether shelf-stable or perishable, must offer tangible benefits—and communicating those benefits will require retailers to be better merchants.

Specialty-food merchants must offer consumers educated reasons for purchasing. Telling the story, providing recipes and serving suggestions and, most of all, offering purchasing guidance will be paramount. Take a look at the world of wine retailing and buyers will find what wine merchants have known for years—consumers want to be educated, even led down the path to enlightenment.

Great values need to be expressed. A retail suggestion about the rarified quality and great value goes back to the basic premise of mitigating consumer risk. Offering suggestions and possibly limiting selection go a long way in encouraging trial.

Specialty foods are also seeing growth in pre-packaged versions, especially when it comes to imported meat, such as prosciutto or serrano ham. Pre-packaged means the product has been sliced properly and the shelf life fixed. For example, prosciutto di Parma must be sliced and packaged in Italy, so in-store mistakes are eliminated.

Organics are another gem that is still showing sustained growth. Granted the overall market is still small, but consumers who are committed to organics are willing to spend extra dollars—within reason. The "reasonable" amount seems to be no more than 25 percent difference between organic and non-organic.

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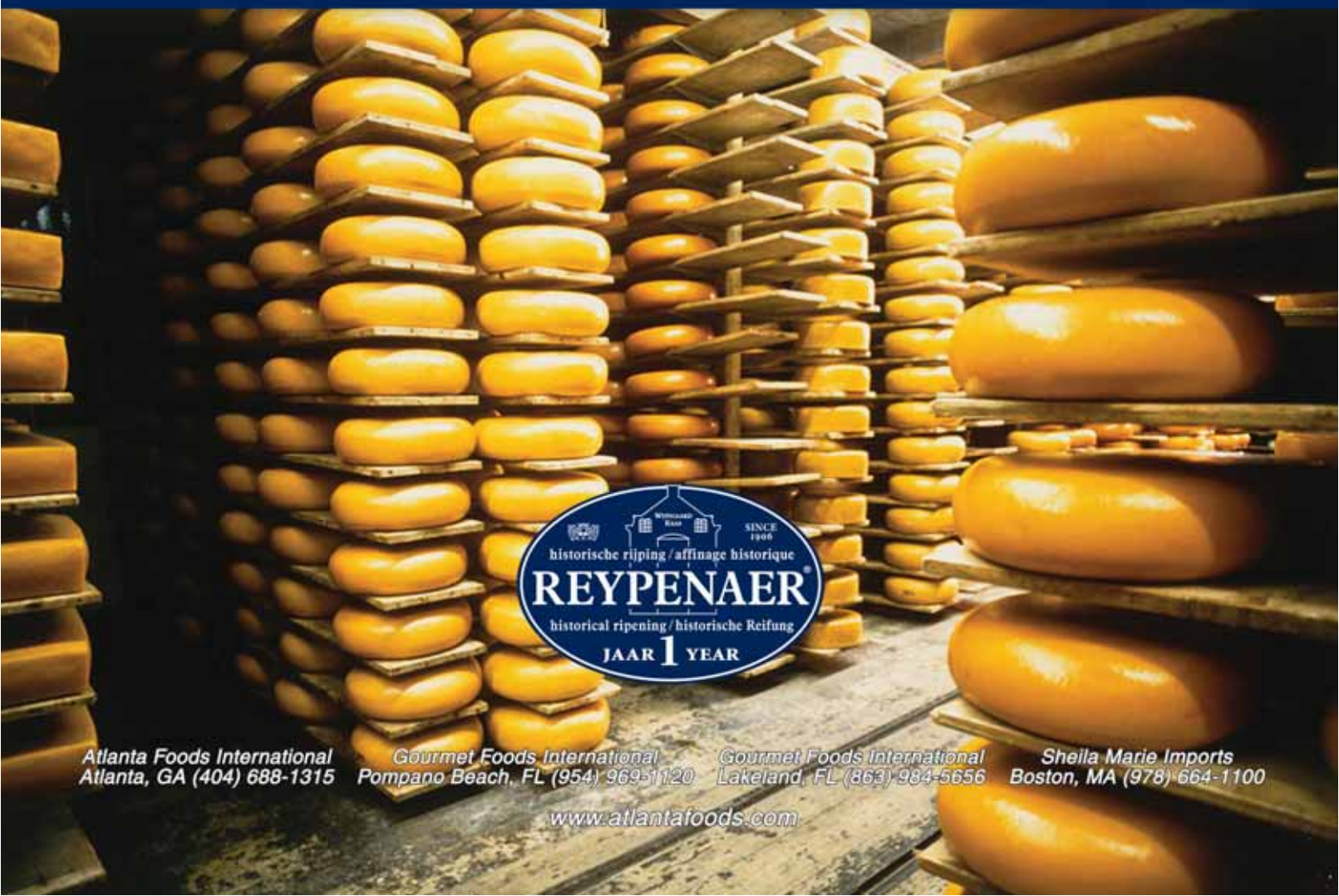
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# The Italian Deli

Consumers still opting for imported Italian deli items amid rising prices

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN



PHOTO COURTESY OF ATLANTA

Americans are still choosing to purchase imported deli products from Italy in spite of soaring prices caused by rising shipping and packaging costs and a strong European currency. Some retailers, however, are noticing changes in consumers' buying habits during the current economic downturn, such as purchasing smaller amounts due to shrinking food budgets.

Most industry experts credit consumer preference for genuine Italian foods to an increased marketing push that began more than two decades ago. As a result, consumers have become accustomed to paying more for what they view as better and more authentically tasting products.

Luigi "Lou" Di Palo, owner of New York City's Di Palo Fine Foods located in the city's Little Italy neighborhood, claims his sales are remaining steady, although his customers are definitely more frugal shoppers in the present economy.

"My customers' priority is to have the best," he says. "To save money, they buy less at a time but shop more fre-





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quently, so they don't waste."

Many Italian product importers, such as Savello USA, Hanover Township, PA, remain optimistic that a slow strengthening of the U.S. dollar will begin to turn the economic tide. Savello's president, Cesare Gallo, says he hopes to see a drop in prices during the next few months as the exchange rate moves in America's favor.

John Jack, vice president of sales and marketing for Fiorucci Foods, Colonial Heights, VA, emphasizes that factors such as packaging and feed costs are also playing a significant role in rising prices. The company produces Italian deli meats in Italy and Italian-style deli meats in America, including a new line of roasted European-style meats under the Rostello brand.

"Cost production factors, which are generally energy-driven, really spiked in 2008," Jack explains. "Many of the packaging materials we're using are petroleum-based. And, during last summer, the cost of raw materials reached heights we've never seen before."

Pierre Zreik is the chief executive officer for Rovagnati USA, Clifton, NJ, a company that distributes a number of meat products made in Italy's Lombardy region, including Gran Biscotto prosciutto cotto (steamed

cooked ham); gran cotto arrosto (roasted ham with herbs); porchetta (double pork loin roasted with pancetta); mortadella; speck (smoked and dry-cured ham); Meditarreneo (French-style steamed cooked ham); and prosciutto di Parma. He believes Italian deli

customers are remaining loyal to his company's products in spite of the difficult financial conditions and rising transportation costs.

"The consumer has accepted the increases due to the exceptional quality of the products we have," Zreik says. "Maybe



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they don't buy as much, but they buy regularly. I am sure the high costs of living and the financial downturn have influenced the buying habits of many."

Parmacotto, an Italian producer of prosciutto cotto, prosciutto di Parma, mortadella, roasted hams, salami and other traditional products, is so confident American consumers will remain faithful to fine Italian imports that the company launched a brand-new retail operation on New York's Upper West Side last November: Salumeria Rosi,

an authentic Italian deli and restaurant.

Parmacotto's chief executive officer, Alessandro Rosi, says the company has seen an increased interest among consumers in New York City, and the United States in general, for genuine Italian foods.

"When Americans come to Europe, they visit Italy, they enjoy our culture and our food and they look for quality when they go back home," he explains. "We want people to have an Italian corner in their neighborhood. Salumeria is the place where we can

explain our products and tell their history: where they come from, how they can be cooked and what to drink with a prosciutto or with a cheese."

The United States has been spared the significant price increases Italians have faced in recent months, according to Riccardo Mapelli, product manager for Atalanta Corporation, Elizabeth, NJ, a firm specializing in imported meats, cheeses and other grocery items. "Fortunately, we don't see as great an increase as they do in Italy, but we should expect a 20 to 30 percent increase by spring 2009," he says.

Some Italian imports, such as prosciutto di Parma, are actually seeing sales increases during the economic downturn, a fact David Biltchik, advisor to the Consorzio del Prosciutto di Parma, attributes to the high quality of the products. "Despite the weak dollar and the slowing down of the economy, sales of prosciutto di Parma are continuing to grow," he says. "People appreciate good quality and good taste."

Paolo Grandjacquet, president of Saratoga Marketing Group, Saratoga Springs, NY, a firm representing Grana Padano cheese in the United States, thinks the tastes of American consumers have become so refined they're willing to pay the cost for superior products.

"United States consumers are impacted by the high value of the Euro versus the U.S. dollar as imported cheeses and other food products, in general, become more expensive," he says. "This can cause a fluctuation in sales, but it also helps premiere products like Grana Padano, Parmigiano-Reggiano, prosciutto di San Daniele and Parma stand out among the many local imitations offered in this market."

### **Educated Consumers Want Quality**

Efforts made by the Italian government and private companies to inform Americans about the wide range of high-quality Italian foods appear to be paying off. Grandjacquet attributes increased sales of Grana Padano in the United States to this marketing thrust.

"The Consorzio has been advertising over the past 10 years in consumer and trade publications as well as sponsoring Lidia Bastianich's TV program for the past 4 years," he says, referring to the *Lidia's Italian-American Kitchen* series broadcast on American Public Television. "These efforts have increased the awareness, the popularity—and ultimately—the sales of Grana Padano in the United States. We also work with many supermarket chains across the country and organize in-store sampling activities in an effort to expand usage."

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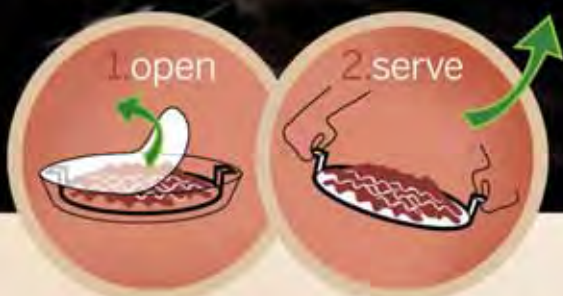
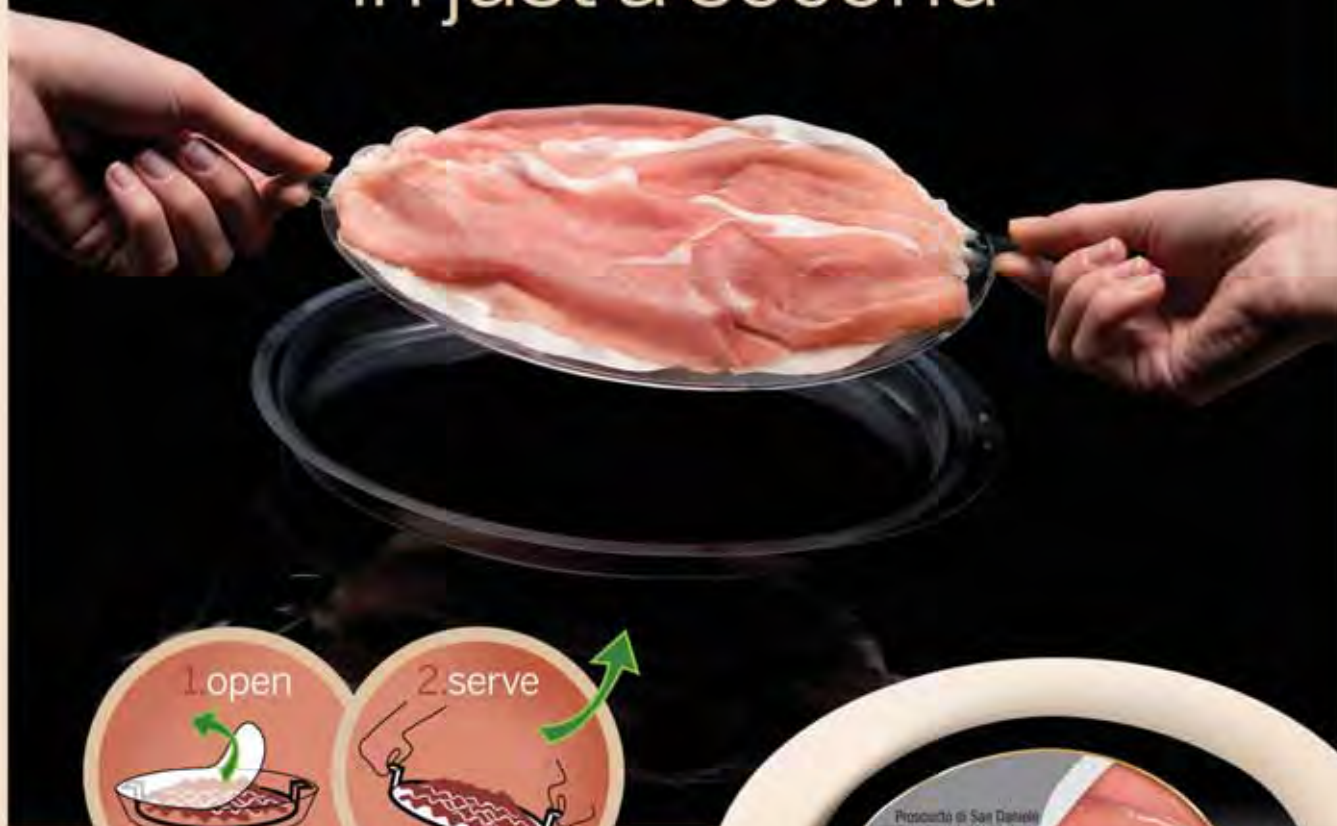
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Biltchik says the Consorzio del Prosciutto di Parma's efforts to bring its namesake product to the forefront of American consumer consciousness have paid off in a big way. "Prosciutto di Parma is still a niche product, but it is, by far, the largest selling Italian meat product in the United States. We're still one of the more visible products, and we're trying to stay that way."

That was not the case a couple of decades ago, explains Biltchik, when there were almost no imported Italian deli prod-

ucts on the U.S. market. In fact, prosciutto di Parma is now viewed as the Italian deli meat product that paved the way during the late 1980s for today's successful Italian imports. "It was viewed as opening the market for a lot of products."

Many Americans now ask for Italian imports by name and recognize the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) label. For example, Grandjacquet believes they know Grana Padano is a versatile, healthful and flavorful cheese that has withstood the test of

time. "The PDO designation helps distinguish an original product for its value and consistent quality, and discerning consumers realize that quality has its value, regardless of the cost."

Atalanta's Mapelli says Americans are also familiar with speck, an aged, lightly

**"DESPITE THE WEAK DOLLAR AND THE SLOWING DOWN OF THE ECONOMY, SALES OF PROSCIUTTO DI PARMA ARE CONTINUING TO GROW."**

—David Biltchik, advisor to the Consorzio del Prosciutto di Parma

smoked ham fusing the Italian tradition of aging with the German tradition of smoking, while Di Palo of Di Palo's Fine Foods claims artisan deli meats such as mortadella are also gaining a loyal following.


"Everybody's got a secret recipe of spices that gives one company's mortadella a different flavor from other similar products," Di Palo says.


Once relegated to big cities and coastal areas, these items are now found on plates across the country.

"Over the last 10 or 15 years the variety of imported Italian products sold in Middle America has increased significantly," says Jack of Fiorucci Foods. "Prosciutto, pancetta, mortadella—things you couldn't find before are now prevalent."

Porchetta, referred to as Italian pulled pork among Italian-Americans, is also gaining in popularity. Dating back to the days of the Roman Empire, porchetta is still prepared in Italy as it was centuries ago by deboning a whole pig and sewing it back up, head and all, before roasting it with plenty of salt, garlic, rosemary and other herbs. Although the U.S. government doesn't permit imports of the whole animal version, porchetta made from pork loin is allowed into the country, and it's available at Di Palo Fine Foods and other fine food retailers that carry genuine Italian meats.

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"People love porchetta," says Di Palo. "This has been well received."

There's hope, however, for American consumers wanting to try a traditional porchetta without having to plan their next vacation to Italy. A Birmingham, AL firm, PorchettaPrimata.com, is now manufacturing traditional porchetta from farm-raised Kentucky pigs, according to traditional Italian preparation methods.

"It's pig and spice, and that's it," explains Nathan Marcus, director of PorchettaPrima-

ta.com. "Our program is truly as authentic as anything you can get in Italy."

Companies continue to introduce new products from Italy in spite of the current economic climate. Lucini Italia, Miami, FL, recently began importing an organic Stravecchio Parmigiano-Reggiano from the Emilia-Romagna region of Parma that proudly bears the PDO seal. After hand cutting, eight-ounce wedges of the cheese are immediately vacuum packed.

"This method also preserves the organic

integrity of the cheese and adds shelf life," says Lucini Italia president David Neuman. "We found through research that a cheese of this quality and rarity must have a special package to properly convey and deliver the quality the consumer expects. The package fully communicates the history and usage of this exceptional product."

Savello USA's Gallo adds that "a variety of new cheeses, such as Taleggio, a PDO product from the Lombardy region, is finding its way into American kitchens alongside longtime favorites like Parmigiano-Reggiano."

Gran Biscotto prosciutto cotto, a steamed cooked ham, is also relatively new to the American market, introduced a few years ago by Rovagnati USA, according to Zreik. "It's the No. 1 choice among consumers in Italy, and its popularity in the states has increased tremendously since we opened our office in 2006."

### Selling More

When introducing customers to an Italian food for the first time, sampling is a surefire way to gain sales. "Don't be afraid to give a taste—that's very important," says Di Palo of Di Palo's Fine Foods.

For the past three years, the Consorzio del Prosciutto di Parma and the Consorzio del Formaggio Parmigiano-Reggiano, along with the support of the European Union and the Italian government, have sponsored in-store tastings of their products across the United States.

"We are convinced that, at retail, this is the best way to generate a 'buzz' about these products—to taste them is to recognize their superior quality," says Ruth Lowenberg, senior vice president of Lewis & Neale, the New York City representative of the Consorzio del Prosciutto di Parma.

"In addition, we have been conducting training sessions for deli managers and distributor sales teams," she continues. "The importance of having knowledgeable deli staff who know how to handle products, especially premium products like prosciutto di Parma and Parmigiano-Reggiano, cannot be underestimated. Our customers, who have chosen to pay a little more for superior quality, demand good service and are entitled to it. That is why training is so critical."

Di Palo believes handling the food properly, such as separating cured meats from cooked, refrigerating at correct temperatures and slicing to order the correct way, will make the difference in the quality of Italian deli products.

Gino Colangelo, a representative of Speck Alto Adige PGI (Protected Geographical Indication), affirms the importance of educating the deli staff on Italian imports.



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## Italian Cured Meats

Americans love Italian cured meats. One of the best sellers at Di Palo Fine Foods in New York City's Little Italy is prosciutto di Parma. "Lately sales of prosciutto di San Daniele have also increased, and we've seen big increases in the sales of speck in the past year or so," reports the owner, Lou Di Palo.

Cesare Gallo, president of Savello USA, an Italian product importer in Hanover Township, PA, says sales of pancetta—sometimes called Italian bacon—have taken off during the last year. The company first began importing cooked, smoked pancetta from Leoncini last year. "It's very mild, very pleasant and lightly smoked."

Prosciutto may very well be Italy's most famous cured meat among Americans. The United States is the world's third-largest market—outside of Italy—for Italy's famed prosciutto di Parma, according to David Biltchik, advisor to the Consorzio del Prosciutto di Parma.

Thanks to an effective North American marketing strategy over the past 20 years, prosciutto di Parma is almost a household name in the United States. Much of the ham's recent popularity, however, is due to packaging innovations. The recently introduced pre-sliced packages of prosciutto have several advantages, and packaged prosciutto di Parma has a 90-day shelf life. This, Biltchik notes, "is rigidly enforced" to ensure quality.

The packaging also means less work and less training for employees. "The pre-sliced products have enabled us to get into outlets such as Costco [based in Issaquah, WA] and into supermarkets where we weren't really before," says Biltchik. "Still, some consumers may prefer to have their prosciutto sliced to order in the deli. A smart deli will carry both."

Di Palo warns deli operators not to be tempted to pre-slice cured meats in the store, since it could decrease shelf life and have a negative impact on the flavor of the products. "Pre-slicing at the factory is done under conditions that ensure the



Chef Cesare Casella slices prosciutto at Parmacotto's Salumeria Rosi in New York City

product will maintain its freshness and quality," he explains.

While Americans have already fallen in love with prosciutto, they are discovering other cured delicacies such as speck. "Speck Alto Adige PGI [Protected Geographical Indication] was introduced to the United States in late 2003 but not really actively promoted until late 2005," says Gino Colangelo, president of Colangelo & Partners Public Relations, New York City, a firm that represents Speck Alto Adige PGI. "The product has gained enormous popularity among trade professionals and consumers, and sales growth has been well into the double digits since we launched the marketing program in 2005."

Speck is an unusual product because it's both cured and smoked. "In order to create the distinctive flavor, each Speck Alto Adige PGI ham must undergo an eight-step process over a 22-week period," explains Colangelo. "Smoking and drying of the ham must be precise, using prime wood at cool temperatures—68 degrees—to ensure the distinct taste is present in the ham."

"These unique hams are characterized by a thin layer of mold that accumulates

on the outside at the end of the curing and smoking process. Speck Alto Adige PGI is the only ham that uses mold in the production process," he adds. "The mold prevents the crust from becoming too hard and guarantees the uniformity of the inner seasoning and smoking."

Other Italian favorites have not yet made their way stateside, primarily due to strict import regulations, but Di Palo is hoping that will change soon. "We're looking forward to the possibility of offering other cured meats, such as culatello and coppa," he says. "Bresaola would be good. People have received the South American and the locally produced bresaola very well. If we ever get the Italian, it will be very popular."

"Bresaola, which is a dried cured beef from Valtellina in the Lombardy region, would be a great product to be able to import," says Colangelo. "We would also love to see lardo di Colonnata, a special product that is cured in the marble caverns of Carrara."

Mapelli says these are just a few of the many Italian cured meats currently unavailable in this country. "Culatello is only the first of a long list of meats not available in the United States like coppa, pancetta coppata, lardo di Colonnata PGI, bresaola and real salami. We have a bresaola from Uruguay that's pretty good, though."

Mapelli further explains that the salamis currently sold on these shores are not what he refers to as "real salami."

"There are actually two Italian companies that sell, quote-unquote, salami in the United States," he explains. "One is produced in this country and the other in Parma, Italy. Unfortunately, the United States Department of Agriculture requires a very strict procedure that kills the product. It's also wrapped in plastic and not in the natural gut, which gives real salami its aromatic special flavor. I doubt any of these products, with the exception of pancetta, will be able to make it into the United States anytime soon." **DB**

"Knowing at least a little bit of the product's history is key. If you can offer your customers snippets of info, this engages them in the product and can help turn them into repeat customers."

And customers won't ask for more information if they don't know the product is

available. That's why the Consorzio del Prosciutto di Parma's Biltchik wants delis to focus more on point-of-sale signage.

"We'd love to see clear signage that tells you what the product is," he says. "Delis could do themselves a favor by having good, clear signage."

And while customers should be encouraged to use ingredients any way they can imagine, it helps to give them a starting point, according to Gallo of Savello USA.

"Maybe give them some recipes and some information on how to use the product," he suggests. **DB**





PHOTO COURTESY OF GROBBELS

# COMFORT FOODS THRIVE IN TOUGH TIMES

When facing a tight pocketbook, consumers  
revert to the familiar flavors of home

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

**D**uring hard economic times, consumers always revert back to the basics. For many people, this brings back memories of home, family and a simpler time, when home-cooked foods played a more central role in family life. Who doesn't have memories of the extended family gathered around a table filled with comforting foods such as meat loaf and mashed pota-

toes, corned beef and cabbage or even chicken and dumplings? No matter what part of the nation you hail from, there's a particular food that calls you home.

The current economic climate is one reason that a 2007 study conducted by New York-based Datamonitor America—cited in the Madison, WI-based International Deli-Dairy-Bakery Association's (IDDBA) report, *What's in Store 2008*—revealed that craving

for nostalgic foods is on the rise. Twenty percent of the respondents surveyed claimed they had purchased nostalgic comfort foods more often in the past year than they had in previous years.

More consumers are now opting to dine at home rather than eating out to save money, but many find they have even less time to prepare their favorite comfort foods due to an increased work schedule caused

by company cutbacks. Now's the perfect time for deli operators to stand in the gap and offer the flavors consumers want at prices that are easy on the pocketbook.

### Back To The Basics

Nan McGrath, director of retail sales for the Lamb Weston brand of ConAgra Foods, Eagle, ID, says, "People are looking for a way to feel safe and secure in today's uncertain economy. Comfort foods, which are foods reminiscent of a simpler time of childhood,

can fill this need."

"Home-cooked" is another way to describe comfort foods and so is "inexpensive," says Guy Giordano, president of Vincent Giordano, Philadelphia, PA. "Consumers equate comfort foods with a good value."

Jim Daskaleas, vice president of product development for Walker's Food Products Corp., Kansas City, MO, believes consumers are now bypassing the \$6 lattes and other extravagances and, instead, focusing on basic dishes with simple ingredients.

"In other words, consumers are choosing foods that tend to be comfortable on the pocketbook and provide more value for the buck," he says.

Shirley Leonard, marketing manager for Sandridge Food Corp., Medina, OH, thinks seasonally falling temperatures play just as critical a role as the economy in steering people toward more comfort food purchases. "Consumers look for hot and hearty comfort foods, especially in the fall and winter."

Taste, quality and convenience are traits consumers want in their comfort foods, says Jason Dobis, vice president of sales for Harry's Fresh Foods, Portland, OR. "Restaurant dining is down and grocery traffic is up. Consumers are eating at home more, but they're not necessarily cooking more at home."

Jerry Shafir, president of Kettle Cuisine, Chelsea, MA, says supermarket delicatessens should take advantage of the economic downturn and prepare more of the foods that people are now yearning for.

"There's a real opportunity for deli operators to gain a greater market share of the consumer's stomach," he emphasizes. "That means offering a menu selection of prepared foods that encompass familiar comfort items, as well as those that are innovative, healthy, ethnic and indulgent."

### The Comfort Consumer

"Everyone is a comfort-food consumer," relates Kathy Lenkov, communications manager for Glendale, CA-headquartered Nestlé Professional, the firm that produces the Stouffer's brand.

The comfort-food shopper, says Mona Doyle, president of the Consumer Network, Philadelphia, PA, "reflects more of a state of mind than a demographic statistic. When we take a hit, we look for comfort foods. Life is full of hits."

According to the 2007 report, *Comfort Food: Nostalgia Meets Contemporary*, released by Olson Communications of Chicago, IL, the Y-Generation (people born between 1980-1999) and Baby Boomers (those born between 1946-1964) interviewed reflected no significant differences in how they determined which foods they consider comfort foods, the way they like them to taste or which version they prefer.

Phil Masiello, vice president of sales and marketing for Farm Rich Foods, Commack, NY, says consumers are now focused on healthful, fresh, great tasting and—above all—quick meal solutions. "The customer is primarily mom shopping in the supermarket, with more and more men beginning to take on the shopping responsibility. Everyone is looking for a way to save time."

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## A Twist On The Traditional

Comfort foods, adds Consumer Network's Doyle, "are what your mother or grandmother fed you when you got sick or scraped your knee. That could be anything from Jell-O to mashed potatoes, hamburgers, grilled cheese or meat loaf. Pizza is a comfort food for many people under the age of 50. It's an individual thing. There are so many variations."

Regionality and ethnicity also play a role, Doyle adds. "Comfort foods in South Florida are pulled pork, sweet plantains, and beans and rice. In New York, it's chicken soup, meat loaf and macaroni and cheese. In the Midwest and Texas, it's barbecue and chili."

Pot roast is a classic American favorite, and Vincent Giordano has seen a recent increase in sales of the company's pre-cooked version, affirms Giordano. "We've especially seen growth in pot roasts in delis that feature prepared foods."

Comfort foods are not limited to entrées but can include everything from side dishes to soups and salads. Tried and true versions remain popular, but those with unique flavor twists are gaining steam. According to *Comfort Food: Nostalgia Meets Contemporary*, when certain food items were characterized as comfort foods, significantly more of the chefs surveyed admitted to having modified, altered or modernized them in some way. This held true for mashed potatoes (80 percent), meat loaf (75 percent), soups (61 percent) and lasagna (57.5 percent).

Sandridge's Leonard believes it's important to offer both traditional and altered versions of the most popular comfort foods but cautioned against going to extremes with the flavors. "You have to be careful, though, that the dish is still familiar," he says. "When consumers don't know the name or flavor, they tend to shy away."

Barbecued pork is another soothing food, says Keith Wilcox, who serves as both director of cooked meats and sales and marketing manager for the deli division of Curly's Foods, Edina, MN. "Some delis like to add their own sauce to regionalize it."

Pork Carnitas, cooked pork with lime and garlic flavoring, and Beef Barbacoa, chuck roast with citrus and chili, are two new items from Curly's.

"These meats, especially when merchandised along with rice, beans and tortillas, are considered comfort foods by Hispanic shoppers," Wilcox says. "Mainstream customers also enjoy these items as witnessed by the popularity of restaurant chains like the Chipotle Mexican Grill [the 700-plus outlet chain based in Denver, CO]."

Corned beef hash is a true bit of Americana, a relatively inexpensive dish dating

## The Ultimate Comfort Food

**W**hen consumers participated in the 2007 *Comfort Food: Nostalgia Meets Contemporary* survey from Chicago, IL-based Olson Communications, they were asked to describe their favorite comfort foods. The top choices were desserts such as pies, cakes, cupcakes, candy and chocolate. Armed with such powerful information, deli operators can pounce on such consumer passion by merchandising desserts as part of meal deals.

The 2007 *Dessert Consumer Trend Report* from Technomic Information Services, Chicago, IL, revealed 85 percent of consumers surveyed ate dessert once a month or more, 57 percent ate dessert "very frequently" or "often" (at least once a week), and nobody responded they "never" ate dessert.

It's no surprise, then, that Tom Vierhile, executive editor of ProductScan Online, Naples, NY, defines comfort foods as hot, gooey and fattening. "They're usually high in fat and sugar. Typically, you see the number of people on a diet decline when there's a downturn in the economy."

Laura Marshall, director of marketing for Knouse Foods, Peach Glen, PA, claims one of the nation's legendary comfort desserts is still as American as mom and baseball. "Apple pie appears to

be driving increased dessert revenue opportunities in the foodservice industry," she says.

Knouse Foods produces ready-made pie fillings in a variety of flavors that can be easily used to create simple but comforting dessert for grab-and-go or the hot-food bar. "In the deli," adds Marshall, "crisps tend to be more practical than pie. For example, operators can spoon pie filling into a tray and top with a simple oatmeal or granola topping. They can merchandise this warm dessert by the pound on a hot-food bar or pre-portioned for take and heat."

Any chocolate lover will swear chocolate is a comfort food delivering more pleasure, pound for pound, than any other sweet. Capitalizing on this love affair, Walker's Food Products Corp., Kansas City, MO, introduced its Brownie Bite Chocolate Delight earlier this year. The new item consists of smooth chocolate mousse with tender pieces of chocolate brownie bites swirled together with dark chocolate fudge.

According to Jim Daskaleas, Walker's vice president of product development, the delightful treats practically sell themselves. "Display these behind the counter and sell them by the pound," he says. "Demonstrate them, and you'll definitely drive demand." **DB**

back to the early 1900s and the nation's early diners known as hash houses. Farm Rich Foods launched its version of this popular breakfast treat to help consumers enjoy it in the comfort of their homes.

"As customers cook at home more, one of the biggest meals they're preparing is the weekend breakfast," says Masiello. "Hash seems to be a very popular alternative to sausage or bacon."

Potatoes, of course, in all their different versions, have always been a popular comfort food. ConAgra's Lamb Weston recently introduced four new stuffed potatoes, or Spudz, which come in several varieties, including broccoli and cheese, and chipotle Cheddar. "These represent a combination of two great comfort foods—potatoes and cheese," says McGrath.

Harry's Fresh Foods is targeting shoppers seeking organic comfort foods with its seven-item line of side dishes. These include Organic Spring Vegetable Risotto, Organic Creamy Macaroni and Cheese and Organic Zesty Penne Marinara.

"Customers who purchase organic foods consider it a lifestyle and don't abandon this type of purchase in tough economic times," says Dobis. "We do notice that if the price spread is higher than 20 to 25 percent between organic and conventional, then it becomes problematic to trade up new customers to organic."

New taste twists have also come to macaroni and cheese. Nestlé Professional offers this classic dish made with Vermont Cheddar and seasoned with applewood smoked bacon under its Stouffer's brand. Sandridge's upscale version is made with Gorgonzola cheese and penne pasta.

Chicken salad is also getting tweaked, with Sandridge offering unique flavors created with applewood smoked chicken or chicken flavored with Dijon mustard.

Sheri Oppenheimer, manager of communications for North American Foodservice of the Campbell Soup Co., Camden, NJ, says the satisfying and familiar qualities of soup are synonymous with comfort.

"We have several products that take a



premium twist on familiar favorites, such as our StockPot Creamy Tomato Basil Bisque and Fully Loaded Baked Potato and Cheddar soups. The Tomato Basil Bisque, one of our top sellers, is a great example of a premium, innovative take on one of the most classic comfort foods we all know and love: tomato soup."

Consumers particularly turn to cream soups when the weather gets cold, says Kettle Cuisine's Shafir. "That means cream of broccoli, cream of potato and cream of tomato, to name a few popular choices."

### Merchandising Tips And Tricks

*Create A Destination:* If a comfort food such as soup, for example, is something a deli wants to sell, it shouldn't be done in a small way, says Dobis of Harry's Fresh Food's. "Make soup a destination. The key is to

We can provide this product description and photography for operators who want to incorporate it into their signature style."

*Cross-merchandise.* Delis should follow the lead of some restaurant chains and offer a choice of two selections for one price from soups, salads and sandwiches, says Kettle Cuisine's Shafir. "This is a great way to increase the total ring."

Another promotional idea, adds Dobis, "is to offer a sandwich at the regular price and a tub of soup for free or at a reduced price."

ConAgra's McGrath says more sales can be made by cross-merchandising hot sandwiches with a bag of fresh potato chips. "We offer three types: natural or russet, rose-colored and purple. On a pound for pound basis, these are more profitable for the deli than commercial bagged chips."

Delis can also learn a trick or two from

Farm Rich Food's Masiello notes customers are primarily looking for foods they can take home and reheat quickly. "They prefer pre-packaged products that are easily recognizable with minimal preparation and available in the self-service case."

*Customize.* Take a comfort food and merchandise it with a signature twist, advises Nestlé Professional's Lenkov. "For example, take our ricotta lasagna and double stack it for an appetizing presentation. Or, top it with an Alfredo or pomodoro sauce."

McGrath believes delis can create their own distinctive styles by being more creative with traditional recipes. "Cycle in different types of mashed potatoes, such as jalapeño Cheddar redskin or roasted garlic, as a side for rotisserie chicken."

Lenkov says it's simpler than most deli managers think. "You can mix almost anything in traditional macaroni and cheese, for example, peppers or meat, or basically any vegetable or protein."

Even without special meal-deal pricing and original creations, delis can ring up multiple purchases by displaying complementary side dishes with meats, such as macaroni and cheese with rotisserie chicken, salads with deli meats, and sandwich spreads with fresh bread.

"Suggestive selling by the deli clerks and sampling make a difference, as do recipe cards," says Sandridge's Leonard. "The more shopper marketing conducted at the store level, the greater the chance of making the sale. Seventy percent of shoppers make buying decisions in the store, and 68 percent of those decisions are impulsive."

*Multiple Locations.* Merchandising an item in a new location or in multiple locations can attract the attention of shoppers who may overlook the product in its traditional spot.

Some duplication isn't bad, according to McCarthy. "Typically, customers are either bulk or pre-packaged shoppers. However, the best customers are those who buy both forms depending on their constraints at the time. If you carry an item in only one area, you may miss customers."

McCarthy emphasizes that the strategy behind multiple locations is giving consumers exactly what they want, which will always produce more sales. "Product behind the glass allows consumers to customize the amount of hot and ready foods they want, while grab-and-go offers refrigerated convenience," he says.

And convenience and an ample selection of comfort foods will always translate into satisfied customers, who, in turn, become repeat customers and transform a super-market deli's bottom line.

DB



PHOTO COURTESY OF HARRY'S FRESH FOODS

intercept customers as soon as they walk in the department. Let them see a full attractive soup bar."

"In our opinion," says Shafir, "the best soup program offers a combination of hot ready-to-eat soups, along with refrigerated pre-packed soups to eat at a later time. Equipment to display soups in such a way is a big investment, but it's worth it."

Promotions also define the deli as a soup destination. Dobis says delis should "advertise Friday night as clam chowder night, both in-store and in newspaper ad circulars. This will bring customers into the deli on a regular basis."

Shafir believes the days of delis offering only one or two soups are over. "Now, most delis offer six or more varieties, such as a cream-style and broth-based soup, as well as chicken, tomato, vegetarian and seafood versions."

The soup bar should be well signed, he adds. "We suggest a description of each soup, as you would read it on a restaurant menu.

takeout pizza restaurants. "Cross-merchandise pizza with breaded mozzarella cheese sticks," McGrath adds. "This is what today's kids think of as comfort foods."

*Meal Deals.* Many restaurant chains seek to attract diners by promoting an appetizer, entrée and dessert for one price. Delis can also capitalize on this prix fixe concept by bundling items to create a single value-priced meal deal.

John McCarthy, Jr., retail trade manager for Reser's Fine Foods, Beaverton, OR, suggests offering a choice of selections in meal deal programs. "Results from Reser's *Attitudes & Usage Survey* show that consumers like variety and want the ability to make their own choices," he says. "This means, for example, offering a protein such as rotisserie chicken and a choice of side dishes. These side dish selections could include mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese or pasta. Or, for the holidays, it could be green bean casserole, mashed sweet potatoes, stuffing and orange cranberry relish."

# Going Green

Packaging manufacturers and deli operators jumping on the environmental bandwagon

BY CHRISTINA DAVIS ROBERTS

Going green has moved center stage as the spotlight shines on eco-friendly products and business strategies across every industry. Green issues are a hot topic, driving business decisions—including transportation, processing and new innovations in food packaging—that affect the deli counter. Supermarket deli operations can expect leading packaging companies to provide new options that respond to the need for sustainability, help them meet corporate initiatives and satisfy consumer demands.

Perhaps a natural outgrowth of the organic food movement, green packaging refers to the use of environmentally friendly practices in the production and disposal of packaging products by taking into account the comprehensive impact on the environment, humans and animals.

Understanding the concept of sustainability is imperative to identifying and bringing in-house those business practices and products that will provide tangible results. Sustainability practices increasingly affect how customers view the businesses they patronize. Many eco-minded consumers now take a company's environmental practices into consideration before making their final purchasing decisions.

"Sustainability is not just about protecting the environment," says Gareth Ackerman, chairman of the CIES World Food Business Summit Committee and Pick 'n' Pay Holdings Ltd., Cape Town, South Africa. "It has to do with issues such as food security, food safety, job creation and individual prosperity, healthful eating, fair trade, ethical sourcing of products, labor rights, customer loyalty and poverty alleviation."

In fact, a joint survey by KPMG International, Amsterdam, Holland, and CIES in June 2008 at the CIES World Food Business Sum-

mit in Munich, Germany, revealed that 56.6 percent of those responding claimed sustainability is now a core element of business strategy. Pressures such as legal requirements, voluntary codes, taxes and the cost of reducing carbon dioxide emissions are fueling the demand. In the report, Neil Austin, KPMG's London, England-based global chairman for consumer markets, says, "The adoption of sustainable business strategies is not primarily driven by formal requirements, but rather by the imperative of business need."

## Greener Packaging

One of the easiest ways for delis to contribute to a greener planet is by using recyclable or biodegradable containers. Environmentally friendly packaging choices for foodservice have been steadily increasing and will continue to increase over the next few years. John Alexanian, sales and marketing director for Cube Plastics, a Toronto, ON, Canada-based manufacturer of food-grade storage containers, believes it's both a fascinating and challenging time for the packaging industry.

"Ultimately it's important to all of us to find sustainable ways to use less and be less damaging to the environment," he says. "When we look at the green initiative, we think, what's better than a reusable product? It's not just about recycling and putting something through that process for a one-use container. We offer a sustainable product that can go from freezer to microwave to dishwasher."

Many environmentalists see material compostability as the ultimate goal in sustainability. Be Green Packaging, Santa Barbara, CA, produces a tree-free compostable tray container made from bulrush, a ubiquitous invasive plant that reseeds and regenerates itself and grows in waterways throughout the Western Hemisphere. The com-



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pany discovered the plant while searching for an alternative to sugarcane-based products, which are less friendly to the environment. Be Green Packaging now oversees the entire bulrush process—referred to as a closed-loop cycle—from manufacturing to the final composting of the used products. The company successfully passed the vetting process for Austin, TX-based Whole Foods Markets, the retailer with the reputation for being the earth's flagship green grocer; Be Green's Bulrush fiber containers are now utilized throughout the Whole Foods chain.

"The economic downturn is not going to affect this movement because it's not an economic disadvantage to going green," says Ron Blitzer, president and CEO of Be Green. "Pricing now is much lower than it was five years ago."

### Consumer Awareness On The Rise

As more people become aware of environmental issues, they're noticing things previously taken for granted in terms of waste creation and garbage. "I have heard from deli retailers that customers are very vocal and love it when they make the switch to bulrush containers," adds Blitzer.

Cities such as Seattle, WA, Santa Barbara, CA, and Oakland, CA, have banned or

are considering a ban on the use of certain packaging materials. It's a warning sign for those in the packaging industry that changes are on the horizon. With a two-year lead time required to make substantive changes, proactive companies will be the ones able to stay on the forefront of product development.

For deli operators, education is crucial. Learning when and why to use what type of package depends on the nature of the food-service item and its time on the shelf. How deli customers ultimately feel about environmental issues and whether their actions and dollars support these issues will depend on their knowledge and education about the subject. Their perspective will also vary depending on where they get their environmental information and whether a deli's packages meet their expectations of what it means to "go green" in North America.

In the changing packaging environment, deli executives will need to be gatekeepers of such information, says Bob Wills, president of Cedar Grove Cheese, Plain, WI, a manufacturer of certified organic cheeses. Wills compares the green packaging movement to the organic food movement.

"Standards can be met, but the reality of what consumers might agree on as their definition of organic or sustainable might not be

the same," he explains. "Companies can adhere to the regulations set by a particular industry organization, but the reality is very different from what consumers might identify as being organic."

### Deli Operators On The Forefront

The supermarket deli is a perfect place to address sustainable packaging, as well as the green practices used in producing it, according to Wills.

"The deli has a lot more flexibility to promote local products that require less transportation and utilize an efficient distribution system," he adds. "So much of the information on a product package doesn't actually cover a lot of the green stuff going on. Organic doesn't just mean a product is free from recombinant bovine growth hormone."

Wills believes deli operators are in the middle of the food supply chain and at the vanguard of the green movement, needing to convince suppliers to use environmentally friendly packaging, as well as educating consumers on its importance.

"The level of concern is at the highest level it has ever been," Wills notes. "Most consumers recognize there are serious changes to our environment that are man-made or heavily influenced. Customers will make a green choice within a range of price, if they believe they can make a difference."

Many consumers may already be using green packaging without knowing it. Some clear plastic containers such as those found on salad bars or used for grab-and-go foods are made from a corn-based resin known as polylactic acid (PLA), according to Tracy Murphy, southeast regional sales manager for InnoWare Inc., an Atlanta, GA-based manufacturer of disposable plastic and paper products for prepared deli foods. InnoWare produces both the clear lids and darker-colored bases from raw materials grown strictly in the United States. The containers can be used for food temperatures no higher than 120° F, so they are not recommended for hot foods or use in the microwave. They are compostable in a commercial composting facility, where they revert to a soil product used for crops or as landfill in residential areas.

"Consumers are stressing they want more of a closed loop, but even if you aren't able to close the loop entirely, you are keeping natural resources intact," Murphy says. "If you choose to compost in a commercial composting facility, it will take 60 to 180 days. If there's not a composting facility readily available, it can be recycled."

Companies are adding or redefining positions internally to address the growing need of integrating environmental issues with standard business practices. Tedd Heilmann,



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general manager of Organic Prairie, La Farge, WI, a producer of organic meats for more than a decade, notes that his company recently hired a sustainability director to review energy audits, carbon use, transportation costs and methods.

"Organic and sustainability issues are getting people's attention as the mass market has taken on organic meats," he says. "We are feeling the consumer pull and simply responding to what the stores that sell our products are asking for. Consumers are paying extra for green products, and sales growth is strong."

### Legislating The Environment

Mark Spencer works as the emerging materials and sustainability business manager for Pactiv, a Lake Forest, IL-based packaging manufacturer. One of his primary responsibilities is to search for new materials and plan their application and configuration for food processors, foodservice establishments and supermarkets. He must also stay on top of new packaging regulations and legislative changes designed to reduce solid waste around the country.

For example, the California cities of Santa Monica, Malibu and Oakland, along with Seattle, WA, have banned polystyrene containers, most commonly known as Styrofoam, in an effort to reduce waste and promote recycling. The new laws may be ahead of the science in terms of providing alternative cost-effective ways for alternative packaging, but the groundswell of local concerns is still spurring legislative action. Performance of green materials will continue to improve and their costs will gradually fall, but current performance is limited compared to existing non-green containers.

"We've not seen what some of these green materials can be yet," Spencer says. "In the short term, we'll be on the lookout for new materials with better performance at lower costs as technology improves. Most green materials don't meet the temperature and rigidity needs for foodservice right now, but in three to five years, they will."

On deli meats, most supermarkets use high-barrier shrink film, which is primarily made of polyvinylidene chloride (PVdC)—also known as Saran—a material environmentalists hope to eliminate in the future due to concerns about toxic fumes created during its production and incineration. Because it can't be recycled, Saran is already banned in much of Europe and may soon face bans in the United States.

"The ban in Europe has driven a trend to create thinner and higher-grade food packaging," says Ryan Till, packaging specialist at Avon, OH-based Carroll Manufacturing &

Sales, which produces the Flavorseal brand of packaging. "We are now innovating PVdC-free, chlorine-free barrier packaging that is more environmentally friendly and recyclable."

According to Till, the company's goal is to reduce current non-green packaging thickness by 33 percent and therefore create less packaging waste.

"An advanced manufacturing process and a higher grade of plastic to increase the strength of the material will enable us to

reduce the thickness of the bag," he says. "It will be stronger but thinner."

Organic Prairie's Heilmann emphasizes that consumers have so far proved willing to pay extra for humane animal treatment and greener, organic products.

"We all need to adopt a leading edge, he says. "As the Wal-Marts of the world start to address real change, finding that it's just good business to reduce waste and conserve resources, then we'll find we're no longer on the fringe."

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# Strong Sushi In A Weak Economy

Emphasize safety, wise marketing and trends to maintain interest in your deli's sushi program

BY BOB JOHNSON

Before sushi made its appearance on the Los Angeles dining scene in the mid-1960s, the Japanese dish of raw fish, vegetables and rice was basically unheard of in the United States. Little by little, the new form of cuisine grew in popularity, first among Japanese businessmen and other ex-patriots living in California, and then among the more adventurous Americans willing to try something new. Soon the California Roll, which utilizes cooked crab or imitation crab instead of raw fish, was invented to appease diners leery of eating uncooked fish. By the 1970s, sushi restaurants had begun popping up all over the United States to satisfy the hunger of a nation in search of a new and healthful culinary option.

Fast-forward to the New Millennium, and grab-and-go sushi and sushi bars are now a staple of many supermarkets. Today nearly a quarter of supermarket shoppers use the deli sushi station at least one to three times a month, according to *U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends 2008* from Arlington, VA-based Food Marketing Institute. Although the sushi sector is still growing in leaps and bounds, new merchandising techniques may be needed to attract and maintain consumers feeling the economic pinch.

Aaron Petrovsky, vice president for Hissho Sushi, Charlotte, NC, believes supermarket deli operators should begin publicizing that they offer high-quality sushi at a much lower price point than a typical sushi bar.

"Difficult economic times will require retailers go about merchandising sushi in a different way," he says. "Fresh sushi is a luxury item, but grab-and-go sushi in the supermarket—the average meal is in the \$6 range—is still a more cost-effective option than dining in a sushi restaurant, which can often exceed \$20. Promoting the freshness and health benefits of sushi may help, too."

## Safety First

A first step toward gaining and maintain-



ing sushi market share is to offer safe sushi products, and that begins with suppliers.

"The product we sell is really safe sushi," says Tara Milligan, director of marketing for Chicken of the Sea, San Diego, CA. "It is heat sterilized, which makes it safe, but it's not raw like most sushi."

In addition to tuna, Chicken of the Sea produces salmon, shrimp, crab, oysters, clams, sardines and mackerel, all of which come packaged in cans, pouches or sealed plastic cups. The heat sterilization process makes the products shelf-stable, so they don't require refrigeration until the containers have been opened.

Raw sushi manufacturer and distributor Lee Kum Kee, Los Angeles, CA, sought and earned its International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9002 certification to ensure the safety of the company's products.

"We harvest the raw material from our own oyster farms," says Greg Haradiran, brand manager for the firm.

Petrovsky believes deli operators and suppliers must work as a team to ensure the safe handling of raw sushi. "Sushi bars, with sup-

port from a professional sushi company and trusted sushi brand, are key to food safety," he says. "The company needs to have a trained support staff, internal HACCP [hazard analysis and critical control point] plans and detailed training/operations manuals for the chefs to adhere by."

Ensuring the deli handles sushi safely may be sufficient for a store's operation, but it's not always enough to placate consumers concerned about the safe handling of raw fish. Sometimes they need to see sushi being handled properly with their own eyes.

"It is optimal for the chef to be in the deli or prepared foods section with a proper sushi case, allowing the chef to prepare sushi daily, facing and interacting with the customers," Petrovsky says. "This re-enforces the perception of freshness, which is very important to sushi consumers."

## Delineate The Space

A successful sushi program requires a significant space commitment, particularly if the deli staff plans on putting the preparation area in public view or offering its own sushi



bar. The latter requires at least 150 to 200 square feet of space but would pay for itself with the right consumer base, according to Hissho Sushi's Petrovsky.

"A full-service sushi bar staffed with a trained sushi chef and accompanied by grab-and-go sushi is the most effective way for merchandising sushi," he says. "On-site chefs, coupled with extensive sushi menus and customer interaction, are key for locations that have the clientele. Regular specials, promotions, product sampling, colorful menus and introducing new products are also important for the operation to flourish."

Stores that do not have the necessary space for a full-service sushi operation should focus on the grab-and-go sushi format and customer convenience, according to Lee Kum Lee's Haradiran.

Chicken of the Sea's Milligan recommends emphasizing the timesaving aspect of grab-and-go. "I would think grab-and-go is the most effective way of merchandising sushi."

And supermarkets without a sushi program needn't be afraid of starting one, notes Petrovsky. "Sushi is a highly fragmented industry with relatively low barriers to entry. Supermarkets should feel comfortable and confident their sushi partner will perform and

be responsive to their needs."

### Be A Trend Setter

Although sushi has been growing in popularity among mainstream American consumers for a quarter of a century, it has made significant strides within the last eight to 10 years, a fact Milligan attributes to an increased interest in more healthful eating. Supermarket delis must therefore stay on the cusp of emerging sushi trends and flavors in order to keep the interest of existing consumers and attract the attention of those just jumping onto the sushi bandwagon. They must also capitalize on the healthful and nutritional characteristics of sushi as compared to other fast foods, while emphasizing the convenience of grab-and-go.

Haradiran explains that new flavors, such as hoisin—a sweetened paste made from soybeans, which is often referred to as Chinese barbecue sauce—are beginning to catch on in the United States. "American palates have become a lot more open to other flavors, including raw fish," he says. "And people are aware that sushi is healthful."

Petrovsky believes there is plenty of room for growth in new items, particularly those that are natural and not dyed with artificial colors to make them more eye appealing.

"Multi-grain rice has become popular recently due to its health benefits," he relates. "Although not really new trends, natural ginger and wasabi are surprisingly not widely adopted yet."

Due to the tight economy, some deli sushi departments are beginning to offer a choice of more economical items to help ease the strain on consumer wallets. This also includes the incorporation of less-expensive fish in some products.

"Some of the sushi makers are considering tuna as a filler, which gives you more variety," Milligan says. "Tuna, historically, has been a lower-cost value product for the consumer, so it does well in harder times."

Even if the economy dictates a shift in the product mix, it won't affect consumers drawn to sushi in search of fresh food that is different and healthful. In order to continue to attract new converts, Petrovsky believes supermarket delis should include sushi products, such as the California Roll, that enable customers to enjoy the unique creations of rice, fresh fruit and/or vegetables without jumping head first into the taste of raw fish.

"The freshness, health benefits and the realization by consumers that sushi does not always mean 'raw fish' have been driving the increasing popularity of sushi," he says. **DB**

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# 10 Ways To Win Big During The Super Bowl

Grab sales for the big event and keep customers coming back for more.

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

Christmas may be long gone, but the party isn't over yet. Soon after the last wreath is packed away, consumers begin to think of the Super Bowl for their next get-together.

This year's celebrations could be especially important for supermarket delis because the current economy has many people eschewing restaurants and other expensive outings, opting to spend time gathered at home with family and friends. When memories of New Year's Eve fade, it is the perfect time for delis to extend the holiday feasting fervor further into the New Year and rack up increased revenues with pre-planning and smart marketing concepts.

An estimated 7.5 million Super Bowl parties will take place this February 1. That means a lot of social snacking on items such as wings, pizzas, dips and sandwiches. The Super Bowl is, in fact, synonymous with entertaining, according to Tom Hickey, marketing director for DCI Cheese Co., Richfield, WI. "The Super Bowl is a wonderful merchandising event and leads to store traffic and merchandising creativity," he says.

Business typically slows significantly after New Year's Day, with customers frequently reining in their spending, notes Eric Le Blanc, director of marketing, foodservice retailing, for Tyson Foods Corp., Springdale, AR. "Super Bowl is an important event, adding excitement and opportunities for impulse sales," he says. "It's a critical time to gain a foothold in a low-traffic timeframe."

Deli operators can take advantage of game day as a way to change customers' shopping habits and "convert them into regular deli patrons throughout the year," explains Dan Emery, vice president of marketing for Pilgrim's Pride, Dallas, TX, the makers of several types of fully cooked wing items. "It's a really good opportunity not only to sell a lot of product but also to let new people know the deli is there as well."

Rod Steele, director of category planning



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for Sara Lee Deli, Downers Grove, IL, says most deli dollars during Super Bowl build-up are due to "incremental point-of-sale merchandising that does a great job of converting the traditional non-deli user into a deli consumer."

With that in mind, here are 10 ways to turn this year's Super Bowl into an end-zone dance for supermarket delis:

### Get On The Field Early

According to the National Association of Pizzeria Operators, Louisville, KY, sales of pizzas increase about 10 percent on Super Bowl Sunday. For a bigger slice of the pie, supermarket delis should first make themselves known as the go-to pizza place for football parties long before the Super Bowl.

Tyson's Le Blanc believes the opportunities begin with college bowl games and run through Super Bowl Sunday. "The same products have application for multiple events, and it only makes sense to use the same promotional materials and product offerings for multiple occasions," he says.

Waiting too late to merchandise the deli for the Super Bowl can cost in the long run, according to Dominick Frocione, vice president of sales for Ward Hill, MA-based Cedar's Mediterranean Foods Corp., which

makes hummus, salads, wraps, spreads, pita chips and desserts. "By then, menus are already planned, and all you will see are impulse purchases," he says. "Start some merchandising a few weeks early so your regular customers can start thinking about what they want to serve."

According to Patrick Ford, international marketing director for Raleigh, NC-based Ford's Gourmet Foods, the maker of Bone Suckin' Sauces and Fire Dancer Nuts, supermarkets need to create the relationship between their delis and game day. "Let them know you're going to be the Super Bowl place," he advises.

### Prepare Your Game Plan

Super Bowl means big business for finger foods, such as pizzas, sandwiches, dips and chicken wings. In fact, the National Chicken Council projects that more than one billion wing portions will be consumed during the 2009 Super Bowl weekend.

Pilgrim's Emery emphasizes that Super Bowl Sunday is the biggest day of the year for wings. "We've got Wing-Dings and Wing-Zings, and they're really perfect because the operator can prepare them in the deli fryer."

Boneless Wyngs are one of Tyson's biggest sellers for the game. "They're especially popular among consumers uncomfortable with gnawing on a bone in public," explains Le Blanc. "They offer the same flavor delivery but in a bite-size, boneless form."

Dips play an important roll on game day as well, serving as a centerpiece for Super Bowl socializing. "Typically the hummus category enjoys a 20 percent spike around Super Bowl Sunday," says Howie Klagsbrun, vice president of sales for Sonny & Joe's, Brooklyn, NY. The firm sells a full line of pre-garnished hummus, including Just Hummus, Hot Enough Hummus, Hummus Galilee (with Galilee olives), Hummus Pignoli (with pine nuts) and Garlic Addiction.

Cedar's Frocione is excited hummus has finally crossed over into the mainstream. "It has transcended from what was originally perceived as a health food to an everyday product that appeals to everyone," he observes. "I serve it at my Super Bowl parties and am always happy to see it's gone long before the traditional cream cheese dips are even touched."

Sandwiches maintain their role as an enduring finger food right through football season, according to Sara Lee's Steele. "We

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get a significant bump in Sara Lee deli meat and cheese shipments during the Super Bowl timeframe. This is due to the important role sandwiches have during football parties, and Sara Lee provides all the components for a great Super Bowl sandwich event."

### Open The Playing Field

Industry experts recommend making more room for all the tantalizing items available for a Super Bowl party. The best-selling grab-and-go items should be moved to the front, so busy shoppers do not have to waste time searching.

The cheese selections should also be ramped up, according to statistics released by the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board (WMMB), Madison, WI. Market research manager Suzanne Isige says U.S. consumers purchased 51 million pounds of cheese in supermarkets during the week leading up to Super Bowl 2008, which is 19 percent higher than an average week. "This makes this week the fifth highest of the year for cheese purchases," she notes.

Since Super Bowl fans will be in the mood for more cheese snacking, DCI's Hickey recommends making extra room for the company's Black Diamond Aged Cheddars. "This is the ideal snacking cheese," he

explains. "Consumers can include Black Diamond as part of a cheese course to serve for their parties, or they can slice it and serve with crackers. Our Black Diamond Extra Sharp and merlot cheese spreads are absolutely perfect for entertaining."

Hickey also recommends the King's Choice line of imported snacking cheeses, which includes both plain and flavored Havarti, Gouda, Edam, Fontina and others.

### Tack On The Extra Point

The deli's biggest advantage over other venues is the ability to offer busy consumers same-day game snacks without having to make extra stops. A shopper can pick up sodas, chips, dips, sandwiches, pizzas, wings and more under one roof without sacrificing quality.

Cedar's Frocione believes facilitating the shopping experience will increase cash register totals. "Help the consumer by pre-selecting some great products and great values and set them up in a special display section for Super Bowl."

Consumers are more than willing to pay for the convenience if delis facilitate their shopping experience, says Tyson's Le Blanc. "Providing the consumer with checklists or planning tools can make your deli a destina-

tion, even at full retail, so it's possible to build incremental sales without sacrificing margin."

Such helpful checklists can even help sell items in other departments, Le Blanc explains. "The deli will be passionate about selling wings, but there are opportunities for other sides such as cold salads, bakery items and paper goods."

### Go On The Merchandising Offensive

Visibility is crucial for increasing impulse sales, and effective displays are those that encourage consumers to stop and take a second look. "Remember, the No. 1 reason shoppers make a prepared foods purchase when they had not planned to shop the category is they saw the product," adds Le Blanc. "Make your displays visible, especially utilizing secondary display areas, and you have a winning strategy for incremental sales."

Delis need not go it alone, as most suppliers are happy to provide display materials. "We work with our customers on in-store, cross-merchandising opportunities with recipe suggestions to maximize merchandising efforts," says Hickey.

Ford's Gourmet Foods even offers online store support through the company's Web site. Deli managers have access to printable signs, recipe cards and banners, as well as a

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### Encourage Team Camaraderie

The trophy goes to the players who perform best as a team, and deli supervisors, likewise, will score a bigger victory by working jointly with suppliers to implement a successful cross-merchandising strategy. Sonny & Joe's Klagsbrun says delis are usually on the front line of sales scrimmage during Super Bowl build-up but frequently overlook the opportunity to merchandise accompaniments.

"Sonny & Joe's hummus can be cross-promoted with many things typically sold in the deli, including upscale crackers, bagel and pita chips, mini bagels, pitas, flatbreads, fresh breads and a host of deli-case cooked foods and standard meats," he explains. "Sonny & Joe's also has a line of pickles—sour and half-sour—that come in a bucket with a handle. It's a wonderful accompaniment to any Super Bowl deli package."

### Huddle For More Profits

Putting the entire party on a platter for your deli patrons is an effective merchandising tool they'll appreciate for the added time-savings.

"When it comes to wings, platters definitely work," reports Emery of Pilgrim's Pride. "We have accounts that do huge business with platters."

Cold platters are just as popular. Klagsbrun says Sonny & Joe's pre-garnished hummus is "perfect to place in the center of Super Bowl platters with vegetable crudite, chips or breads for dipping."

"Assorted sliced Sara Lee deli meats and cheeses, along with our new Sara Lee Sandwich Dressings, make for a great Super Bowl platter combination," Steele explain.

Shelby Weeda, president, King's Hawaiian Bakery West, Inc., Torrance, CA, recommends utilizing King's Hawaiian Bakery's new Snacker Rolls on party trays with items such as dips and wings. "And don't overlook traditional sandwich platters, which are always in vogue due to ease of consumption."

### Cheer On The Players

One-of-a-kind snacking items and special accompaniments can make the difference between an average Super Bowl party and one that's remembered long afterward. Ford of Ford's Gourmet Foods recommends using Bone Suckin' Sauces (available for foodservice in half-gallon containers) and Bone Suckin' Seasonings to create flavorful ribs and wings. "It makes it a little different and helps set you apart."

Innovative pre-made products will save

both deli workers and customers time during Super Bowl build-up.

Stefano Foods, Charlotte, NC, makes a unique pizza-like item known as Stefano's Rip-n-Dip, which is a stuffed bread ring that comes in either pepperoni and cheese or four-cheese flavor and is accompanied by a marinara dipping sauce. Consumers just heat it up and serve.



PHOTO COURTESY OF KING'S HAWAIIAN

Stefano's vice president of sales and marketing, Alan Hamer, says the Rip-n-Dip, like many of the firm's other products, was purposely designed for entertaining. "Shoppers seek high-quality, value-added party foods that are both crowd-pleasers and show a degree of creativity."

For a south-of-the-border twist, Don Miguel Mexican Foods, Anaheim, CA, recently introduced a deli tray that combines mini tacos, mini empanadas and taquitos, available in either beef or chicken flavors. "It's unique," says Marilyn Vincent, senior marketing manager, "and they're all hand-held, which makes them great Super Bowl items."

### Prepare For The Blitz

Hamer advises delis to prepare in advance for the challenge of the huge surge in demand created by the Super Bowl. "Compared to Christmas, where parties build for a four-week period, Super Bowl action is concentrated on a single day," he notes. "This creates significant service challenges for the deli: ordering enough product, having sufficient staff and balancing hot and cold food offerings. A lot of the pressure can be taken off staff by serving ready-to-heat foods that are shipped frozen and merchandised refrigerated."

Timing is crucial for delis offering hot

foods, which must be maintained at proper temperature and humidity levels to avoid drying out, explains William Rakow, corporate executive chef for Alto-Shaam, Menomonee Falls, WI, a foodservice cooking equipment manufacturer. The company makes a unique combination oven-steamer that can cook food in half the time of a traditional convection oven. "Everybody does a great job of cooking," he says. "It's the holding that can keep cooking foods and make them dry out. We have special equipment that has no fans, and you can hold food for many hours without it drying out."

Timing is also an issue for delis competing with pizza shops for Super Bowl business. "Everybody wants their pizza at half-time," adds Rakow. "And Super Bowl is one of the biggest days for pizza. With a combination oven-steamer, you can cook it, chill it and reheat it—and no one would know because you don't take the moisture out the first time."

### Go For The Goal

"Remember that Super Bowl is all about fun, so create a sense of excitement in your store," says Tyson's Le Blanc. "Merchandising, point-of-sale, in-store media and staff events can all help bring a spirit of excitement that shoppers will find infectious to your store."

Inviting deli customers and staff to join in the fun will set a festive mood leading to even more sales.

"One option is to award prizes to the most creatively dressed customer and associate or to the winners of in-store Super Bowl trivia contests," recommends DCI's Hickey. "Delis might also consider capitalizing on the halftime entertainment, which seems to be getting more publicity every year. This year's half-time show is Bruce Springsteen, so they could give away Springsteen CDs to consumers as part of an in-store deli contest or tie the giveaways into purchases."

Cedar's Frocione Foods laments that everyone does the same promotional events year-in and year-out and suggests altering the routine to create added interest. "Why not shake up the mix and do something new?" he asks. "Maybe run some tie-in promotions, such as buy a chip and get a free dip. We have had some retailers ask us to split a promo with another company, but not as many as you would think. Don't look at Super Bowl as just a one-week opportunity to see a lift in items you always sell; rather, use it as an opportunity to get initial trial from shoppers who might not try new things unless there is an incentive for them to make that first purchase."

DB

# Spain's Quintessential Quesos

A good selection of Spanish cheeses drives sales and profits

BY ELIZABETH BLAND

Consumers are intrigued by novelty cheeses, but when in doubt, they frequently reach for their trustworthy favorites. Although once considered “exotic,” many Spanish cheeses have gained mainstream status. Considered the cornerstone of Spanish cheese sales, Manchego has become a fashionable—albeit somewhat safe—choice for consumers.

As the general interest in Hispanic culture and heritage grows, so does the curiosity surrounding the cuisine of Spain. Specialty cheese connoisseurs are finding the country's cheeses intriguing, fashionable and affordable, and cheese buyers must satisfy this craving for knowledge and flavor with a basic assortment of Spain's best queso creations.

## Mapping Spanish Cheeses

Spain boasts more than 100 varieties of native cheeses, 13 of which are Denominación de Origen (DO) cheeses, a European Union name-protection status known as Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) in English. Classic Spanish cheese selections include those most commonly associated with the country, but opinions vary on which ones best represent the nation.

Tomás Lucas, marketing director for Dehesa de los Llanos, Albacete, Spain, claims Manchego, which has been steadily growing in popularity in the United States, is the nation's most famous cheese.

Michele Buster, vice president of Forever Cheese, Long Island City, NY, believes there are many other Spanish cheeses that can win the hearts of American consumers just as Manchego has done. “There's no one definitive style of Spanish cheese since each region considers its own as the Spanish ideal,” she says. “For Spaniards, Manchego is not always the cheese they mention first.”

For a well-stocked Spanish cheese case in the United States, Buster suggests including Manchego, Drunken Goat, Naked Goat, Campo de Montalbán and Capricho de Cabra cheeses.

The cheeses of Spain are just as complex as the nation's varied geography. Although



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## Manchego: The Golden Child

**C**onsidered one of Spain's greatest culinary contributions, Manchego DO cheese is produced only in the La Mancha region from the milk of the Manchega breed of sheep. It's typically sold at three ages—approximately three, six or 12 months—and is recognizable for its herringbone rind. Manchego's popularity has skyrocketed in the United States over the past two decades.

Two Manchego cheeses won highest honors at international competitions in 2008: Dehesa de los Llanos, a raw 18-month artisan Manchego, won Best of Class in the hard sheep's milk category at the World Championship Cheese Contest in Madison, WI, last March; and Lacteas García Baquero's Gran Maestre Manchego Curado, a six-month cheese, won a Gold Medal in the ewes' milk category for the second year in a row at the World Cheese Awards in Dublin, Ireland, last September.

Paul J. Sullivan, director of sales for Norseland, Stamford, CT, the exclusive importer of Lacteas García Baquero cheese, says the two-time award validates the superior quality of the Spanish company's products. "We're proud to represent such a fine selection and bring them to the forefront of the U.S. specialty cheese market."

According to Tomás Lucas, marketing director, Dehesa de los Llanos, Albacete, Spain, obtaining overseas recognition of his company's products was a "very important" achievement.

"This is confirmation that the Italians and the French are not the only ones able to create excellent products," he claims. "It shows the rest of the world Spain can also offer an authentic treasure."

The extreme weather conditions endured by the sheep of La Mancha—hot summers and cold winters, combined with a scarcity of water and grass—add character to the milk used to create the award-winning cheese, he adds.

**DB**

nearly every region of the county produces cheese from the milk of cows, sheep and goats, cow's milk cheeses are primarily made in an area stretching from the northern Atlantic coast in Galicia to the Basque region in the Pyrénées; sheep's milk cheeses are found in central Spain on the flats of Castile-León, Castile-La Mancha and the Extremadura; and goat's milk cheeses are crafted along the Mediterranean coast and in the Balearic and Canary Islands. There are always exceptions of course.

### Las Ovejas: The Sheep

Move over Manchego: There are other tasty sheep cheeses roaming the shelves! Idiazábal DO, a raw milk Pyrénées cheese originating from Navarre and the primarily cow's milk Basque region, is one of these. The cheese is gently smoked for a delightful balance of sweet and savory flavors.

A neighboring cheese, raw-milk Roncal, was Spain's first cheese to receive DO protection. Roncal is aged three to four months, during which time it develops a moist, slightly granular texture and nutty flavor hinting of herbs, grasses, and flowers from the mountain pastures.

From the Extremadura comes Torta del Casar DO, one of Spain's most famous sheep milk cheeses of the soft, spoonable category. The milk is curdled with the flor de cardo thistle flower, making it suitable for vegetarians. Legend has it this style of cheese owes its vegetarian origins to the Jewish cheesemakers of the area who could not mix animal rennet with milk because of

their strict dietary laws. Although this cheese can be gently sliced and plated, it's best served scooped, according to Forever Cheese's Buster.

### Las Cabras: The Goats

Wherever there's a sprig of herbs or a patch of grass in Spain, goats seem to have wandered. These hardy animals can survive under conditions of duress but also enjoy the luxury of lush pastures. Thus, goats have found homes all across Spain, and their milk has given rise to a broad variety of cheeses.

On the Mediterranean coast, Murcia al Vino, or Drunken Goat, as it's often labeled in the United States, soaks in red wine, while furry gray Garrotxa wheels hide out in the caves of Catalonia. Other goat cheeses hail from the sunny Canary Islands near Africa. Majorero DO comes from Fuerteventura Island, where the goats produce a dense, aromatic, high-fat milk. The resulting cheese can vary in flavor from sweet honey and thyme to aged versions made spicier by rinds sealed in oil and paprika.

Elsewhere, goat cheeses are completely different yet equally tantalizing. "Bucheron-style cheese is hot, as well as French-style mold rind cheeses," relates Buster. "In fact, the entire aged-goat category sells well."

Within this category fall Queso del Tietar—also called Montenebro—and Leonora, both of which are from Castile-León. The shape of Montenebro is likened to a mule's leg; it comes in a flattened log covered in ash and mold. The paste of this cheese is dense, with aromas of mushroom



PHOTO COURTESY OF ATALANTA CORP



and yogurt prevalent near the rind.

For a brighter and grassier mold-encrusted cheese, look no farther than Leonora, a long brick of soft, cakey goat cheese that pairs perfectly with Cava sparkling wine.

While Montenebro and Leonora cheeses share the “goat log” look, they are distinct creations. “They are of a similar style,” explains Forever Cheese’s Buster, “but the curd is cut finer in Montenebro. The goats are different breeds, and Leonora is a much newer cheese that is hand-made.”

### Las Vacas: The Cows

Cows may be in the minority in Spain but they make their presence known through several superb cheeses, such as Mahón DO from the island of Menorca and Tetilla DO from Galicia.

Named for the capital of Menorca, Mahón DO was once made of sheep’s milk, but after the British brought cows to the island, the cheese evolved into a unique cow milk delicacy. Ripened in underground caves,

## Unique Spanish Pork

Not only is Spain a country of sheep, cows, and goats, it’s also home to pigs. With jamón serrano leading the pack, Spanish charcuterie includes lomo, chorizo and the pricey Ibérico ham, which has only recently become available in limited quantities in the United States.

Often erroneously referred to as “Spanish prosciutto,” jamón serrano is produced by different methods, with different pigs and the terroir of a different country.

“Spain is a very proud country,” says Dan Incaudo, vice president of business development and sales for Cudahy, WI-based Smithfield Global Products, which imports Campofrio products from Spain.

Kate Whittum, sales and marketing director for Redondo Iglesias USA, Garden City, NY, notes that because serrano’s curing occurs at a higher temperature than prosciutto curing—causing more of the meat’s water weight to evaporate—it develops a more concentrated, drier flavor.

“Serrano has a more complex flavor profile than prosciutto,” she explains. “It is a wonderful balance between nuttiness, porkiness and salinity.”

DB

these flat, square-shaped cheeses are encased in rust-colored rinds rubbed with oil and paprika.

Tetilla often elicits giggles at the cheese counter; not only does its name translate as “nipple” in Spanish, but it also comes in a large “Hershey’s Kiss” shape. It’s a springy, young cheese that is buttery, tart and milky.

### Blended Families

Also common are blended cheeses, many of which use all three milks. Ibérico DO

looks much like a Manchego, but it’s made of cow, sheep and goat milk and produced throughout much of central Spain. Regulations require it contain at least 25 percent, but not more than 40 percent, of any one milk type.

From Asturias, Spain’s intensely veined blue cheese, Cabrales DO, is crafted from cow, sheep, or goat milk. When grazing is at its best during the warmer summer months, Cabrales often includes all three milks. In the winter, it’s made primarily from cow milk. DB

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# The Three P's Of Cross-Merchandising Crackers

Pairing, placement and partnering are key in cross-merchandising crackers and related deli items

BY LISA WHITE

As Americans rein in their spending and eat out less, they are looking to supermarket delis for gourmet items to enjoy at home and serve at parties. As a result, a slumping economy can be a real boon for specialty crackers, flatbreads and other high-end consumer packaged foods.

During these lean economic times, smart retailers should take advantage of the cross-merchandising opportunities afforded by crackers and flatbreads to help boost sales of complementary deli items. When executed correctly, cross-merchandising enhances product appeal, increases opportunity for add-on sales and encourages deli personnel to think outside of the box.

The three ingredients of a successful cross-merchandising campaign are pairing products, product placement and partnering with manufacturers and/or retailers. When all three aspects are implemented successfully, sales will follow.

## Pairing Products

Supermarket delis are ripe environments for creative cross-merchandising because of the wide variety of products they encompass. The colorful and aromatic environment of savory meats and cheeses, fresh salads and enticing hot foods makes the mouth water and creates the perfect spot for impulse buying. And crackers displayed in the deli benefit from the excellent complementary company they keep. Sampling them with other deli items is an excellent way to create consumer interest and educate shoppers in the process.

Tom McGlade, CEO at Chicago, IL-based Rubsclager Baking Corp., says the company's cocktail rye bread was designed as a vehicle for dips and spreads, but it's also great for creating appetizers to sample deli meats and cheeses.



PHOTO COURTESY OF VENUS WAFERS



"We utilize different methods for cross-merchandising, and this is largely dependent on the creativity of deli managers," he says. "Mini sandwiches offer a wonderful opportunity for deli managers not only to educate consumers but also to present innovative appetizer ideas."

Because the crackers and flatbreads sold in deli departments are typically higher-end than their counterparts sold in the grocery aisle, pairing with gourmet products can be beneficial. Antonio Galati, director of business and development at La Panzanella, Seattle, WA, recommends topping his firm's low-fat crackers with French cheeses, pâté, prosciutto and imported meats to help accent their gourmet appeal. "Although we offer nine cracker flavors, the taste should come predominantly from the topping."

Galati believes it's better to cross-merchandise according to the change of seasons, targeting picnickers and those on vacation during the summer months and people looking for entertaining ideas in the fall and winter. In the summer, cross-merchandising should be geared more toward snacking, he adds, with emphasis in the fourth quarter on appetizer accompaniments.

Demos are typically more popular in the first quarter of the year, when cracker and

flatbread sales are usually slowest. Many companies provide free products for sampling to help boost consumer interest.

"We always send tasting samples to our customers, which help sell products," advises Marilyn Caine, part owner of Aunt Gussie's Cookies & Crackers, Garfield, NJ. The company's packages include user and sampling suggestions such as topping the crackers with cream cheese and strawberries, salsa with tomato, or cheese with jalapeños and red pepper.

Organic products in the deli are another wide-open segment for cross-merchandising. Organically minded consumers are always on the lookout for new items, with price being secondary to their preference for foods produced without artificial fertilizers or pesticides. Hingham, MA-headquartered Venus Wafers is jumping on the natural foods bandwagon in a big way with its eight-grain



PHOTO COURTESY OF DOCTOR KRACKER

organic crackers, which are packaged in clear cellophane containers so consumers can see all their natural goodness. According to James Anderko, vice president of sales, these and other similar products offer increased customer appeal and are now coming down in price as well. "We are getting more

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requests for organics or natural crackers in the deli," he explains. "Costs were prohibitive for a while, but as organics become more common, the costs have become more in line with non-organic foods."

Because many consumers have balked at the higher price of organic crackers in the past, Venus' Anderko insists sampling is even more important now that prices are falling. "Shippers and displays are best located around the cheese case or by the hummus and other spreads," he says. "Consumers want to be educated, and the best way is through passive or active demos with crackers."

Cross-merchandising also helps convey the value of deli crackers, which typically carry higher price points than grocery crackers. Proximity also makes sense when pairing them with deli meats and cheeses.

The Snack Factory, Princeton, NJ, includes an extra bag of its Pretzel Crisps or Ciabatta Crisps with every order so delis can sample them at the full-service counter, says Milt Weinstock, marketing director. "Crackers should be by the gourmet cheeses to make it easier for consumers looking to purchase party food," he notes. "Displaying two products together provides an instant serving solution, whether you're looking to pair crackers with hummus for an appetizer or with gourmet cheese for an hors d'oeuvre. We encourage delis to pair cheeses, spreads and dips with our products while customers are waiting to be served at the deli counter. This is an intriguing way to facilitate sampling and increase impulse sales."

#### Product Placement

In addition to the wide range of product pairings, there are several display options. Rubschlager has secured a place for its cocktail rye beneath the full-service case in most delis, so consumers have come to expect it there. The firm provides shippers retailers can place next to complementary deli items.

"We recommend that our products be displayed on front knee-knockers, in baskets or within cheese islands as tie-ins with complementary products," says Michael DiCristo, Rubschlager national accounts manager. "The more display shippers are used, the more visible the products are. These shippers also provide deli managers with added flexibility to move the displays, which can help reduce out-of-stock levels during peak periods."

Other companies carve out space in the deli for their products with special racks. La Panzanella ships its products with their own rack for just such a purpose, but Galati says the products can also be displayed on top of the specialty cheese gondola or under the meat case if other space is not available.

Aunt Gussie's Caine advises against the

commonly used floor baskets and says table displays beneath the deli counter are preferable to shelving for displaying crackers. The company supplies cardboard shippers designed particularly for delis with little or no extra space. "Many stores use basket displays because they're simple, but shopping is hard enough without having to bend down to pick something up from floor level," she adds. "Tables are better for crackers, because it sets them apart from the similar, lower-end brands found on grocery aisle shelves."

Alan Konecny, director of sales at Dallas, TX-based Doctor Kracker, also believes table displays work best and emphasizes that shippers and displays work well only when placed by the cheese case or adjacent to hummus and other spreads. "When partnering with a brand, its best to have a demo

**"CRACKERS SHOULD  
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TO PURCHASE PARTY  
FOOD."**

—Milt Weinstock, marketing  
director at The Snack Factory

next to the table," he advises. "This gives both sampling companies more traction in the marketplace and more validity. Shippers work well for introductory offers but are not a long-term solution to brand growth."

Whatever the display situation, it's beneficial to combine either passive or active sampling to help educate customers how products are used. These can include pairing suggestions and recipe cards to help boost sales.

#### Picking Partners

Joining forces with one or more manufacturers can help cut demo costs for retailers, while providing added visibility to a cross-merchandising program.

Doctor Kracker joined forces with Ukiah, CA-based Bonterra Wine for a marketing program that began late last year in San Antonio, TX-based H.E. Butt Grocery Co. (H-E-B) stores. Large table displays were placed in the deli, where the crackers were paired with wine. It was so successful that plans are in the works to expand this program to Cincinnati, OH-based Kroger Co.



stores in the near future. "Wine partners are beneficial, because they offer a different dynamic and provide more validity in the marketplace," Konecny says.

Doctor Kracker has also partnered with hummus companies for cross-merchandising promotions. "Hummus is a hot product right now, so this is a natural partner for us as well," he explains.

The right manufacturing partner can give a complementary product added visibility, more upscale appeal and a positive image.

Konecny suggests retailers offer in-store \$1 discount coupons on Doctor Kracker products when purchased along with the

**"CONSISTENT  
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INTEREST."**

— Alan Konecny, director  
of sales at Doctor Kracker

store's private label cheese brand, which will augment the sales of both. He encourages money-saving, joint marketing efforts between manufacturers and retailers. "Co-demos allow manufacturers and retailers to share costs, along with the benefits," Konecny says. "Typically, the demo costs are split fifty-fifty. But the bigger benefit is that this helps connect consumers with how to use the product. Consistent promotions with retailers effectively keep the product in front of consumers and spark their interest."

In today's economy, manufacturers are more concerned about demonstrating the value of their products. For this reason, price breaks and coupons have become more prevalent in attracting customers who are determined to keep a tighter rein on their grocery budgets.

With innovative product pairing, creative and visible displays, and joint marketing efforts between manufacturers and retailers, cross-merchandising crackers with other complementary deli items can lead to more register scans.

"Product success and failure is often determined by cross-merchandising," Rubschlager's DiCristo says. "Better merchandising will sell more products." **DB**



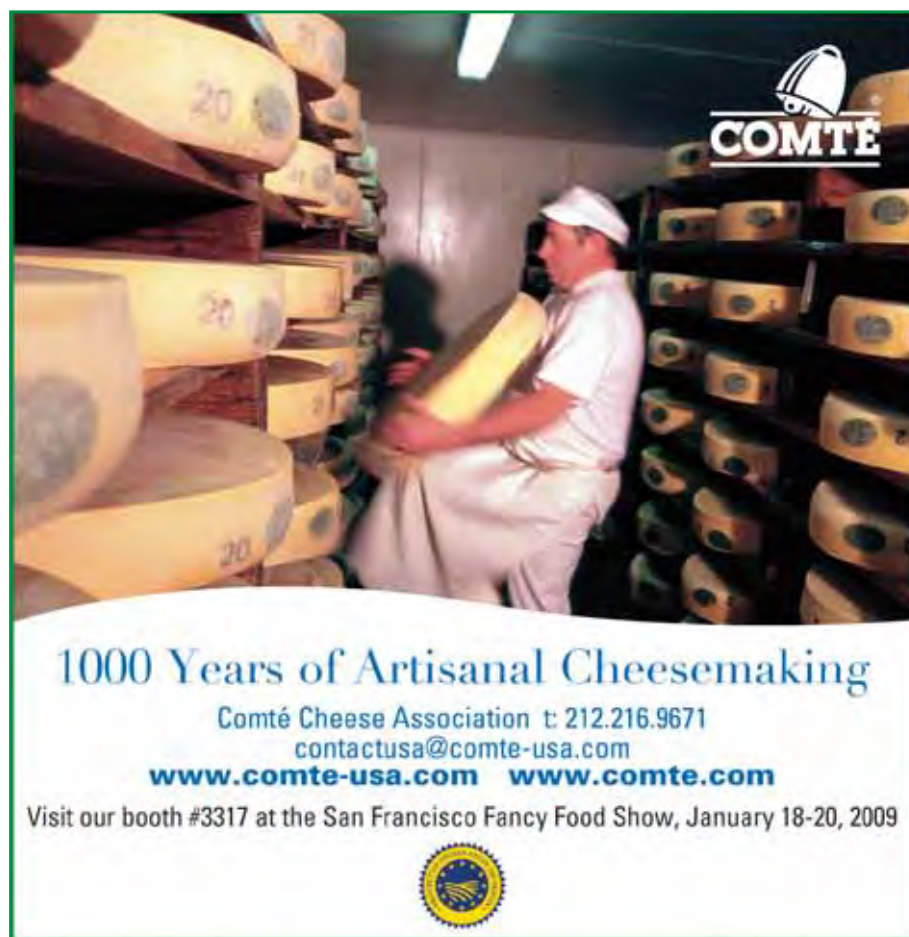
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## CDC Study Finds Three Million U.S. Children Have Food Or Digestive Allergies

22. Oct.08

CDC

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The number of young people who had a food or digestive allergy increased 18 percent between 1997 and 2007, according to a new report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In 2007, approximately three million U.S. children and teenagers under age 18—or nearly 4 percent of that age group—were reported to have a food or digestive allergy in the previous 12 months, compared to slightly more than 2.3 million (3.3 percent) in 1997.

The findings are published in a new data brief, *Food Allergy Among U.S. Children: Trends in Prevalence and Hospitalizations*. The data are from the National Health Interview Survey and the National Hospital Discharge Survey, both conducted by CDC's National Center for Health Statistics.

The report found that eight types of food account for 90 percent of all food allergies: milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, fish, shellfish, soy and wheat. Reactions to these foods by an allergic person can range from a tingling sensation around the mouth and lips to hives and even death, depending on the severity of the reaction.

Children with food allergies are two-to-four times more likely to suffer from related conditions, such as asthma and other allergies, compared to children without food allergies, the report said.

Other highlights:

- Boys and girls had similar rates of food allergies: 3.8 percent for boys and 4.1 percent for girls.

- Approximately 4.7 percent of children younger than 5 years had a reported food allergy, compared to 3.7 percent of children and teens aged 5 to 17 years.

- Hispanic children had lower rates of reported food allergy (3.1 percent) than non-Hispanic white (4.1 percent) or non-Hispanic black children (4 percent).

- In 2007, 29 percent of children with food allergies also had reported asthma compared to 12 percent of children without food allergies.

- Approximately 27 percent of children with food allergies had reported eczema or skin allergy, compared to 8 percent of children without food allergy.

- More than 30 percent of children with food allergies also had reported a respiratory allergy, compared with 9 percent of children

with no food allergy.

- From 2004 to 2006, there were approximately 9,537 hospital discharges per year with a diagnosis related to food allergy among children from birth to 17 years. Hospital discharges with a diagnosis related to food allergy increased significantly over time between 1998–2000 through 2004–2006.

The mechanisms by which a person develops an allergy to specific foods are largely unknown. Food allergy is more prevalent in children than adults. Most affected children will outgrow food allergies, although food allergy can be a lifelong concern.

The full report is available at [www.cdc.gov/nchs](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs).

## OREGON: Advance Offers Revolution In Food Safety Testing

27.Oct.08

Oregon State University  
Science Centric

<http://www.sciencecentric.com/news/article.php?q=08102724>

Microbiologists at Oregon State University have developed a new technology to detect illness-causing bacteria, an advance that could revolutionize the food industry and improve the actual protection to consumers while avoiding the costly waste and massive recalls of products that are suspected of bacterial contamination but are perfectly safe.

The new approach—made possible by fundamental research on the color changes in pigment-bearing cells from Siamese fighting fish—should be easier to use, faster and more directly related to toxicity assessment than conventional approaches now used to test food for bacterial contamination and safety.

The technology has been patented, and the findings were just published in the professional journal *Microbial Biotechnology*. Further studies will be needed before the system is ready for commercial use.

"Rapid methods are not readily available to directly assess the toxicity of bacterial contamination in a user-friendly fashion," said Janine Trempey, professor of microbiology and associate dean of the OSU College of Science. "When this new technology is commercially available, we should be able to provide a higher level of assurance to the consumer, while avoiding the waste of millions of dollars worth of food that is suspected of bacterial contamination but is actually safe."

Bacterial illnesses associated with food and water can produce symptoms ranging from mild stomach upset to severe illnesses and even death, and they are common. It's

**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).

been estimated there are about 76 million illnesses of this type every year that cost the U.S. more than \$10 billion.

Part of the problem is that conventional food safety testing done with DNA-based tests or antibody-based methods only indicate the presence of specific bacteria, which does not necessarily describe toxicity and the potential to cause harm. Sometimes bacteria only exhibit the behavior that can cause illness under specific environmental conditions, and it's that toxic behavior that we need to detect, Trempey said.

"Bacteria are common on exposed surfaces, including the food products we consume," Trempey said. "Simply knowing they are there doesn't completely tell you, in a direct measurement, about their potential to make you sick or whether the food is safe to eat."

Existing tests only work to detect bacteria that have already been characterized, based on a specific sequence of DNA or type of protein they produce. Such tests can't tell whether the contaminating bacteria are alive or dead, they can't directly assess their toxic potential and sometimes don't detect newly emerging or genetically rearranged strains as bacteria mutate.

It's possible, Trempey said, that portable kits could be developed that would not require specialized training to use. Results would be available in minutes and allow food processors, distributors, handlers or even consumers to quickly assess food for contaminating bacterial toxicity.

Several OSU graduate and undergraduate students assisted on this research and the recent peer reviewed publication. The Department of Homeland Security, Howard Hughes Medical Institute, the Dr Harry B. and Ralph H. Levey Philanthropic Fund and the Tartar Foundation supported the student research fellowships.



# The Consumer Is Always Right ... Or Always There?



By  
**Jeffrey Spear**  
President

Studio Spear LLC  
Baltimore, MD

**R**etailers used to say, "The consumer is always right." Nowadays, it seems retailers are taking a somewhat different approach, revising the statement to read, "The consumer is always there," along with the unspoken sentiment, "no matter how we treat them."

Along these lines I've been noticing—on an all-too-frequent basis—how commonplace it's become for one or two deli brands to dominate the deli case and/or the self-serve displays. It's not that I have any objection to these brands. It's just the practice leaves little room for consumer choice and minimizes new product experiences. If the consumer is always right, and trends indicate consumers are seeking out more diverse and interesting culinary experiences, I would think deli operators would be scrambling to accommodate a broader and more diverse selection of products.

The *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* reports that, according to Giant Eagle's spokesperson Dick Roberts, "Folks are looking for bold, exotic flavors and ethnic variety."

Additionally, Bellevue, WA-based The Hartman Group notes, "Consumers are moving away from foods they perceive as 'industrialized' or 'highly processed' toward higher quality foods that represent new taste and flavor experiences."

If these statements are true, and I've seen plenty of reports from sources such as Chicago, IL-based Technomic, Chicago, IL-based Mintel International Group Ltd. and TrendWire.com that agree, then why are selections in the deli case being pared down to just a few dominant brands?

Having attended the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association (IDDBA) Convention in New Orleans, LA, and the Summer Fancy Food Show in New York City, I can assure you, it's not for lack of availability. At each of these events, there were lots of producers, both domestic and international, offering numerous choices for meats, cheeses, pâtés, salads, condiments and related deli products. With so many options, I struggle to understand why deli directors are allowing the larger, more powerful brands such as Boar's Head, Dietz & Watson, Oscar Mayer (Kraft Foods), Hillshire Farms (Sara Lee) and Perdue to take over their departments, virtually eliminating choice and ignoring consumer preferences.

Sure, issues relating to store location, buyer demographics (including household income, family size, etc.) all play a

role, but this trend of monopolistic deli brands is happening all over. In fact, on a recent visit to see stores in the mid-Atlantic, such as Giant, Shoppers, Safeway, Ukrops, Piggly Wiggly and Fresh Market, there was little in the way of distinctive product offerings from one store to the next.

I get the impression that deli directors either prefer to do business with as few suppliers as possible—regardless of what this means in terms of product variety or quality—or are unwilling to embrace change in any meaningful way, or both.

Come on guys. If Wegmans and Whole Foods Market, touted as industry leaders, can manage a varied inventory that represents choice in terms of price, product description and quality, why can't you?

When asked about house brands such as Primo Taglio (Safeway) or Boar's Head (Giant's de facto "house" brand), Jeffrey Saval, president of Baltimore, MD-based Deli Brands of America, says, "Quality is on the rise. To compete in this day and age, you have to have quality." While I agree wholeheartedly, I also believe retailers need to offer product choice in terms of brand diversity as well.

I understand supermarkets have realized better margins from house-branded products for quite some time. I also recognize that making larger purchases from a single supplier is easier to manage and yields volume discounts.

This is fine when talking about commodities such as canned vegetables and granulated sugar. In the deli case, however, why operate to the contrary when there is an enormous variety of ethnic and regional products to choose from and a significant volume of data indicating that new food experiences play a big role in consumer purchases? It's not as if supermarkets are all thriving and reporting record growth.

If supermarkets weren't struggling for survival, if there weren't so much competition and if there were more obvious distinctions between grocery brands and in-store experiences, I wouldn't be raising these issues. My concern is that everyone is making the same offers. In the deli department, the similarities are stunning.

So, the next time you attend a Fancy Food or IDDBA show, pay attention to what's being offered and dare to be different. At the very least, dare to offer something different from your closest rivals. Give your customers something special—and a stronger reason to make return visits and repeat purchases.

**DB**

**I struggle to understand why deli directors are allowing the larger, more powerful brands ... to take over their departments, virtually eliminating choice and ignoring consumer preferences.**

# Blast From The Past: Grobbel's

**F**

our generations of American consumers have enjoyed the fine meats produced and sold by Detroit, MI-based Grobbel's since German immigrant Emil Grobbel founded the company in the city's old Cadillac Square Market in 1883.

His business and family grew steadily over the next four decades, with his three sons joining the Grobbel team. Grobbel's relocated to the newly formed Eastern Market District in 1925, where the firm began crafting its signature corned beef.

Today, Grobbel's is run by fourth-generation Jason Grobbel and the company's premium meat offerings for the supermarket deli, which include roast beef, pastrami, corned beef brisket, flat round and eye round, have grown substantially.

Throughout four generations of Grobbels, the philosophy and old-world values of the company's founder have remained constant: to offer world-class value by starting with the finest raw materials, hand trimming the meats to exacting specifications and using only the purest natural ingredients and spices.

As a result, Emil Grobbel's original passion for his craft is still enabling Americans from coast to coast to savor the exquisite flavor of Grobbel's famous corned beef and other fine meats.



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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