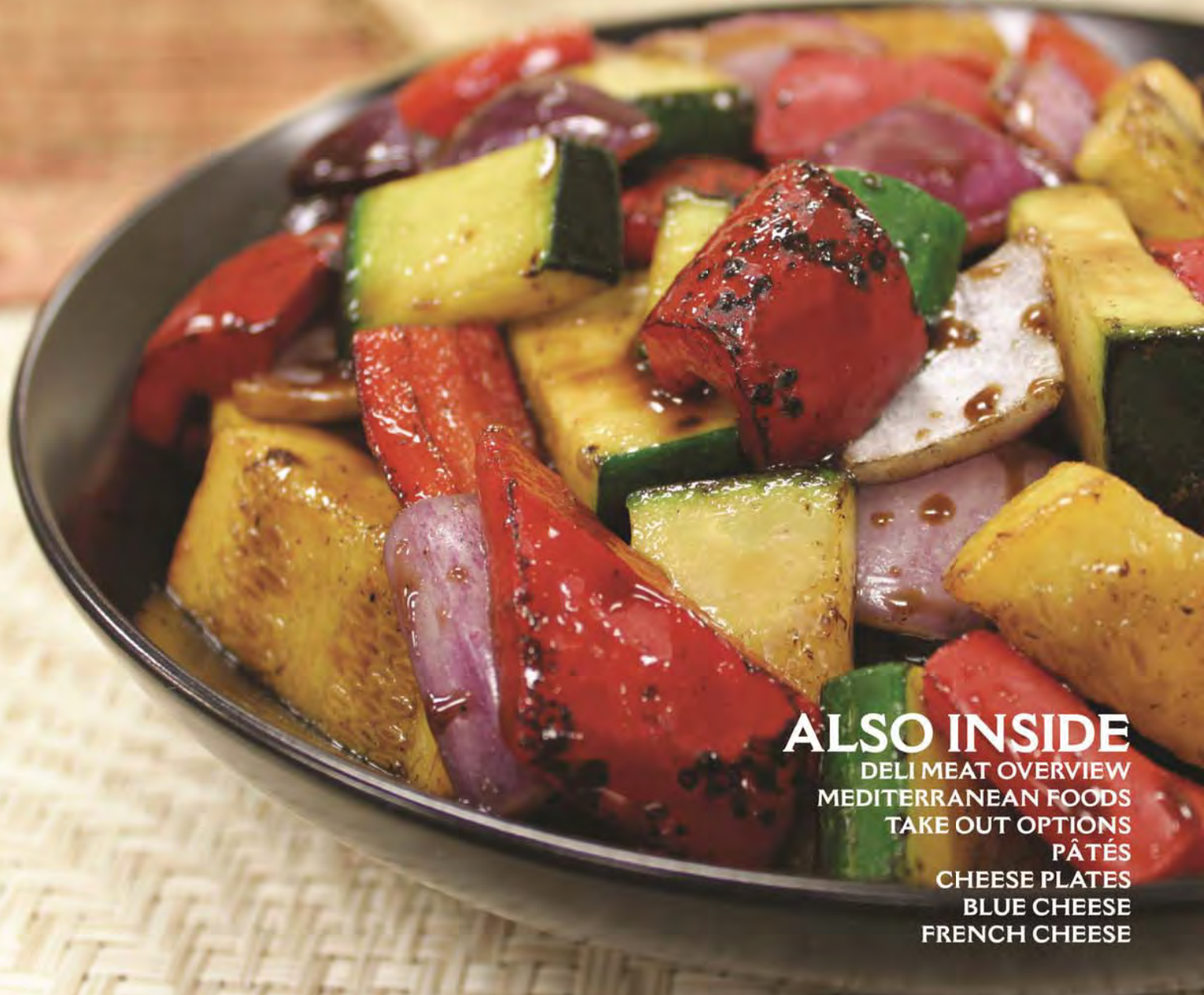


DELI BUSINESS

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Healthy Deli



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COVER STORY

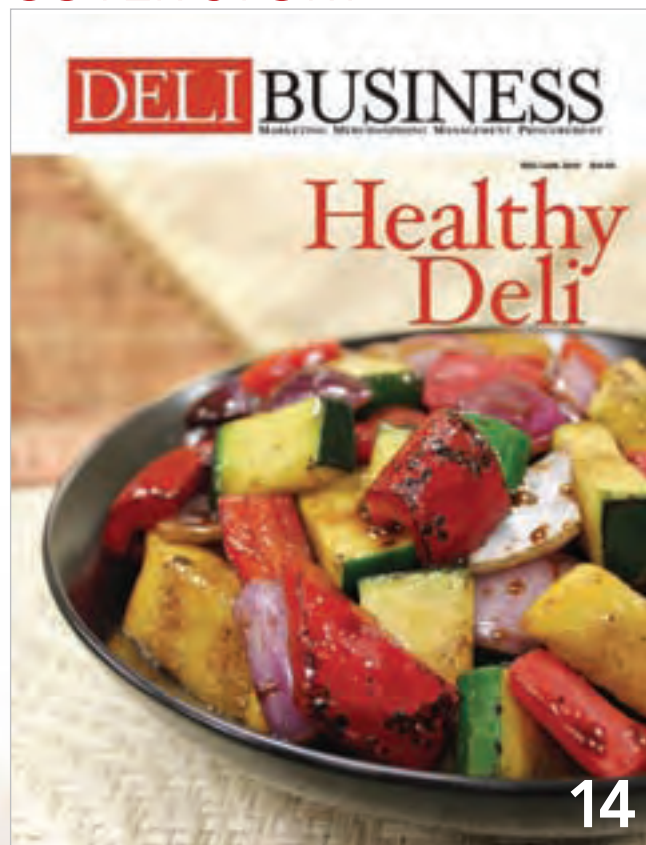


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WORLD RECORD CHEESE CARVER AND HARRIS TEETER HONOR VETERANS



Matthews, NC-based Harris Teeter supermarkets and nationally recognized cheese carver and *Guinness Book of World Records* holder, Sarah Kaufmann, The Cheese Lady, saluted veterans and active-duty military personnel and raised awareness for the Wounded Warrior Project with a special cheese carving in Harris Teeter's Arlington, VA, store. Kaufmann, known for her military cheese carvings sculpted Old Glory and her protectors from a 640-pound Cheddar Mammoth.

For more than 16 years, Kaufmann has been sculpting salutes to the military and their families. Famous sculptures include a 6-foot long aircraft carrier celebrating the return of the USS Ronald Reagan and the "yellow submarine," the USS Jallao, honoring the men that built and served on the submarine during and after World War II. You can see Kaufmann's military carvings at www.sarahcheeselady.com.

COMING NEXT ISSUE IN FEB./MAR. 2012

COVER STORY
Healthy Deli, Part 2

FEATURE STORIES
Asian Foods

MERCHANDISING REVIEWS
Grab & Go
Food Bars

PREPARED FOODS
Wings
Pizza

PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES
Packaging

DELI MEAT
Roast Beef
Salami

CHEESES
Dutch Cheeses
Rubbed Rind Cheeses

COMING IN APRIL/MAY 2012

DELI BUSINESS will take an in-depth look at sandwich programs and their impact on deli sales and profits.

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New Products



CRISP FOOD CONTAINERS

Anchor Packaging, St. Louis, MO, announces the addition of a second, smaller, version of its Crisp Food Container, sized to hold four pieces of chicken or a variety of other fried food products. The Crisp Food Containers use through-the-closure ventilation, along with raised airflow channels in the base of the container, combined with venting in the anti-fog lid, to ensure that fried foods remain crispy. The unique design of this packaging system retains internal temperatures better than other containers in use for fried foods. It is designed to withstand up to 230°F when placed in warming unit displays and under heat lamps. Made of polypropylene (#5PP), they are microwave-safe, dishwasher-safe, and consumer reusable and recyclable. www.anchorpac.com



TAILGATE READY BRISKET

Sadler's Smokehouse, Ltd., Henderson, TX, now offers its popular Tailgate Ready Beef Brisket with its new Sadler's Smoky Sweet BBQ Sauce packet in every package, for added value and convenience. Tailgate Ready Beef Brisket, first introduced in 2010, is carefully selected, trimmed and seasoned, then pit-smoked for hours over hickory and other natural hard woods the same way Sadler's has prepared its meats for more than 60 years. With a suggested retail price of \$7.99 per pound, each package is about 40 ounces and serves 8 to 10 people. All Sadler's meats are fully cooked and feature innovative packaging designed for easy heating in the oven, microwave or on the grill.

www.sadlerssmokehouse.com



PRIVATE-LABEL DELI OPTIONS

Haliburton International Foods, Inc., Ontario, CA, announces its entry into the retail market as a manufacturer for private-label brands with many new-to-the-industry products for the wall or service deli. Wall deli items include salsas, hummus, dips and spreads. In addition, Haliburton manufactures a line of restaurant quality, true center-of-the-plate individually quick frozen fire roasted vegetables with the fresh flavor, vibrant color and firm texture of freshly roasted vegetables that perform brilliantly as a side dish, in salads, on top of pizzas, and as accompaniment to any entrée — and they can be certified ready-to-eat.

www.haliburton.com



FOOD PACKAGING FOR FOODSERVICE

Inline Plastics Corp., Shelton, CT, has introduced a new line of upscale containers for foodservice. The Visibly Fresh product line, which consists of rigid, crystal clear plastic containers with an upscale design and minimal ribbing, promotes more attractive product merchandising and highlights the quality of the food. The line of eight containers in four popular footprints provides opportunities to package an endless variety of foods and food combinations. Visibly Fresh packaging ranges from single-serve sizes for snack applications up to dinner-size portions. Visibly Fresh containers are manufactured from 100% recyclable PET material. The line uses existing industry-leading Safe-T-Fresh tamper-resistant packaging. www.inlineplastics.com



NEW SIZE BURRATA

Maplebrook Fine Cheese, Bennington, VT, has introduced a unique 2-ounce Burrata, also known as Burratini. The Burratini is packaged with four pieces in containers of sea salt brine. The 2-ounce Burrata was developed based on suggestions from chefs who wanted to create dishes with a single, whole Burrata ball. Maplebrook's Burrata team went to work, testing a variety of configurations that would ensure meeting Maplebrook's standards for flavor, texture, aesthetics, and shelf life. Burrata is a recent addition to Maplebrook's line of handmade cheeses, including hand-stretched Mozzarella, hand-dipped Ricotta, cherry-wood smoked Mozzarella, whole-milk Feta, and more.

www.maplebrookvt.com



PRESLICED UNCURED TURKEY BOLOGNA & SALAMI

Plainville Farms, New Oxford, PA, a leader in antibiotic-free (ABF), vegetarian fed, all-natural, humanely raised poultry, has added pre-sliced uncured turkey bologna and pre-sliced uncured turkey salami to its deli line. Both are flavored with all-natural ingredients and have no nitrates, MSG, phosphates or carrageenan. The resealable 7-ounce packages each have a suggested retail of \$3.99. These two new SKUs join other popular Plainville Farms pre-sliced deli meat offerings including oven roasted turkey breast, honey turkey breast, hickory smoked turkey breast, oven roasted chicken breast, honey maple uncured ham and Virginia brand uncured ham.

www.plainvillefarms.com



CRUISER BOWL CONTAINER AND LID LINE

D&W Fine Pack, Fountain Inn, SC, has launched its new Cruiser Bowl container and lid line, available in 10 sizes for portion control and with Power Seal lids to protect against leaks and spills. For use in hot or cold applications, they are microwavable, reusable and top-rack dishwasher safe. Clear lids are available vented and non-vented. The line is well suited for packaging healthier options, such as deli salads, soups, fresh-cut fruit and oatmeal, as well as comfort foods, such as mashed potatoes and macaroni and cheese. Cruiser Bowls are made with D&W's exclusive C-Green material, talc-filled polypropylene engineered to reduce the overall use of plastic resin while maintaining product integrity, quality and durability.

www.dwfinepack.com



JARLSBERG ORIGINAL CHEESE DIP

Norseland, Inc., Stamford, CT, part of TINE SA, Norway's largest producer, distributor and exporter of dairy products, is pleased to introduce Jarlsberg Original Cheese Dip. Jarlsberg, with its unique mellow-nutty flavor, is the main ingredient and is combined with red onion and mayonnaise to create a hearty, deliciously addictive dip that's perfect for instant entertaining and casual get-togethers. It travels well, too, for picnics and tailgating, or can simply be used to enhance any number of recipes. The 8-ounce microwavable container makes it super convenient for quick, easy usage, has a guaranteed 45-day shelf life from shipping, and bears Jarlsberg's distinctive bold yellow, red and blue colors and logo.

www.norseland.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

New Products



BACON POUCHPACK

Smithfield, Smithfield, VA, has rolled out the Smithfield PouchPack, the only bacon package to offer two stay-fresh pouches each containing approximately six slices of uncooked, stacked bacon. The pouches are perforated for easy separation and have an E-Z Peel opening. Plus, the bacon in the pouch is stacked so slices peel apart more easily. Smithfield PouchPack Naturally Hickory Smoked Bacon is now available in Hometown Original flavor. Retail price for a 12-ounce package of two pouches is competitive with the 12- and 16-ounce bacon category and varies depending on the retailer.

www.smithfield.com



DILL PICKLE LIP BALM

Van Holten's, Waterloo, WI, has moved beyond its pickle-in-a-pouch manufacturing to offer a new product, Big Papa Dill Pickle Lip Balm. Big Papa is Van Holten's flagship pickle-in-a-pouch character who adorns the lip balm packaging. Big Papa dill pickle flavored lip balm is an impulse novelty item that comes in a .15-ounce tube. Sixty tubes are packaged in a clear plastic globe container for easy merchandising anywhere. The lip balm is made with natural ingredients, has SPF15 protection and will retail for 99¢ - \$1.29.

www.vanholtenpickles.com



NON-GMO VERIFIED WATER CRACKER

Venus Wafers, Inc., Hingham, MA, has launched a non-GMO (genetically modified organisms) certified water crackers under its brand, The Original Mariner Biscuit Company. Venus will display the Non-GMO Project seal of approval on its new packaging and expanded range of water crackers. The Non-GMO Project offers North America's only independent verification for products made according to best practices for GMO avoidance. The crackers have also been verified vegan and certified kosher.

www.venuswafers.com



CREMONT RETAIL PACKAGING

Vermont Butter & Cheese Creamery, Websterville, VT, has introduced retail packaging for Cremont, its double-cream, blended milk cheese made with cows' milk and cream, as well as goats' milk. The specially designed container will help protect the cheese and allow it to continue to age from creamery to the table while maintaining a very creamy cheese. The clear container is also ideal to show off the cheese's signature wrinkled rind.

www.vermontcreamery.com



by Jim Prevora, Editor-in-Chief

Health Messaging Is Kiss Of Death

If a restaurant chain aimed at mainstream consumers creates a new healthy food offering, the way to guarantee it flops is to create a special menu section labeled “Healthy Menu Options.”

Why is this? The most logical explanation is patrons get the message as, “These products don’t taste good enough or satisfy sufficiently to be on our regular menu.” If there’s a delicious, satisfying option that also happens to have healthy attributes, why isn’t it on the menu for everyone to buy? Putting it on a separate “healthy” menu is the kiss of death.

Logos identifying dishes as healthy, low carb or low calorie aren’t much better. Long experience says this kind of marketing shifts attention to the utilitarian benefits of the food, detracting from the emotional attraction that motivates purchase.

We have less data on the impact of health claims at the deli counter. Because many people view eating out as a treat, they may well be particularly resistant to utilitarian claims in a restaurant. When shopping for day-to-day purchases for home consumption, they may be a bit more open to healthy product claims. Maybe.

Certainly it can be useful to have guides available for consumers who have particular dietary needs, such as diabetes or hypertension. Signage indicating products are vegetarian or vegan can also be helpful, especially if their contents are hard to discern visually. Black bean soup can be a delight for vegetarians or ham lovers!

Still, overt health claims are problematic, not least because at retail we don’t typically sell complete diets; we sell individual foods. Some delis do a nice job, for example, selling mini-cheesecakes. Although some are lower in calories or fat than others, calling any of them “healthy” is a bit odd. There’s absolutely nothing wrong with eating the full-calorie version as an occasional indulgence. In fact, the first thing most dieticians or nutritionists will tell you is there’s no such thing as a healthy or unhealthy food — it’s the quantity and combination that makes a diet healthy or not. Even then, a lot has to do with the individual. A 6’ 4” 18-year-old male martial artist who lifts weight, runs and swims for recreation has a lot of leeway in what he eats. Attributes presumed to be healthy — say low calories — might not be relevant to him.

In addition, the science on many nutritional issues is not well settled. It’s true the USDA has recommended lower sodium intake and the FDA is considering reducing the recommended sodium levels. Still, a study published this year in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* is more subtle. It finds that though high levels of salt intake are associated with an increased risk of

stroke and heart attack, low salt intake is associated with a higher risk of death and hospitalization due to congestive heart failure. This study found moderate salt intake is optimal. This complex story isn’t easy to reduce to a label or sign.

The interplay between food satisfaction and consumption is also not well understood. Although it may seem healthier to sell a lo-cal version of something, if that product doesn’t satiate, the consumer might eat more to compensate. The deli department needs to be especially mindful of this dynamic as delis typically sell a broad array of product. Some of this may be a “health salad” inherently low in calories, and some of it may be specialty cheese rich in fat and calories.

Deli executives have good reason to be hesitant to claim one product is “healthy” and the other “not healthy,” and, truth be told, it’s very plausible consumers who buy rich satisfying foods may wind up satiated and thus eating less than those who buy less satisfying product.

In light of these issues, a focus on “healthy food” seems difficult to execute wisely. Perhaps a better approach would be to continue the long-term trend in delis toward selling higher quality food. It wasn’t that long ago that the deli case was filled with pimento loaf and bologna. These processed products have fallen out of fashion and given way to whole muscle meats, such as good quality roast beef, turkey and ham. The processed cheeses that were all many consumers knew 30 years ago are now crowded out by an array of fine specialty cheeses.

Offering products that don’t satisfy, that don’t taste good, that one would not want to offer to all consumers in the name of selling “healthy foods” is a fool’s errand. The way to crack the consumer interest in healthy eating is to find innovative products that stand on their own in terms of flavor and mouth feel — and also happen to have many healthy attributes. This often involves looking at cuisines, such as Mediterranean, Asian and Latin American, which do not traditionally encompass a lot of highly processed foods.

Offering high quality, delicious foods is the mark of any successful deli operation. If you do it right, you’ll have plenty of healthy options to delight consumers and encourage higher sales and more frequent visits.

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Located in the Netherlands, in the city of Woerden, the van den Wijngaard family has been aging cheese for generations. The process for making the exceptional Gouda called Reypenaer takes place in a century-old warehouse, still without refrigeration. Inside, cheeses are turned and wiped down everyday by hand as the fluctuations in temperature and humidity assist in improving the aroma, taste, texture and complexity of flavors. In order for this cheese to be awarded the designation of "Reypenaer", it must be aged for at least 1 year. In 2005, 2007, 2009 & 2011 Reypenaer was awarded with the Gold Medal for Best Dutch Cheese at the International Cheese Show held in Nantwich, England.



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www.atlantafoods.com

Gourmet Foods International
Long Island City, NY (845) 701-5557

by Lee Smith, Publisher

Fighting Obesity with Good Food

Obesity is a personal matter. No one wants to admit being obese and no one wants to talk about it, so fat-talk is always spoken in the third person. Maybe it's time to take fat out of the closet.

I'll be first. I'm fat, but not as fat as I was two years ago. Then I was obese. Now, I'm only slightly obese and almost into "normal" sizes at which time I'll only be fat. There are a lot of reasons why I'm overweight. I travel a lot; my job requires sitting at a desk all day; I eat out frequently; I'm in the food business, so I'm always looking for and trying new foods; and I make bad food choices, but not on purpose.

However, over the last two years I've lost about 50 pounds and I'm happy it took that long. Why? Because I didn't diet — I changed the way I eat. I paid attention to people I know who are thin and watched what they ate. Forget lifestyle, forget hormones; the basic reality is every one of them ate differently than I did.

I decided to exchange what I was eating for healthier foods, and gradually I've lost weight — without dieting. I decided to forget about prepared meals out of a box and cook more. I started eating more fresh fruit and vegetables, more whole grains, more fish, and more beans. I also ate more specialty cheeses, yogurt, chicken and olive oil.

I gave up additives, preservatives and highly processed foods. We stopped buying foods that contained sugar when sugar wasn't needed. I cut way back on meat, substituting vegetarian meals, fish and more poultry.

I didn't give up anything, but gradually my tastes have changed. Grease is now distasteful as is anything too sweet. If something has artificial anything, I can taste it and the chemical taste is overwhelming.

My point isn't to pat myself on the back or get preachy; it's to raise awareness that dieting doesn't work but healthy eating does. It's time supermarkets become nutritional leaders or risk becoming irrelevant.

Healthy eating is where the deli department can make a difference. When I began this journey, I thought we'd be making everything from scratch, but that hasn't been the case. Rotisserie chicken is a staple. However, when it comes to most supermarket deli departments, rotisserie chicken is where it begins and ends.

We buy lots of fresh prepared foods — tuna salad with celery, walnuts, and cranberries; wild rice; fish cooked that day; pasta dishes; prepared vegetables that range from spinach and Feta spanakopita to grilled veggies to baked butternut squash with maple syrup; and, of course, soups. We just don't buy them at mainstream supermarkets. We buy them where we know they are freshly made without any "hidden" ingredients.

There's a need for healthier foods — and the healthier versions aren't all that different from the "regular." They're just better quality, made fresh and free of chemicals and pH-altering additives. They taste great and are satisfying. The flavors are clear and bold and there's no aftertaste.

In the search to drive down labor costs, the industry went to outside manufacturers. In the search for a 45- to 60-day shelf life, flavor-changing additives and preservatives were allowed. In the search to drive up gross-profit margins, less expensive ingredients were used. In the search for flavor, sugars, fats, artificial flavors and salt were added.

We ended up with garbage and eat to find satisfaction that doesn't exist. We have fat, salt and sugar. It tastes great, but it doesn't satisfy. Eat grilled chicken, wild rice with pecans and cranberries, broccoli and a salad — and the satisfaction lasts the evening. Simple in-season fruit complements the meal.

Retailers need to be consciously aware of what they're selling. Today, contemporary means healthy. Maybe more deli departments should go back to preparing some foods in-store. For those that can't, technological advances, such as high-pressure pasteurization, allow long shelf life without additives or preservatives.

As for cost of goods, there will be a price increase that should be passed along. I've talked to retailers and manufacturers who have introduced better quality, better tasting food and they've found significant sales increases with price being much less of an issue than anticipated.

As an industry, we need to be thinking quality and not gross-profit percentages. Yes, we can't discount profits, but they come from doing things right over the long term and understanding your clientele. Quality doesn't mean cheap, but it can mean less expensive. Prepared foods can range from rice and beans to roast lamb and new potatoes, but the quality of both can remain high.

Retailers can lead a food revolution or take a wait-and-see attitude, but successful supermarkets can no longer view themselves as simply reflections of society at large and wholesalers to the community. The country is too diverse and options too prevalent. Middle-of-the-road attitudes lead to mediocrity — and mediocrity is what makes losers. **DB**



Lee Smith



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This is PART I of a 2-part series on healthy deli foods.
PART 2 — Consumer Research — will appear in the Feb/Mar issue.

Healthy Deli

PART I

There are opportunities, but retailers need to exercise caution

BY BOB JOHNSON

The desire to eat good-for-you, nutritious foods is one of the great trends of our time, but what that means for retail deli sales isn't obvious.

"Healthfulness is one of the mega trends in food, and we're trying to find out how that translates at the deli," says Sharon Olson, principal of Olson Communications, Chicago, IL. "It may or may not be true that people are looking for healthier food at the deli. In our survey of casual dining establishments such as Chili's, Applebee's and Outback, there was a direct opposite relationship between what people said they thought was healthy and what they thought they would eat. In restaurants people talk and behave differently."

Many researchers have noted the difference between how consumers eat at home and how they eat when they go out. "Most consumers say they eat more healthy when preparing food at home; for many, this seems to be tied to the oversized portions offered at many restaurants. Forty percent of consumers say they eat healthfully at home, while only 18 percent say they eat healthfully away from home," according to the Unilever Sandwich Pro summary of the 2010 Technomic *Healthy Eating Consumer Trend Report*. "Although most consumers do not follow a specific diet, the vast majority of consumers indicate that health is a priority for them and they try to eat healthy most of the time."

According to Sandwich Pro's data, foods consumers associate

-NEW-
DELI CUP PROGRAM



16 oz. Deli Cup

The Private Brand Cup Program is Here!

We are offering a full line of wall deli items such as Salsas, Dips and Spreads, served in 8 oz, 12 oz and 16 oz deli cups. For the service-deli segment, we manufacture items such as fire roasted vegetable blends, pasta blends and rice blends including our fire-grilled shrimp. For more information about how to fire up your deli sales, e-mail Bobby Ray at bray@haliburton.net.

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INTERNATIONAL FOODS

with being healthy are, in order, raw vegetables, fruit, super fruits, fish, seafood, herbs, soy products, regular yogurt, cooked vegetables and egg whites. Foods consumers associate with being unhealthy are bacon, sausage, pork, cheese and beef.

This healthy-food split personality is at the heart of the question of whether good nutrition is an opportunity or a trap for the deli. "We think most consumers experience a 'feel good' mood about choosing higher-quality foods they consider to be healthier for their families," says Forrest Senter, national sales manager for Whole Harvest Foods, Warsaw, NC. "At the same time, an indulgent side rationalizes it's OK to break their healthy eating rules on occasion." Whole Harvest produces trans fat-free vegetable cooking oils without using harsh chemicals.

Rationalizations aside, producers of healthy food options generally report improved sales to the deli, and that suggests there are opportunities. According to Steve Dzisiak, commercial leader for oils at Dow Agro Sciences, Indianapolis, IN, "Health is driving the food industry in all the different categories. The fastest growing and most profitable segment of food companies is the better-for-you category.

"It's hard to change what people eat, but we can make what people eat healthier," he continues. "We're going to see a doubling of our healthier oil this year. From about four years ago we're up about threefold, and it will keep growing at least double digits."

Although the category is growing, most producers, ironically, advise against merchandising healthy food primarily for its nutritional value.

Field Roast Grain Meat Co., Seattle, WA, makes a line of grain-based meat analogs that contain grains and vegetables — rather than soy — and oils that have been pressed without using chemicals. They're high in fiber, through the roof in protein and entirely free of cholesterol. But president and founder David Lee advises against emphasizing health in merchandising the products.

"Flavor is important because health by itself is not going to make a product," Lee says. "Promoting on health will tell some people, 'Don't eat this.' We're all about flavor and mouthfeel with fresh vegetables, and we use salt and oil. We sell more of our products to meat eaters than to vegetarians. Carnivores are eating less meat and more vegetarian foods."

Field Roast Grain Meat is sold in Whole Foods and Wegmans in New York, and Lee believes the company could penetrate more conventional stores when decision makers open up to the latest trends. "We've been growing 40 percent annually for the last three

years. We've been going to Whole Foods and natural foods delis for years. Our business there grew years ago, but it's been kind of flat only because we've been too busy to push it. We haven't cracked mass markets yet, but we think we can be in stores like Kroger and Safeway," Lee continues.

Consensus says healthy food alternatives must taste good to succeed at the retail level. "If it doesn't taste good, it won't sell," notes Jeffrey Siegel, CEO, Farm Ridge Foods,



PHOTO COURTESY OF HALIBURTON INTERNATIONAL FOODS, INC.

Commack, NY. "I think freshness is more important to the consumer; that's more important, as well as taste."

It isn't necessary to emphasize the details of a product's higher nutritional value because consumers already get the general idea. "If consumers see grilled chicken with broccoli and watercress, they know it's a good product without knowing if it's high in sodium, cholesterol or calories," Siegel adds.

Go Picnic of Chicago, IL, has a line of shelf-stable balanced meals that include a protein, a fruit, a whole grain and a sweet treat; they contain no trans fats, MSG, high-fructose corn syrup or artificial flavors or colors. "I use them as snacks for my kids in the car. You can use them at your desk or at the beach," says Lauren Russ, who does public relations for Go Picnic through her firm Connect Communications, Chicago, IL.

They fill the need for a small meal or substantial snack that is portable, convenient and nutritious. "We've definitely seen a lot more interest. They're a healthy, nutritious alternative. I could see them in the deli. They're already in grocery stores, but not in the deli department," Russ says. All of the meals are less than 500 calories, many are gluten free and a few are vegetarian. The key is the ingredients sound enticing. The cheese spread is Asiago, the dried fruits include Mariani dried cranberries and pineapple and the sweets include Brown & Haley

Almond Roca butter crunch toffee.

Mediterranean food is the poster child for successful healthy food in the deli. "We've seen the explosion in popularity of Mediterranean foods led by hummus and also items such as tabouleh, bruschetta and tzatziki," says Bob Ferraro, co-founder and director of sales at Tryst Gourmet, Port Washington, NY. "Hummus in particular has grown from a meager household penetration of around 4 percent at the turn of century to over 20 percent in 2011. It's perhaps one of the fastest growing categories throughout the entire store and has been for many years now."

Tryst has introduced a line of hummus made from alternative beans such as white beans, edamame or yellow lentils, and the novelty is a selling point. "The response was twofold as many consumers liked the health aspect but just as important was the fact that the new items were innovative and creative, offering consumers choice over traditional style hummus. No matter how good things are, it's human nature to want to try new things from time to time," Ferraro adds.

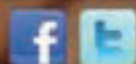
Rotisserie chicken is another healthy deli option. "I think many core deli foods are natural fits for both consumer attitudes of eating healthy and indulging their cravings for good taste and more," Senter says. "A portion-control component for most deli foods links back to 'healthier' and 'waste not'. However, the wide variety of protein offerings of most delis, coupled with the quick and freshly served-, sliced- and packed-to-order approach, offers a uniquely convenient, higher-quality shopping experience in the eye of the deli customer. I think rotisserie chicken is a prime example of the trend towards healthier eating."

Foods that are grilled rather than fried can provide healthy, delicious alternatives. "Customers are looking for more authentic and healthy ethnic global flavors. We offer all natural dishes such as Szechwan Fire Grilled Shrimp Stir Fry, Fire Grilled Shrimp Thai Pasta Salad and Oaxaca Rice," says Jorge Aguilar, deli sales manager at Haliburton International Foods, Inc., Ontario, CA.

Flavorful low-salt alternatives can bridge the gap between nutrition and mouth appeal. "While many consumers seek out healthier options, some say food loses its flavor without all the salt and fats," notes Mark Sandridge, CEO, Sandridge Food Corporation, Medina, OH. "The shoppers' ultimate goal is to buy food they and their family can feel good about without sacrificing taste. Offering alternative reduced-sodium options for favorite foods — while maintaining existing taste profiles — is a good start in shifting current sodium consumption behavior."

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unique and exciting flavor profiles. “Products that are lower in sodium, lightly dressed and non-mayo-based — such as couscous, bean salads, barley, and quinoa — have grown in popularity. Dishes with ethnic flair and trendy ingredients have also gained favor, including products with dried fruits, nuts, unique proteins, more flavorful greens such as arugula and kale, and roasted vegetables,” Sandridge says.

The split mindset is obvious in the soup category. “There are a couple of conflicting trends going on right now in refrigerated deli soups. Many consumers are absolutely looking for healthier products but there are also many consumers looking only for great tasting, restaurant-quality comfort foods — without regard to their healthiness,” says Levon Kurkjian, vice president of marketing at Kettle Cuisine, Chelsea, MA. That means successful healthy options are also somewhat indulgent.

Consumers may be reading labels in many supermarket departments, but this isn’t as frequent in the deli. “Most deli retailers don’t post nutritional information about what’s in their salads. They don’t post nutritional information about any of their dishes. In supermarket retail, people are looking at the label. They’re looking to eat healthy at home,” Olson of Olson Communications notes.

Healthy by Many Other Names

Part of the complexity of merchandising more nutritious products is the lack of a clear and universally accepted definition of healthy. “In the deli there hasn’t been a shift in what the consumers are looking for,” says Farm Ridge’s Siegel. “In the past the deli hasn’t been a successful place to launch nutritional foods. I think part of the problem is the definition of ‘healthy’ keeps changing. Is it low sodium, low cholesterol, low fat, low calorie, good cholesterol?”

Some health metrics are becoming more popular. One trend is the increased popularity of foods that aren’t fried. “In the last couple of years, customers have been searching for non-fried foods in the deli. Rather than purchasing potato wedges, fried chicken and macaroni salad, they’re looking for fire-roasted vegetables, rice, marinades and fresh salsas,” Haliburton’s Aguilar relates.

Another clear trend is whole-grain bread. “The best performing products in the bread category are breads that promote claims that include whole grain, heart healthy and fiber rich,” says Tom McGlade, CEO of Rubschlager Baking Corp., Chicago, IL. “Shoppers’ purchases indicate healthier breads are increasing. According to Nielsen, for the 52 weeks ending July 10, wheat bread sales (\$2.6 billion) surpassed white bread (\$2.5 billion).”

Vegetable-based dishes are also increasing in popularity — if they meet the mouth appeal test. “During this trend towards healthier deli foods, we’ve seen disproportionate growth in vegetarian varieties, broth-based varieties, protein-rich varieties and ethnic cuisine-inspired varieties. Alternatively, some of the heavier cream-based soups have lost share of sales,” Kurkjian says.

Who Do You Serve?

Merchandising healthy foods in the deli is a complex subject and depends on consumer demographics. “We can say that in higher socio-economic areas, healthier deli foods are



more popular. We also have some evidence, while not nearly as strong as the socio-economic factor, that geographically consumers on the two coasts, Colorado and some larger metropolitan cities are more inclined to purchase healthier deli foods and in other parts of the country,” Kurkjian adds.

The demographics of the healthier food market, however, are shifting. “Once upon a time, the typical hummus consumer was a female age 25 to 55, college grad, with a \$50,000 plus income,” explains Tryst’s Ferraro. “But now it’s spread across many demographics. Kids in particular love hummus and now generations of them have grown up around the product. Once upon a time better than 30 percent of all hummus sales in the U.S. were in the Northeast. Now it’s spread significantly including many places where people used to think hummus was something you spread in your garden to help things grow. We still see higher sales along the coasts — East, West, South — but it’s much more even these days. Once upon a time there were very few choices in flavor, quality, pack size, etc., with all leading brands closely priced. Now the category is very diversified with differences in quality, added value, pack size and price. So there’s something for every-

one which I believe has attracted many more income groups to the category.”

The predominant market for deli foods, and for healthier foods, is among middle-income consumers. “A Counter Intelligence study finds the most frequent deli shoppers are people with incomes of \$50,000 to \$74,000,” Sandridge of Sandridge Foods notes. “Demographic studies of types of shoppers show the health-conscious segment — people concerned about nutrition attributes in food — shop the supermarket more times per week than the average consumer.”

These consumers can be found in locales of all sizes. “About 28 percent of health-conscious deli shoppers live in large cities, 27 percent in small cities or towns, 26 percent in suburban areas and 18 percent in rural areas according to research from IDDBA’s *What’s In Store 2012*,” Sandridge continues.

Geography matters in assessing the appeal of healthier options. “There are many upscale retail stores that have a larger variety of deli items, and customers go there for a lunch buffet and pick up items for dinner for their families. We’ve noticed the West Coast wants hotter salsa and the East Coast wants milder salsa, but this has nothing to do with income,” Aguilar says.

Uncharted Territory

Understanding how the healthier eating trend translates to the deli is uncharted territory. When asked if there is more demand for healthy food at the deli, Field Roast’s Lee responds, “The right answer is yes, but the honest answer is I don’t know.”

Part of the difficulty is that consumers are not yet clear about the issues. “We know consumers look at nutritional labels now, whereas five years ago they didn’t. But they may be confused about what they’re looking for,” Farm Ridge’s Siegel says.

Still, some healthy trends have already made headway. “I believe a consumer trend toward healthier food choices was in evidence at least a decade ago. It became more visible with the trans-fat issue and health risks surrounding consumption of foods containing hydrogenated oil,” says Whole Harvest’s Senter.

The range of healthy options should keep expanding since this trend has legs. According to Sandridge, “This trend for healthier food has been around for many years and has recently become even more prevalent. This could be due to the growing obesity rates as well as current, stricter sodium-intake recommendations by the American Heart Association and USDA. It isn’t a fleeting trend, either. As the industry becomes further attuned to the use of preservatives, additional healthy, pure products will emerge.”

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Whither Deli Meat?

Once the archetypal deli category, deli meat now shares the spotlight with a host of rivals

BY JAN FIALKOW

The traditional supermarket deli has undergone many changes over the years. Once the go-to department for cold cuts and sandwich meats, the deli now offers myriad prepared foods, salads, dips, cheeses, spreads, ethnic options and more. While the marketplace for these items has expanded, the manufacturers of deli meats face a variety of challenges to their once-vaunted position as the category that moved the most merchandise at the highest prices with the most significant profits. This is not to say the category is in trouble; rather it's a mature category that can't count on the kind of rapid expansion that less developed categories enjoy.

"The deli meat category continues to be challenged," explains Eric Le Blanc, director of sales development, Tyson Foods, Inc. - Consumer Products, Springdale, AR. "While household penetration of the category is stratospheric, modest annual increases sug-

gest purchase frequency is not all it could be. We also see usage increase in older population segments, which leads to the question of the growth prospects for the category."

In fact, the deli meat category has shown a small increase in dollars in the past year, albeit with a slight decrease in total pounds. According to *Freshlook August 2011* from FreshLook Marketing Group in Hoffman Estates, IL, says Kari Lindell, director of retail marketing for Butterball, LLC, Garner NC, "The deli category is up slightly compared to a year ago with a dollar increase of 2.3 percent but a 2 percent decrease in pounds. In order to maintain and drive growth, manufacturers should strive to continue meeting the ever-changing preferences of the consumer, keeping in mind that taste is always the top priority."

She believes variety is the key to maintaining — and growing — the consumer base. "At Butterball, we continue to offer

great tasting products in a variety of flavors, now with less sodium than a year ago. Our research shows that Butterball consumers purchase more flavors of deli meat than the average deli consumer — demonstrating variety is often key to staying relevant in the category."

Upscale Matters — Big Time

Consumers may have been buffeted by the drawn-out economic downturn, but many of them — at least those still employed — have been unwilling to sacrifice quality on the altar of rock-bottom pricing. According to Bruce Belack, executive vice president, sales and marketing, Vincent Giordano Corp., Philadelphia, PA, "There's no doubt that economic conditions nationally have affected retail sales. More so, retail prices for deli meat items have risen dramatically due to the strong beef market. However, just about all of our retail customers have stayed



with premium, high-quality deli roast beef items reflecting what the customer wants. In fact, in 2011, two of our larger accounts raised the quality level for their private-brand programs; more confirmation of what the majority of consumers is demanding. Our overall sales of premium deli roast beef items have remained very strong. Our customer list is growing.

"The more upscale and all-natural pre-sliced product suppliers — including our company — are also having their products high-pressure pasteurized to offer a premium, low-sodium, healthy product with a great shelf life," he adds. "Our sister company, SafePac, is offering this process to many of these suppliers. All of our Giordano deli meats are pasteurized at SafePac."

The economy, while hurting some consumers deeply, has created an opportunity to reposition upscale items as affordable luxuries. "In a trend of the last three or four years, consumers have purchased downstream because of economic challenges," says Jim Dickman, CEO, Charlie's Pride, Vernon, CA. "But there's a distinct group of consumers looking to shake off the economic doldrums. They're looking for distinct items with great flavor." Charlie's Pride offers roast beef, corned beef, pastrami, and even prime rib with au jus for the service deli.

"We're pursuing marketing new and innovative products to folks with greater discretionary funds," Dickman continues. "We're seeing more call for private-label and branded

Sandwich Programs

The future of the deli meat category may well lie in its shift to become part of the prepared foods category. Programs that capitalize on one of deli meats' most fundamental uses — in sandwiches — open the door to increased volume and increased profit. Where previous generations tended to buy sliced-to-order deli meats to make sandwiches at home, today's consumers are apt to purchase a sandwich, either made-to-order or premade.

According to *What's in Store 2011* from the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association (IDDBA), based in Madison, WI, sandwiches are the third top-ranking item in the prepared foods category.

The future of the deli meat category can be seen in a positive light because, contends Eric Le Blanc, director of sales development, Tyson Foods, Inc. - Consumer Products, Springdale, AR. "Balancing any concern for the future should be a healthy appreciation for the depth of America's love affair with the sandwich. Not only have manufacturers brought a great range of flavors to deli meats, but an explosion of artisan breads and bold condiments has also made the sandwich more exciting than ever."

The 2010 *Sandwich Consumer Trend Report* from Chicago, IL-based Technomic, Inc., indicates that the most important factor influencing sandwich purchase is the quality of meat.

"A sandwich program can be a very profitable extension of deli meat sales for the retailer if the presentation resembles what a sandwich chain offers," says Bruce Belack, executive vice president, sales and marketing, Vincent Giordano Corp., Philadelphia, PA. "Great signage, custom-made sandwiches with high-quality meats and bread are the key!"

DB

upscale, superior products. We've done a bang-up job with American Kobe beef products. That may seem counterintuitive [because of the economy], but these products are doing very well. So we've introduced more super-premium products.

"We see gradual economic changes in a positive direction and we want to encourage the trend for upscale products," he explains. "It's surfacing in many industries; they're beginning to see opportunities. We position the products as affordable luxury. We've always touted to retailers our terrific service, on-time delivery and super-premium product. At the end of the day, it's a terrific value."

Consumers whose jobs are secure are beginning to open the purse strings again. "Recent reports show that upscale retailers such as Dillard's are experiencing sound sales growth," says Tyson's Le Blanc. "This and a variety of other evidence indicate

that the economic slowdown is not having the same impact on higher income households as it is on lower income households. You see this in deli meat, as in other categories, as a bifurcation in the marketplace: Consumers either purchase very inexpensive value items or purchase super-premium products. The middle of the road is a very tough place to be right now."

Necessary Strategic Shifts

Retailers looking to maintain a strong deli meat position need to think beyond sale pricing. To do this, they need to have a strong handle on their demographics and to be able — and willing — to try new approaches.

"As always, good decisions will be based on good data," notes Le Blanc. "Retailers who have a good understanding of their customer base will be able to make sound strategic decisions based on their ability to pay and their perceptions of value. If the industry as a whole runs up-market in order to offset lower volume, we ultimately pay a price in the form of lower incidence — number of shoppers who purchase the category — and lower frequency. Trying to recover and build the business in the future with low incidence and low frequency will be a serious challenge. Smart retailers will modify their assortment





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by store location to provide value items where their shopper base requires them in order to keep the consumer in the category. In markets that will bear it, premium items make a lot of sense. It's important to remember that 38 percent of all deli service-case purchases are made by households whose income is less than \$50K annually. These lower income shoppers are a part of the category and the industry should try to continue to meet their needs."

Listening to consumers and fulfilling their needs provide a definite advantage. "Consumer preferences continue to influence what deli meat products retailers carry," relates Butterball's Lindell. "Currently, consumers are looking for products that offer them variety as well as value. In order to help retailers maintain a strong position in deli meats, they will need to offer consumers more selections at a good price point — giving consumers reasons to return to the deli

case and incorporate deli meats into a variety of meal occasions."

Sometimes, manufacturers hold the key to innovative marketing ideas. Charlie's Pride's Dickman speaks of the importance of reaching out to consumers. "We started promoting directly to consumers. To increase incremental growth, we have a program in which any consumer who purchases one pound or more of roast beef gets a free au jus package. This makes it easy to makes a traditional beef dip sandwich. We judge the success of the programs by the number of calls we got from consumers after the promotion stopped in a particular chain."

The company is willing to offer a variety of support options to retailers. "We intend to look out for creative ideas to encourage greater sales. In some chains this is recipe cards and ideas for simple and quick meals," Dickman adds. "We distribute them to retailers and they tell how to use Charlie's Pride products at home. We have a corporate chef who develops the ideas. Some are seasonal, such as how to utilize prime rib in a sandwich with horseradish sauce or in a salad. They spark ideas for dinner entrées. It's important to explain to the consumer good, affordable usages for the product."

Trends

According to Giordano's Belack, retailers must stay on top of the latest technologies. "It's clear the presliced deli meat category in tubs and zip-lock packaging is growing in sales. The major suppliers in this category are enhancing their offering with more appealing graphics and titles for their line to gain a stronger percentage of these sales. Consumers like the quick purchase and the perception is these products are very safe and fresh. Unfortunately, in some cases, the sodium levels are much higher in an attempt to extend the shelf life.

"I will add that the all-natural category continues to grow," he continues. "I believe a large majority of consumers are looking for safer and fresher quality deli product.

The deli should continue to exploit its position as a destination for those who are cutting back on eating out but who still want great tasting, hassle-free meals. "With less disposable income, consumers are shifting their dollars from high-end restaurants to more quick-service establishments and are eating at home more often" says Lindell. "This is where offering a variety of great tasting products to grocery stores can be seen as a real value to the consumer. Not only can eating at home help consumers save money, but it also gives them control over how their meals are being prepared and which ingredients they choose."

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FAST-GROWING ETHNIC FAVORITES

Mediterranean foods offer consumers a healthy choice and retailers a quick turn

BY KAREN STEWARTSON



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Mediterranean foods — the traditional foods of Greece, Israel, Iran, Egypt, Lebanon and the rest of the Middle East — have gone mainstream. They're perceived as healthier than the traditional American diet because they're rich in healthy fats such as olive oil, lean protein, vegetables and legumes. And they offer health without sacrificing flavor.

The entry point for many consumers is hummus, which has gone from being a niche item in ethnic neighborhoods to near ubiquity. And its popularity has sparked a cascade of flavor extensions.

According to Dominick Frocione, vice president of sales, Cedar's Mediterranean Foods, Ward Hill, MA, Mediterranean foods are becoming more prevalent with U.S. sales of hummus generating roughly \$400 million last year. Cedar's offers 37 varieties of hummus, including garden vegetable, horseradish, garlic and chive, as well as organic flavors. Hummus is used as a dip with raw vegetables, crackers and pita bread and as spread on sandwiches and in wraps. It's rich in protein, iron and vitamin C, so consumers, especially parents, feel good about eating and serving it.

America's love affair with hummus is not just for the taste but also for its versatility, notes John McGuckin, executive vice president of sales at White Plains, New York-based Sabra Dipping Company, which claims 65 percent of the U.S. market share. Household penetration for hummus is almost 20 percent, he says, which can be credited to both its nutritional value and its positioning in the deli department.

McGuckin believes the convenience of grabbing a container to share at social gatherings such as tailgating parties has boosted hummus sales. On top of that, Americans like to dunk their foods into sauces or dips, and hummus is filling this void. "We think hummus is providing a new way for folks who perhaps would have dipped but didn't feel they had the right solution," he says, adding that people who didn't want to partake in unhealthy, high-calorie dips are now dipping in hummus. To capitalize on this, Sabra offers three single-serve grab-and-go hummus and pretzel combos.

Olives are another familiar entry point into the Mediterranean world. According to Anthony DiPietro, vice president, George DeLallo Company, Inc., Jeannette, PA, "We offer over 100 different varieties and salads in our bulk olives and antipasti alone. Oftentimes because of space constraints, the consumer can get to experience only so much. That's why we spend a

great amount of effort educating about Mediterranean food on our website.”

DeLallo offers Mediterranean products from Tunisia, Italy, Spain and Morocco. “The wide variety of olives and antipasti that we offer for the [deli] bars are the most popular,” DiPietro adds.

Roasted red peppers and artichokes are the most popular sellers for American Roland Food Corp., New York, NY, says Lisa Kartzman, marketing director. Foods such as these don’t necessarily register as Mediterranean cuisine for some consumers, so she believes a contingent of consumers are eating Mediterranean without realizing it.

Opportunities

Mediterranean foods allow deli departments to highlight healthy food options. “We’re working with the Mediterranean Food Alliance [Boston, MA] to build awareness of healthy Mediterranean foods offered in the deli department,” says Phil Meldrum, president, FoodMatch, Inc., New York, NY. “We support our customers with educational takeaways about these products and great ways to use them.”

“Olives are a very healthy fruit and have superb nutrition,” notes Patty Echeverria, marketing manager of Castella Imports, Hauppauge, NY. “Olives paired with cheese, olive oil and bread, make a

delicious first course,” she adds. “The staple olive varieties for supermarket delis are Kalamata, olive medley, Manzanilla, Moroccan cured, Feta salad, green stuffed, French medley, Alfonso and Cerignola. One of the newest, healthier olive trends is Castelvetro olives, grown in Sicily and harvested young. They lack bitterness and are utterly addictive. They don’t have any additives and are lower in sodium.”

Mediterranean food bars showcase the category. “The Mediterranean grab-and-go bars are the place to find healthier foods, not only olives but artichokes, beans, hummus, other spreads and various grilled and roasted vegetable salads,” adds Meldrum.

The current economic situation means consumers are looking to the deli for a quality alternative to restaurant dining. “With the downturn of the economy, consumers stopped going out to eat as frequently and are seeking high-quality, artisanal items they could add to their meals at home,” says Kevin O’Conner, senior vice president of sales at FoodMatch.

“The best thing about Mediterranean foods is that they’re simple, easy to use, easy to share, taste great and offer all the pleasure of the table while you’re doing the right thing for the health of your friends and family,” Meldrum notes.

O’Connor believes it is incumbent on deli operators to let consumers know how expansive the olive and antipasti category is and that it represents cuisines from throughout the Mediterranean.

“The ‘Mediterranean madness’ has exploded into colorful and flavorful varieties, such as marinated mushrooms, marinated garlic cloves with hot peppers, marinated artichokes and onions, sweet peppers, dolmas and more,” says Echeverria. Dolmas are grape leaves filled with rice, veggies, currants and sometimes meat. They’re beautiful in color and can be eaten warm or cold, which makes them versatile throughout the seasons.

Although Mediterranean cuisine is full of vegetables and finger foods, retailers should not overlook center-of-plate proteins. Kabobs provide an option that can be presented as both healthful — portion-controlled, vegetables included — and delicious. For a more casual option, gyro sandwiches made with lamb, beef or chicken seasoned with spices and wrapped in a flatbread and topped with tzatziki sauce (sour cream and cucumber) might be a winner. Chicago, IL-based Kronos Foods, Inc., offers kosher and Halal certified meat products, including beef and lamb gyro slices, a 6-pack gyro meal kit and individual microwavable gyro sandwiches. **DB**



Are You Ready For Some Football?

Super Bowl Sunday has become a big catering day for supermarket delis

BY LISA WHITE



Surprisingly, it's football, not the holidays, that brings in the most catering rings for supermarket delis. The number of Super Bowl parties has exploded in recent years, with the event becoming akin to a holiday all its own.

"This is America's largest single sporting event," says Gary Barnett, vice president of marketing and sales at Amy Food Inc., based in Houston, TX. "The growth of sales during this time period has established it as one of the largest deli events of the year."

More than 111 million people watched last year's championship game, according to The Nielsen Co., with television coverage from early afternoon until late in the evening.

Deli departments not capitalizing on this event — and the National Football League playoff games that lead up to it — are missing out on profitable opportunities for selling take-out foods. To get prepared for this season's Super Bowl on Feb. 5, 2012, it's important to know how to best capitalize on the

event's potential and become a destination for football party items.

Unlike Christmas and Thanksgiving, where a large meal is cooked and consumed before any football games begin, the Super Bowl is an all-day affair. "With an event that lasts this long, people have to eat, and they will eat a lot," says Herb Knutson, director of marketing, Inline Plastics Corp., Shelton, CT.

It captures a large coast-to-coast audience of not only sports fans but also enthusiasts of the halftime performance and the much-anticipated commercials. Retailers prime their stores in advance to capitalize on the popularity of the game. This involves ratcheting up point-of-sale material such as signage. "Supermarkets have created aggressive displays accented with balloons and incorporating several departments," Barnett says.

Deli selections focus on entertaining large groups for the game. Consequently, the departments' offerings of easy-to-fix heat-and-eat items have expanded from the tradi-

tional chips and dips, cold cuts and pizza to ethnic items such as egg rolls, empanadas and crab Rangoon.

This may be because, as the Super Bowl parties have expanded over the years, so has the demographic. Women have become fans of the game, and that has impacted the dynamic of the celebrations and the food being served at these gatherings.

"More and more women have become fans of football, so there's a new dimension to entertaining and the types of products served," says Brenda Killingsworth, trade marketing manager at Reser's Fine Foods, Beaverton, OR. "People are also table-gating — or opting to stay in the comfort of their own home — watching the big game on their flat-screen HDTVs and, subsequently, taking advantage of more options for preparing and serving food."

The No. 1 spectator sport event in the world attracts kid viewers, too. "This event has mass appeal, compared to other food



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holidays such as Christmas, Easter and Thanksgiving," says Mark Scholze, sales and marketing manager at Sparrer Sausage Co., Chicago, IL. "The holiday gatherings are more family-oriented, whereas the Super Bowl can include a more diverse group of family, friends and neighbors."

Due to the expanded consumer appeal, Super Bowl Sunday entertaining now encompasses a majority of service deli categories, including heat-and-eat, hot case, salad

case, meat case and cheese case items.

With this type of entertaining, simplicity and ease are paramount. "All categories have high consumer appeal due to the convenience of little to no preparation," explains Katie Biggers, director of retail market at Amy Food Inc.

Yet, the Super Bowl is not a big centerpiece event. Rather than being a gathering where food is cooked at home, the food is often purchased and served directly out of

Super Bowl Stats

- 8 million pounds of guacamole is consumed on Super Bowl Sunday.
- 14,500 tons of chips are eaten along with that guacamole.
- The average number of people at a Super Bowl party is 17.
- 5 percent of Americans will watch the game alone.
- Of the top 10 most watched television programs of all time, nine are Super Bowls.
- Super Bowl fans spend more than \$50 million on food during the four days prior to the game.
- Super Bowl Sunday is the biggest winter grilling day of the year.

Source: Sugar Inc.

the package. Deli department items are a good fit for this type of entertaining. Deli meats, cheeses, pre-cut fruit, salty snacks, pre-cut veggies, dips, sandwiches and baked goods are Super Bowl party staples.

"Catering is big during this event because of the general size of the party gathering and the time element," relates Weyd Harris, national sales manager, Conroy Foods, Pittsburgh, PA. "It's much easier to get pre-made sandwich rings than to buy all the ingredients and construct the sandwich yourself."

Merchandising Options

Targeting consumers for Super Bowl gatherings is key. A number of merchandising methods can focus attention on take-out items best suited for football parties.

Over the last three years, Tyson Foods in Springdale, AR, has worked with U.S. retailers and research companies to better understand who the deli shoppers are and how best to market to them. "For the deli shopper specifically, during events like the Super Bowl, innovation and trip interruption are in demand," says T. Fuqua, Tyson's brand manager. "A third of deli shoppers expect store promotions and cross-merchandising."

When shopping for this type of party, these consumers are looking for entertainment, theater, aromas and employee interaction. In some cases, product appeal will trump price and value. "Deli shoppers spend twice as much in the supermarket as other shoppers," adds Fuqua.

Especially with Super Bowl displays, cross-merchandising helps drive impulse purchases throughout the store. Tyson offers

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Innovative displays and products that specifically target Super Bowl entertaining can increase register rings. "One retailer we work with tested a wing bar. Looking at the estimated investment in the free-standing unit and associated installation costs, product sales paid for the wing bar's installation in about eight to 12 weeks," Tyson's Fuqua says.

Along with wings, specific deli items geared for Super Bowl parties include deli salads, such as potato salad, cole slaw, macaroni salad and pasta salad; sides, such as baked beans and mac and cheese; specialty dips, chips and salsa; wraps; and platters.

Reser's top-selling Super Bowl items include its American Classics Salads line; Stonemill Kitchens gourmet dips, which include 3 Cheese Pepperoncini, Artichoke Parmesan, Spinach Artichoke and Artichoke Jalapeno Parmesan; and Baja Café Salsas.

To help bring more attention to these items, deli staff should be encouraged to interact with shoppers, offering samples and usage suggestions. In addition, appropriate party items should be placed prominently in the deli, with cues to remind shoppers to pick them up.

"Consumers prefer the personal service and the ability to sample items behind the counter," Reser's Killingsworth advises. "Consumers shop the deli for convenience, brands they can trust, items that save time in meal preparation and items that allow them not to cook." Retailers can promote meal bundling by advertising a complete party in one bag that includes a pre-made sandwich, a cheese and meat platter, crackers and condiments.

Super Bowl displays should also feature items that can be prepared in 10 minutes or less. The key is to make convenience foods even more convenient than usual. "Supermarket delis can effectively merchandise takeout food for Super Bowl Sunday by having a full, fresh, well-stocked variety," notes Amy's Biggers. "The deli should begin to sell and market these items throughout the entire football season to make the department a destination."

Amy's Barnett reinforces this by urging delis to create a destination category by tying in items from all departments in one convenient location.

Providing all the components in one area increases the likelihood of a successful display. It's important consumers not be forced to search for party components from different cases. An area containing cheese, meat, crackers and condiments will attract added



PHOTO COURTESY OF INLINE PLASTICS

attention for these events. "Retailers can build end displays with buns, crackers and healthier alternatives such as gluten-free crackers, along with a shipper of deli sausage bites," Sparrer's Scholze says. "This gives consumers ideas for combos with the goal to increase dollars per customer. The displays should ensure they don't forget anything."

Floor shippers encourage impulse and incremental sales by getting the product in front of shoppers. Offering a variety of flavors allows consumers to choose their favorite condiments.

Along with appealing displays and sampling, timing is important. In terms of merchandising, Christmas is a month-long holiday, Thanksgiving a weeklong event and Easter a four-day celebration, but the lengthy Super Bowl season starts with the playoffs. "Retailers should not ignore the January opportunity to merchandise tailgating-types of products," Scholze adds. "This can be a month-long theme."

Proper Packaging

A number of packaging innovations have been geared for Super Bowl entertaining, including party trays that combine different types of foods, football-shaped domed lids, tray sleeves shaped like footballs, and printing NFL team logos and colors on limited-time-offer items.

"We've seen buckets with brands, team colors and graphics for this event," notes Fuqua. "It's important that packaging geared for the Super Bowl is not plain because it is valuable to deli shoppers."

In fact, innovative trays encourage Super Bowl party planners to invest slightly more in an item, so the actual packaging adds value. Convenience is still an important factor; Super Bowl parties tend to include larger

groups, so consider self-serve properties, as well as eye-appeal, when looking at the product containers.

Convenient grab-and-go packaging is preferable, according to Biggers. Ovenable and microwavable packaging is also popular.

Barnett recommends "family-size packaging that will feed a large crowd at affordable pricing." These items include large platters and bowls that can hold an assortment of foods in large quantities.

Packaging manufacturers have created lines specifically geared toward this type of entertaining. For example, Inline Plastics recently launched large bowls as an extension to its Safe-T-Fresh line of tamper-resistant, tamper-evident, leak-resistant clamshell containers. Made from #1 recyclable PET material, the same as water bottles, the line is positioned as a convenient and environmentally responsible packaging solution.

The Super Bowl spurred Placon Corp., Fitchburg, WI, to expand its Fresh 'n Clear bowl line to include catering bowls that hold 80 ounces (5 pounds) and 160 ounces (10 pounds) of product. "These bowls are available in either black or clear and are great for all types of food, including lettuce salads, pasta salads and potato salads," says Jeff Lucash, national sales manager. The packaging line is geared for parties and large groups.

Flair Flexible Packaging Corp., Appleton, WI, offers packaging with Permazip technology, which helps enhance food safety and customer convenience. An alternative to rigid dome and tray containers, the line is geared for roasted chicken and meats. The closure is tamper-resistant and will not open with steam pressure.

As meat and cheese selections have continued to grow in delis, much of the merchandising has been centered on the packaging.

"Today's generation is about quick meals and takeout," explains Sparrer's Scholze. "People don't have the time or interest in buying something and cutting it up. Consumers want it in the shape and form that make food ready for consuming."

The packaging needs to be presentable to party guests because the product is often served directly from the package. "With sausage especially, it's less about the variety and more about how it's packaged [that makes it stand out]," Scholze adds.

The Super Bowl season offers deli departments many sales opportunities. It's important to pay attention to selection, merchandising and packaging to create a successful display that attracts shoppers looking for party ideas.

DB

The Wide, Wonderful World of Pâté

Many consumers still look to pâté as a holiday treat

BY JACQUELINE ROSS LIEBERMAN

Whether consumers' tastes run to the traditional or the innovative, pâté has something for everyone. Silky. Smooth. Chunky. Creamy. Rich. Healthful. Indulgent. Everyday. Vegan. Pork. Duck. Salmon. Exotic. Familiar. Flavorful. Wonderful. Any way it's sliced, one thing is certain: Pâté ain't just chopped liver.

It's taken Americans decades to learn what Europeans have known for centuries: All sorts of pâtés make for wonderful eating, despite the perceived expense and "fattening" ingredients because these foods offer immense satisfaction in small doses. And consumers are discovering there is a huge variety out there to explore and enjoy.

For years, liver mousses and traditional coarse country pâtés were available primarily at upscale markets. Today those styles are still popular, but so are other pâtés, such as smoked salmon, vegan terrines of creamy puréed vegetables and traditional but less common pâtés such as venison with juniper berries. And thanks to vacuum-packed slices with long shelf lives, deli operators of all sizes can get into the pâté game.

Laurie Cummins, president of Alexian Pâtés in Neptune, NJ, is always looking for new ways to explore these elements with the pâtés she develops. "There is so much creative opportunity," she says. "Technically, to be called a pâté in the traditional sense, the chef will need to include liver and a liquor of some sort. After that, the sky's the limit! Over the years, we have introduced combinations of pork with sage and vermouth, chicken with veal and cognac, duck with Grand Marnier and one with chicken, rum and herbs de Provence."

Other pâté companies, such as Hayward, CA-based Fabrique Délices, and Brooklyn, NY-based Les Trois Petits Cochons, have also branched out in recent years, offering more pâtés made with wild game, new and interesting flavor combina-



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALEXIAN PÂTES

tions and more and more options for consumers who follow dietary restrictions, such as all-natural, low-fat, vegetarian, vegan and kosher. As a result, there's a pâté (or two or 10) for everyone.

Most people think of pâté for entertaining and, indeed, pâté sales increase during the holiday season. Deli operators can capitalize on the consumer's willingness to 'buy up' by offering serving suggestions and cross-merchandising. Active sampling of these suggestions will entice consumers to try combinations they may not have thought of and may get consumers who have never tried pâté to taste it.

The most straightforward suggestion is sliced pâté atop leafy greens garnished with fruit, such as sour cherries or fresh grapes, and served with sliced baguette or unsalted crackers. Another option is spreadable mousse or duck rilette (shredded duck meat cooked in duck fat confit-style) with bagels instead of cream cheese.

An easy appetizer that combines pâté with a deli department staple — hard-boiled eggs — is a twist on deviled eggs, which are having their own comeback. Advise shoppers to stuff hard-boiled eggs with a rich, silky mousse. Or recommend

Wine, Cheese and Pâté

Pâtés and cheeses work well together. Not much is needed per person, as both provide plenty of flavor and satiety, so think "small bites" when creating a cheese and pâté plate. An excellent way to tie cheese and pâté together is by pairing them with a wine that works well with both, according to Max McCalman, dean of curriculum at Artisanal Premium Cheese in New York City. Here are some of his suggestions:

Country-Style Pork Pâté, Classico cheese and Chardonnay
Truffle mousse, Prattigauer cheese and Riesling
Foie gras mousse, Azeitao cheese and Shiraz
Duck rilette, Tarentaise cheese and Zinfandel
Smoked salmon mousse, Majorero cheese and Sauvignon Blanc
Vegan mushroom pâté, Nisa cheese and Pinot Noir

spreading truffle mousse over hot grilled steak for a meal that impresses. As a first course or light meal, suggest a slice of coarse country-style pâté over mesclun salad mix dressed with vinaigrette. Even simpler is a country-style pâté sandwich on brioche or even sourdough bread. This can even be part of a made-to-order sandwich program during the holidays.

Merchandising Opportunities

Camille Black, marketing manager, Les Trois Petits Cochons, recommends retailers be organized in their presentation. "We offer a 'wine rack' display that holds sliced pâté. It pushes the next item forward as merchandise is removed. It helps with the turn by always bringing the oldest items to the front."

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By far the most sought in the city is Les Trois Petits Cochons, 17 East 12th Street (2nd Avenue), where the duck rilette is a specialty. The menu also includes: *le petit* (small) \$4.50, *le grand* (large) \$7.50, *le triple* (triple) \$10.50. The menu also lists various other items and prices.

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In addition, she advises setting up displays that catch the consumer's eye. For example, she explains, "We have logo cutting boards that we supply to retailers. All our products can be unmolded and placed on the cutting boards or they can be displayed in their wrapping. We also include logo name cards for each product."

The holidays represent an opportunity to expand on interdepartmental cross-merchandising. Alexian's Cummins sug-

gests highlighting traditional pairings, such as cornichons, crackers and crusty breads. She also recommends displaying pâtés with brightly colored fruit such as berries, grapes and red currants. Not only do they add a splash of color but they also complement the meats' flavors.

In stores with wine departments, the pairing of wine and pâté should be a given. Wines can be offered in the deli and pâtés can be offered in the wine department if a



refrigerated case is available. If not, signage and sampling will alert wine buyers to the deli's pâté selection.

Pâté and wine are a natural combination, according to Eric Zillier, wine director at the award-winning Alto restaurant in New York City and expert sommelier for Behind the Burner. Because of the richness of many pâtés, "Wine and pâté are some of the most easy things to pair. You have a pretty large part of the wine spectrum that can go with pâté."

Zillier recommends pairing rich pâtés with crisp, light wines that contain little or no oak. These won't overwhelm delicate flavors or hide the textures of the pâtés, and at the same time they help to brighten and refresh the palate. Rustic and less complex wines are often the best matches. "Err on the side of simplicity," he advises.

The exception may be gamy pâtés, such as those made with venison. "I would treat venison as it's own beast," suggests Zillier. "You can serve a more full-bodied wine. Grenache would work really well."

Very rich mousses, such as foie gras, truffle or duck liver, are traditionally paired with rich, sweet wines, such as Sauternes. But an aromatic light, delicate and even dry Riesling would pair wonderfully, as well, he says.

Sparkling whites and sparkling rosés are also a wonderful way to go in any case, "Perfect with duck, smoked salmon and mushroom pâtés," suggests Zillier. Other options include crisp whites, dry rosés like those from Northern Italy or the South of France (where pâtés have long been a popular everyday treat) or light reds, such as Beaujolais or Pinot Noir, which are great chilled.

Urge consumers not to be afraid to try an unusual combination. "Pâté is forgiving," says Zillier. "You really shouldn't sweat it."

DB



*EDITOR'S NOTE: This article, which originally appeared in **CHEESE CONNOISSEUR** magazine, can help deli operators educate both staff and consumers about putting together diverse and delicious cheese plates. The ideas and concepts come from Max McCalman, renowned as one of the cheese world's living legends for his expertise, insight and passion. An advocate of artisanal cheese production, he is the author of *Mastering Cheese*, *Lessons for Connoisseurship* from a *Maître Fromager*; *Cheese, A Connoisseur's Guide to the World's Best*; and *The Cheese Plate*. McCalman is dean of curriculum, maître fromager and director of affinage at the Artisanal Premium Cheese Center in New York City.*

Of the several thousand of plates of cheeses I've designed, I'm fairly certain I haven't composed the same grouping of cheeses more than once — except possibly for different customers on the same day. But I do apply some fundamental “rules” when setting them together.

I often see cheese “flights” designed to employ a thematic consideration, perhaps the provenances of the cheeses, such as a local plate, an Italian selection, an Iberian collection, etc. Some are species-specific, such as all goat cheeses. Other plates are based on styles, such as all washed-rind or all blue cheeses. One of my favorites is to represent several styles of cheese: one fresh, one leaf-wrapped, one bloomy rind, one pressed, etc.

A popular trend in restaurants is to design cheese and wine or beer flights. The creative element of pairing cheeses with specific beverages allows the fromager to apply his or her knowledge, experiment

The Quintessential Cheese Plate

Assembling a nonpareil tasting of cheeses

BY MAX MCCALMAN



with the pairings and then describe the relationships to the guests. One cheese flight design we often employ at the Artisanal Cheese Center offers representations of the historical developments in the evolution of cheese.

Cheese flights in restaurants can make for interesting conversations between the server and the guests and among the guests themselves. Well-designed flights can elicit flavor subtleties in the cheeses — or in their pairing partners — that might go unnoticed if they were left on their own. Or the combinations can fold together to create new flavors altogether.

Although fun, the flights can ignore some of the fundamental “rules” of cheese progressions, such as they may be.

In the Beginning...

The logical order of progression on a cheese plate is to begin with mild cheeses and finish with strong. The rationale is that if



you begin with stronger, more persistent flavors, the nuances of milder ones will be harder to distinguish; stronger aromas and flavors dominate milder ones. Granted, what may be a mild cheese to one person is a strong cheese to someone else, but it would be hard to argue that Roquefort is not stronger than a fresh, pasteurized Chèvre.

The distinctions among all the other cheeses that fall between those book-ends may be a little less certain.

The flavor components that lead to the “strength” of the cheeses include the basic four — salt, sweet, sour, and bitter — plus the fifth flavor, umami, which is usually described as savoriness. I also consider astringency, which should probably not be a noticeable flavor component in a cheese. The composition and balance of these flavors within a cheese add up to its strength. Texture comes into play as well.

Generally, the order one would apply to a tasting of cheese would be younger to older (aged) varieties; if there is a Blue Cheese, it should be the last cheese in a group. If multiple Blues are in a selection, the relative heft of each should be considered. For example, a pasteurized Fourme d’Ambert would be presented before raw-milk Roquefort. Even though some aged cheeses may actually seem to be mild compared to some of the younger ones, the



flavors of the aged cheeses tend to be more persistent, lingering longer on the palate.

Along with younger to older, the progression usually places softer cheeses before harder ones. This makes good sense since harder cheeses are generally expected to keep longer than softer ones. Placing softer before harder cheeses is not a hard-and-fast rule. Alternating the textures of the cheeses in a selection helps to distinguish one cheese from the other.

One aesthetic I liberally apply to cheese groupings is to alternate textures: one soft cheese followed by one firmer textured, followed by another soft cheese, etc. Though this may be a departure from the softer to harder rule for assembling a plate of cheeses, it can help to distinguish the cheeses one from the next and can make for a more interesting lineup overall.

Another fairly clear marker is raw versus pasteurized cheeses. Because heat treatment diminishes the aroma and flavor of a cheese — along with altering the texture and, some would say, diminishing the nutritive value



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Laura Chenel's Chèvre



and the keeping quality — cheese made with pasteurized (read: compromised) milk should be placed ahead of cheese made from unpasteurized milk. Though some cheeses produced with pasteurized milk may exude a rather full aroma, it will be a diminished aroma compared to the same cheese produced with raw milk.

We may have our own biases for or against certain cheese types, but a grouping of various cheeses affords the opportunity to enjoy cheeses we might not normally choose. Not to take the fun out of the experience and over-analyze it, I've found sharing a variety of styles more interesting than having only one. For example, some people who drink only red wine may be surprised to find what can happen with their favorite cheeses if they try it with a white wine, or vice versa.

Wine, of course, can influence the selection of cheeses at the outset. The more I taste cheese and wine combinations, the less beholden I am to the rules of cheese and wine pairings. It's a little more exciting to experiment with the combinations than to follow recommended pairings. The probability of finding a wine/cheese mismatch is less than you might think. After all, a good wine will have its inherent fruit qualities, while a

cheese will have its balancing savory qualities. And at the end of the day, there is no safer or more delicious food than cheese, and wine can make a similar case from within the world of beverages. And there are beers and other beverages, too.

Cows, Goats and Sheep

Along with alternating textures you can alternate animal types, rind types, and provenances — all can help make each cheese more distinctive. An analogy can be found in a concert. If the orchestra plays the first movements of Mozart symphonies and they're all in the key of C, the sameness might wear a little thin. Not sure how many such Mozart examples exist — but you get my point.

With regard to the animals themselves, all else being equal — if the cheeses are all similarly crafted — I'll place the goat cheese first, then the sheep, then the cow. Usually this works well in the relative heft of these three major dairy animals. The fat globules in goat milk are relatively small compared to the sheep-milk fat globules, and those are relatively small compared to the cow milk. The smaller fat globules are a little easier to digest, rather than this being a comparison of

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which is less fattening than the others. The placement of cheeses made with mixed milks depends on the mix of the milks. For example, a cheese made with goat and sheep milk might very well fit best between the all-goat cheese and the all-sheep cheese, assuming the cheeses are otherwise similarly crafted.

One good gauge of a cheese's strength is its relative salt content; saltier cheeses follow less salty ones. This could be one of the considerations for placing the Blues at the end of a group since, generally speaking, blues are relatively salty cheeses. One reason the Blues tend to be saltier than other cheeses is because salt thwarts the growth of competing enzymes, thus allowing the blue molds to develop successfully. Beyond their greater salt levels, most Blues also have relatively dominant, somewhat "piercing" acids that cause them to linger on the palate longer than most other cheeses.

Whatever selections are included, I almost always prefer the cheeses be somewhat different from one another. It's more than "variety is the spice of life" — I also think of the somewhat different nutritive values of different cheeses. The relative values from the primary dairy animals' milk, the styles, the ages of cheeses, whether the cheese is made with raw or with heat-treated milk, where the cheese is produced, the nutrients the animals draw from the vegetation and feeds that go into their milk and the resulting cheeses — all these components add up to the relative nutritional values of cheeses — as well as their aesthetic differences.

Size Matters

One important consideration in the assembly of cheese selections is the amount of cheese to include, both the number of cheeses and the sizes of each piece. I recall a guest at Picholine restaurant who came in for the cheese course only (many guests do this) and began with a plate of nine cheeses. After she had taken her time enjoying that selection, she asked for a second selection of nine! The average number of cheeses on our plates was about five. Go figure. Behold the power of cheese!

In our classes at the Artisanal Cheese Center in New York City we generally settle for seven cheeses, a number that can usually provide a fairly broad range. Since more cheeses are made with cow milk than other milks, those cheeses usually outnumber the others. Not all of the portion sizes are exactly the same weight. The weight of the portion sizes of the softer, wetter cheeses is usually a bit higher. With the higher water content of the softer cheeses, people seem to be able to devour them quickly. The harder cheeses, on the other hand, may take

a few more minutes to consume.

The total weight of cheese served depends largely upon the individual's appetite. There is something to be said for having the one "perfect" cheese — whatever that may be — and one of the marvelous things about cheese is that a little can go a long way. How much cheese ends up on a plate and then in the tummy can also depend upon tolerance for all the various types. Fortunately, these rare low tolerances are not necessarily life-

long problems. One of the many wonderful things about cheese — preserved milk that it is — is its satiety factor, offering near-complete and near-perfect nutrition, along with its stellar track record for food safety.

Even worse than imprecise portion sizes is the too-cold temperature at which many cheeses are presented. This is an issue that must be addressed with "health" officials — cheese must be kept in a cold refrigerator until right before it's served. You'd think we

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were talking about some other food with a far less admirable track record for foodborne illnesses!

We Americans are gradually coming to realize it isn't necessarily the fat in cheese that might make us fat — it's any calories we don't expend. In my opinion, it's difficult to have too much cheese. We may reach a point where we say "I'm good" with our cheese selection, but it's usually long before we actually eat too much. We forget cheese is made from our first food — milk — and is chock full of proteins and amino acids, good fat and fatty acids, vitamins and minerals.

Appearance Counts

Some spacing between cheeses — on a plate, a tray, or a board — is ideal. The problem with crowding cheese slices is more one of appearance than of cross-contamination. Cheeses snuggled up against each other don't usually mind, as long as they aren't soft cheeses that can run together. Firm cheeses are okay adjoining one other as long as they're not pressed together for extended amounts of time. Having a little bit of separation between cheeses is more visually appealing — it simply looks more appropriate.

Leaving the rinds on the cheeses helps to



distinguish them, especially when multiple cheeses have similar looking pastes. In case you forget which cheese is which, the rind can help identify it. The rind can also provide a little "handle" to hold the cheese. Even if

you don't intend to eat the rind, leave it on the slice — many cheese lovers devour it along with the paste. When the rinds are cut off, the cheese can look as if it's been violated.

Cheese plates often have lovely accompaniments that complement cheeses. These can take on artful forms, offering balance to the flavors and textures of cheeses as well as providing color highlights. I'm okay with these added touches as long as I can still savor the cheese by itself. The "composed" cheese plate has its place, but I'd prefer the cheese be able to speak for itself first. Some chefs just can't seem to leave the cheeses alone; they have to muck them up.

The presentation plate, tray, or board is an important consideration. The dark green marble on the original cheese trolleys at Picholine is my preferred surface for presentation because of the contrast it provides. The cheeses stand out on the marble, the marble keeps cool throughout service, and it's easy to clean afterwards. On that note, having an attractive and full selection of cheeses presented from a cheese trolley is one of the most thrilling experiences restaurant customers can behold.

DB

An advertisement for Fiscalini Farmstead Artisanal. The top part shows a woman in a cowboy hat milking a cow, and a hand holding a small piece of cheese. Below this is a red banner with the text "Hand-crafted cheese from carefully handled cows!!". The main part of the ad has a dark background with the Fiscalini logo, which includes the word "FISCALINI" in a blue banner, "FARMSTEAD" in a red banner, and "ARTISANAL" in a white banner. Below the logo, it says "World Award winners again this year!". Further down, it says "Beyond Organic Farming" Merging technology with a reverence for our land and our cows to improve our sustainability. At the bottom, it says "We produce extraordinary cheeses on our sustainable family farm. Our farming practices are certified by Validus Inc. for animal welfare, environmental stewardship, and food safety. We also produce renewable energy to completely power our farm with our own methane-to-electricity unit." and provides the phone number "800.610.FARM" and website "www.fiscalinicheese.com".



Max McCalman

Photos reprinted from the book *Mastering Cheese* by Max McCalman and David Gibbons. Copyright (c) 2009 by Max McCalman and David Gibbons. Published by Clarkson Potter, a division of Random House, Inc.

American Blues Are Staking Their Claim

Domestic Blue cheeses are winning over consumers and winning competitions

BY PATTI ORTON

Once relegated to being a salad topper or dressing component, Blue Cheese is enjoying new freedoms in cuisine, and American-made Blues are better than ever.

For decades, the Blue Cheese category was dominated by expensive, imported regal brands. “American Blue Cheese started here at Faribault, MN, in 1936 as an alternative to France’s renowned Roquefort,” says Jeff Jirik, cheesemaker

and plant manager for Caves of Faribault, Faribault, MN, and vice president/general manager of the natural cheese division of Swiss Valley Farms, headquartered in Davenport, IA.

And according to David Grotenstein, merchandising manager at Union Market and consultant for Food and Image, New York, NY, “Blues are one of the fastest-growing categories within the ever-blossoming American cheese movement.”

As Americans’ palates become increasingly sophisticated, this distinctive family of cheese continues to garner an ever-widening audience. Customers are finding out that just as Cheddar has a wide spectrum of attributes, Blue Cheese also has a wide variety of flavors, strengths and textures. “Today, consumers are searching for rich, full-bodied, intense flavors,” explains Elaine Simon, business development manager of deli and specialty cheese at Lite-



PHOTO COURTESY OF BELGIOIOSO CHEESE INC.

house Foods, Inc., Sandpoint, ID,

While some consumers are seeking bolder Blues, a major segment of the market is seeking well-crafted, balanced Blues. Caves of Faribault's Jirik sums up domestic creations this way: "The flavor profile is typically assertive yet very approachable."

Zoe Brickley, sales manager at the Cellars at Jasper Hill, Greensboro, VT, notes, "Customers are going for higher-quality, more handmade, artisan-style Blues — not necessarily the strongest."

Handle With Care

It is essential Blues receive proper TLC because the bluish-green molds are living and require oxygen. "Be tender, let 'em breathe and show the beautiful blue veining," advises Jirik

Brickley believes the Blue family requires a fair amount of cheese-sitting. "Most have a natural rind, are handmade and need to be looked after." Retailers need to take greater care of these special cheeses, she continues. "I'd like to see them kept colder and cut to order," she adds. "Healthy, fresh and good-looking Blue Cheese is very appealing."

Pre-wrapped Blues represent a significant portion of the category. According to Francis Wall, vice president of marketing at BelGioioso in Green Bay, WI, "Packaging is extremely important because it relates to flavor." Aluminum foil is the traditional wrap for two reasons: It protects the cheese and seals out light, which can

On the World Stage

The uptick of domestic artisanal cheese sales is driven in part by high-quality American-made Blues being recognized as formidable world competitors. Rogue River Blue from Rogue Creamery, Central Point, OR, put American Blue Cheese on the global map. "It was the first American Blue to win best Blue Cheese at the World Cheese Awards in London in 2003," says Christine Hyatt, owner of Scottsdale, AZ-based Cheese Chick and president of the American Cheese Society (ACS), Denver, CO. "It was a pivotal moment — kind of a wake-up call that American cheeses were improving in quality to compete with their Old World counterparts."

From that moment forward, American Blues have continued to do well in international competitions especially given the relative youth of the U.S. industry, Hyatt notes. "Given the expense and amount of logistical hurdles to entering international competition, it's heartening to see how well our makers are performing in this very prestigious category overseas."

"Since there did not used to be a

lot of production of Blue Cheeses in the USA, the American Blues did not win much in competitions. But in the last 10 years all of that has changed," reports Tony Hook, president, co-owner and head cheesemaker at Hook's Cheese Company, Inc., Mineral Point, WI. "Many of the American Blues are now beating out their European counterparts in many competitions, and I think over time we will remain very competitive with the rest of the world."

"America is producing some of the finest cheesemakers in the world," proclaims Elaine Simon, business development manager of deli and specialty cheese at Litehouse Foods, Inc., Sandpoint, ID. "We're fairly young and full of dreams, passion and drive. We have not even begun to master our future. I'm just so excited that the adventure has begun — the renaissance of American artisan cheeses is fascinating. As we do with fine wines, America is producing some of the best in the world, and I believe we will see even more Blues in the future." **DB**



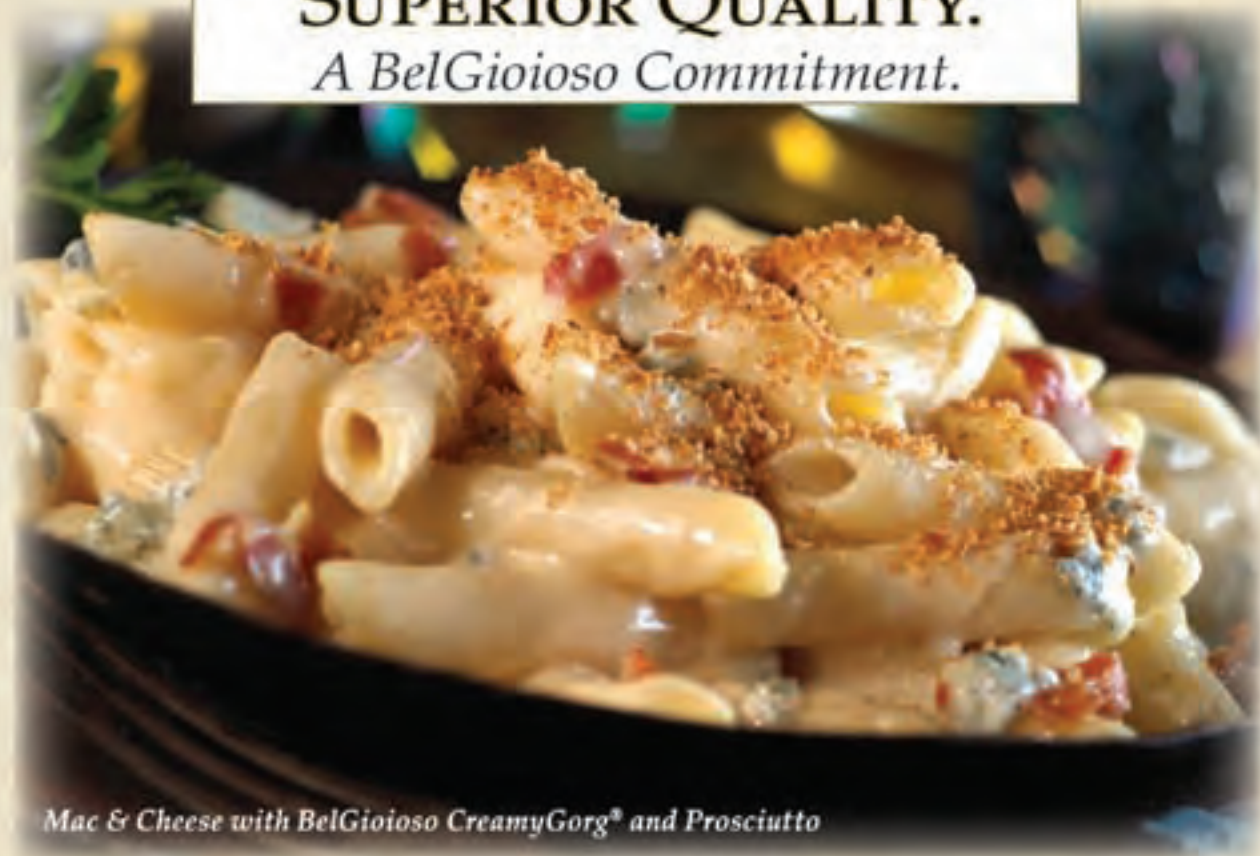
adversely affect the color. BelGioioso adds perforated cellophane around the foil for air exchange. Wall is not a fan of Cryovac-ed Blue Cheeses because "It kills all of the mold causing discoloration and the cheese begins to weep. This gives the cheese an off, sour, unpleasant flavor."

Merchandising — Inside and Outside the Box

Deli operators can increase their sales of Blue Cheese by educating consumers about its versatility. "Everyone knows about using it on salads and in dressings," states Wall. "It's about taking it past that."

He examines the season and looks for opportunities to plug in the blue flavor. For tailgating season and the Super Bowl, he advises showcasing BelGioioso's Creamy-Gorg, which is similar to Dolce Gorgonzola — a mild, soft, almost spreadable variety of Gorgonzola. "Melt it on grilled meats for an artisan slider," he says. When it's apple and pear season, merchandise the fruit with CreamyGorg or any other Blue

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Cheeses for a healthful snack or appetizer. For holiday entertaining, merchandise wedges or pre-cupped crumbles with tenderloin steak to promote a melted finishing touch.

Litehouse's Simon challenges retailers to ask themselves two questions: "Does your display challenge the senses — vision, smell, and taste? And do you create an emotional connection for your customer and the cheese? A passionate merchant creates an interesting experience. Showcase local cheeses; showcase a larger display with samples, story cards and a pairing with a fruit and nuts. Challenge your cheesemongers to be creative! Create the experience — you're the only one stopping your passion."

Blue Cheeses offer many merchandising opportunities beyond the cheese case and, in fact, have a place in most deli food applications, such as sandwiches, salads, soups and entrées. Cross-merchandising allows deli operators both to educate consumers on the cheeses' versatility and to increase sales.

Jasper Hill's Brickley suggests merchandising Blue Cheese crumbles or



wedges next to bacon — one of her favorite flavor combinations.

"Concoct a Blue Cheese spread as a component or condiment for sandwiches," advises Union Market's Grotenstein. "If you do that, make sure you play up the brand or type of cheese, and not just say 'Blue Cheese.'"

"When you love something in your case, it sells — you just can't help it!" says Simon. "Start with a deli campaign that features this category. Run a recipe contest with your customers, and don't be

afraid to sample to your customers — it amazes me every time I do a sampling how many customers tell me they don't like Blue Cheese or have never tried it. Many of them leave with a Blue Cheese in hand, some fresh fruit and a great wine."

Culinary usage can offer retailers an array of cross-merchandising opportunities. Deli operators who share cooking and pairing suggestions will find their sales of the complementary items rising along with their cheese sales.

Fresh, new culinary applications for Blue

Cheese are proliferating in every course and at every occasion, proving newfound versatility and adding dazzle along the way. Jasper Hill's Brickley claims dark chocolate is the ultimate accoutrement for Blue. "Try dipping Bayley Hazen Blue into chocolate ganache," she dares.

Another one of Brickley's favorite Blue Cheese applications is the Green Mountain Special from the Parker Pie Co., a restaurant in West Glover, VT. It's a pizza with spinach, red onion, garlic, bacon, Bayley Hazen, apple and a drizzle of Vermont maple syrup.

As customers gravitate to heartier winter fare, BelGioioso's Wall suggests melting Mascarpone, adding crumbled Gorgonzola and tossing with hot pasta. For an entertaining idea that can be an elegant appetizer or striking dessert, he turns to an Italian "torta" — alternating layers of Mascarpone and young Gorgonzola — to be spread on bread or crackers and accompanied with fresh or dried fruit and a little pot of honey for drizzling.

Cheese and wine is an easy, classic pairing, but for Blue Cheese, the choice of beverage takes a little more thought. Bev-

erages need to be able to stand toe-to-toe with the Blue's pungency and assertiveness. Says Litehouse's Simon, "Serve it to me any day with a robust fruity old-vine wine or a rich, micro-brewed chocolate stout and my day is complete."

Brickley gives thumbs up to marrying Blue with a dark porter or Sauternes for dessert.

Staff Expertise

If the deli is to venture into new ground, Union Market's Grotenstein states, "The one thing retailers must do is make sure their staff knows the cheeses and can tell customers of the differences in order to make real recommendations.

"Blue cheese is one of those categories where a less-informed customer might think they all taste the same," he emphasizes. For this reason, it's paramount that employees are well-versed in the nuances.

A good starting point is pointing out the differences between the various types of Blue Cheese. Speaking of Gorgonzola, Wall notes, "Blue cheese is the generic name for the category. Gorgonzola is the blue-veined cheese of Italy. All Gorgonzola

is a Blue Cheese, but not all Blue Cheese is Gorgonzola." He says Gorgonzola tends to be milder than many other Blues and "has a clean aftertaste that leaves you wanting more."

Simon, who was born and raised on a dairy farm in Lynden, WA, has seen considerable growth in artisan goat milk, sheep milk and/or blends of goat, sheep and cow milk Blue Cheeses, especially from American producers. "I believe consumers are becoming more aware. An increase in the number of farmers' markets and eat-local campaigns have created growing awareness of cheese, and a desire to appreciate the story behind the product is influencing the way we are buying and consuming cheese."

A knowledgeable staff adds to the affinity for artisan Blue Cheese. Cheesemongers are not just educators, they're also storytellers. "There's something to be said about the comfort or lore behind the ingredients of cheese made the old fashioned way — by hand," Simon continues. "It connects us all to our past, connects us to the farms and connects us to a simpler romantic life."

DB

A Menu Must-Have

Mindoro Blue®

Rich and buttery, yet piquant describes this Danish-style blue, which is aged over 60 days

Baby Swiss

A delightfully mild flavor profile characterizes this cheese, known for its creamy texture



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French Indulgences

Positioning French cheese as an affordable luxury

BY KAREN SILVERSTON

The prolonged economic downturn has changed the way Americans shop and may be the “new normal.” If that is indeed the case, deli operators must navigate new waters to find whatever stability they can.

Consumers are no longer buying with abandon, but they haven’t given up on affordable indulgences — high quality, unique items that while expensive in large quantities are easy to rationalize in small amounts.

Stephanie Jordan, cheese specialist for Tony’s Fine Foods, West Sacramento, CA, importer and distributor of domestic and imported cheeses and perishable foods, sees specialty cheeses flown in from France selling well alongside excellent domestic options. “Consumers still want those special French cheeses and like them in a small format, so they’re not spending as much per piece as when they buy a larger format,” says Jordan.

According to Pascal Vaydie, import sales director, Lactalis Deli, New York, NY, “The products that manage not to suffer from the decline are those that are truly unique. These products have strong points of difference versus the domestic items — there aren’t really any alternatives to them.”

Deli operators are now contending with a cohort of consumers who have never before experienced economic doldrums and who, therefore, have no institutional memory of how to respond. “Consumers still want to buy French cheese but are careful about where they shop, what they do and what they buy. This downturn is something those in their 30s have never seen,” says Helder dos Santos, sales manager for Chicago, IL-based importer and distributor C. E. Zuercher & Co., Inc. “I tell shops to be less concerned about price and more concerned about how much is selling and how much is spoiling. People are still spending money — just not in the same way. They’re not spending on things they never heard of or haven’t tried. They’re buying what they know they’ll like.”

Although cheese doesn’t occupy the same exalted position in the States that it



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE CHEESES OF FRANCE

does in France, French cheese nonetheless enjoys a devoted following here. “Cheese doesn’t make it to the plate in every meal here as it does in France,” says Jeff Babcock, cheese category manager for European Imports, Ltd., Chicago, IL. “There’s cheese in everybody’s refrigerator there and it’s relatively inexpensive. In some places here there’s still a sense that French cheese is the epitome. It’s classic, and what we consider classic remains a solid foundation — it’s not diminished by a phenomenon or a trend.”

That solid foundation, however, is not impervious to competition. Cost issues and the push for local ingredients that led people to buy more domestic products have negatively impacted imported Goat Cheese and Brie sales. “They tend to be ingredient cheeses — and tend to be selected by price in an economy particularly sensitive to food

costs. Americans are now creating cheeses that are very good, so people see them as alternatives,” says Babcock.

Making the Most of a Difficult Situation

Retailers can expand the audience for French cheese by positioning it as something to be enjoyed often, not just on special occasions. “We want to reinforce the notion of spicing up everyday food fare. That’s an experience consumers can relate to,” says Jean-Marie Sepancy, strategic services director at New York, NY-based Jaffe & Partners, agency for The Cheeses of France, a marketing council. “Taking a very American-style approach — choosing an American dish, adding French cheese — will appeal to a much broader audience in a more relatable way. The easier you make it for people, the

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more likely they will be to try it.

"The majority of consumers are concerned first and foremost with whether they like it," she continues. "Cost plays a part as do health considerations. And people should know that French cheeses are healthy, nutrient-rich food." Sepancy underscores that hormones are not used in French dairies.

The Cheeses of France promotions include tasting programs across the country, Internet resources and social networking, plus an online advertising component. "French cheese competes not only with American but with all imported cheeses — and The Cheeses of France is happy to have the spotlight in a gourmet or cheese shop environment," Sepancy adds.

Quality remains an important selling feature, so it behooves retailers to emphasize AOC (Appellations d'Origines Contrôlées) cheeses. The English nomenclature for products with such tightly controlled production methods is PDO — protected designation of origin. The PDO concept is gaining traction in this country among consumers who have embraced local foods. Jean-Louis Carbonnier, president of New York, NY-based Carbonnier Communications, which represents Comté PDO in the U.S., explains, "A strong element of PDO cheeses is the quality and guarantee of certain practices they give to consumers. Quality has been the key to success for retailers."

Geographically specific cheeses have fared better than others in the economic crisis, prompting the Fédération Nationale des Appellations d'Origines Contrôlées, Poligny, France to say: Tell me what cheese you're eating and I'll tell you what part of the landscape you're strengthening.

The Basics...

Consumers have come to expect a deli cheese case to include certain basic cheeses. France's iconic cheeses make selecting "the" cheese impossible, but masterfully opulent Triple Crèmes are essential year-round and most distributors offer numerous delectable varieties.

Lovely aged Goat Cheeses run the gamut from creamy to dense and delicate to piquant — devotees are charmed by the mosaic of scents and flavors. "Even if we have a good domestic version available, they're still in demand," says Jordan of Tony's Fine Foods.

For the discerning nose, imported Brie and Camembert must deliver authentic aroma as well as taste, and the newest formulations are right on the money even though they're made from pasteurized milk, a necessity for the American market which demands that raw-milk cheeses be aged for a



PHOTO COURTESY OF COMTE CHEESE ASSOCIATION

minimum of 60 days.

A limited audience lusts after the quintessential "stinky" cheese, Epoisses, washed with Marc de Bourgogne, and other washed rind cheeses.

In the world of cheese, Roquefort's magical presence is unequalled. It's produced only eight months a year using whole, raw milk of Lacaune sheep. Packaging is retail friendly, and whole wheels are available for specialty stores.

Comté is unrivaled in flavor, appearance and history, unique in size, yet available in convenient formats. The Comité Interprofessionnel du Comté — or Comté Cheese Association — provides resources for trade at www.comte-usa.com, and Comté importer Daphne Zepos, Essex Cheese, New York, NY, has a video at www.essexcheese.com demonstrating how to cut an 80-pound wheel of Comté into half-pound portions.

An eloquent expression of the Jura Mountain community, Comté is preserving cheese tradition and at the same time protecting the environment. "To make Comté,

you have to pool milk from small farms together — and the concept of small farms is a relative anomaly in the U.S., but whether it is in France, Switzerland or America, it is necessary to protect the small farms," says Carbonnier. Owners of magnificent Montbéliarde cows take pride in the fact that the milk reflects the pastures where the animals have been, and consumers are becoming aware of the social relevance as well as the extraordinary taste of mountain cheese.

And Beyond...

There will always be consumers looking for something new and delicious. Before the downturn, many such quests were sparked by a competitive streak; today many consumers are still seeking new cheeses, but now it's for their own enjoyment.

"The adventurous consumers want something more than 'creamy' — they're looking for flavor and looking at style. If a cheese looks traditional and has personality, they'll like it, especially one that looks hand-made. Consumers have seen beautiful artisanal cheeses and they're looking for them," says Cecile Delannes, ambassador for the French Cheese Club, an association of five French family-owned traditional cheese producers based in College Park, MD.

A new cheese gaining success is Normanne, a Camembert-style cheese in a 1-kilo — 2.2 pounds — format, produced in Normandy by E. Graindorge. Consumers also are intrigued by the marriage of Normandy's cheeses and its famous Calvados — apple brandy. Grain d'Orge is washed with it, and it is an ingredient in Camembert au Calvados cheese.

Le Roulé, a hand-rolled cow's milk cheese with a swirl of garlic and herbs, is an example of growing interest in a well-known import. "Le Roulé has been distributed in the U.S. for 25 years. In the last two years, sales have boomed. Consumers are requesting high-quality products that are different from what is produced in the U.S.," says Marie Lesoudier, general manager of Laura Chenel's Chèvre, Sonoma, CA.

European Imports' Babcock notes growth in sheep's milk cheeses, such as Basque cheese. "We don't have the sheep population domestically to grow the market share so we can't really compare to, for example, an Ossau Iraty you can find for \$15-\$16 a pound," says Babcock. The Ossau Iraty produced by Fromagerie Agour was named Best Cheese in the World at the 2011 Word Cheese Awards in London.

The established reputation of French sheep's milk cheeses accounts for their ongoing popularity. "There is nothing quite like them," Lactalis' Vaydie notes. **DB**

The New Merchandising Centerpiece



By
**David
Grotenstein**
*Retail Food
Consultant*

FOOD AND IMAGE
NEW YORK, NY

What can we tell you that you don't already know? How many times have you read that same article on merchandising your stores for the holidays? (How many times this month?) The writer's job for these seasonal how-to pieces seems to be how to figure out a different way of phrasing the same thing: massive displays, towering floor stacks, abandonanza, eye-popping, gigantic, festive, colorful, breathtaking, gargantuan, epic. The oversized adjectives flow like warm mulled cider.

The truth of the matter is that there's nothing very different, at least not philosophically, about how you could or should be merchandising your store during the holidays versus the rest of the year. The same cause-and-effect will always apply. Big beautiful shows will sell product, informative signage will endear your customers to you and help build trust, aggressive sampling will convey a generosity of spirit that almost always translates into dollars.

The one exception to this notion may be that Christmas, Chanukah and New Year's allow you to bring in and promote the highest-end products, things special and unique, which might be more of a challenge to move at other times of the year. People are both shopping for gifts and looking to treat themselves well. It's the best opportunity to show your customers everything you're made of. Unfortunately, it's also your best chance to blow that opportunity.

More customers are in your store than at any other time of the year. You can build your shows to the ceiling and hire a brass band, but the far greater challenge is what happens to your customers after you've successfully drawn them in. All too often they can't get the answers they need from the sales staff. It's less a question of what you do during the holiday rush than what you might fail to do: train and inform your counter people. That can be the difference between making a one-time sale and making 20 sales to that very same customer over the next year.

Product knowledge is the new merchandising centerpiece. Style over substance is no longer a viable option in the modern information age; a shopper's disappointment can end up as a brief, damning message on Twitter. Do the people who work your service counters really know their stuff? If not, what have you done to further their education? All too often, we hear managers and owners complaining about the indifference of their staff and how hard it is to find good help. That is a cliché of the worst order and, frankly, almost always completely untrue. Your staff is most likely to tune out because they're not

getting enough support from above. No one is imparting information, much less enthusiasm and encouragement.

Is the information your staff needs readily available? Ingredient lists for prepared foods, descriptions of cheeses, traceability on fresh product such as meat, seafood and produce? Who knows the truth about health risks of certain foods — or the mythology that sometimes passes for fact? Another byproduct of the Internet era is that misinformation gets out there just as fast as the truth. People are right to have concerns, but often they're needlessly afraid of allergies and intoler-

ances, or products they think are just downright unhealthy. Do you know the right answers to these questions? You should, because they're being asked in your store in record numbers.

At the deli counter, life has never been more complicated. A new era of American handcrafted charcuterie has brought an array of spectacular hams,

sausages and cured meats often as high-priced as the imports, or even higher. Can your counter staff explain why to a confused or skeptical customer?

Sometimes, just a handful of people in a given store really know all about the food. The staff is instructed to go find that person when a customer has a question. One may think that's good enough, but if it takes five minutes to find that person or if he or she is already answering 10 other questions, you probably won't seem like a shop with much expertise. The best-case scenario, obviously, is that the very person your customer asks knows the answer.

This may not apply to all departments in the store and all personnel. We don't expect the butcher to necessarily know about produce or your cheesemonger to know how to poach a fish. But if you go to the trouble to create a winning display of something you're declaring to be of special interest right now, you're increasing the likelihood of questions on that particular product by default. It behooves you to help the people who work for you to be aware of the positive attributes of that item and why you're celebrating it.

The stakes are higher than ever for traditional retailers. So much of what people want for gifting and special occasions can be found online. The greatest strength any shopkeeper has — and must continue to fortify — is the human element. That somebody in your store can speak knowledgeably to the differences between like products in a given category, can make recommendations from personal experience, can put a nervous customer at ease, or simply have an enjoyable conversation with a shopper, are the reasons people will want to come back to you, versus shopping with E-anybody.

DB

**The greatest strength any shopkeeper
has — and must continue to fortify —
is the human element.**

Blast From The Past

Les Trois Petits Cochons

In 1975, Les Trois Petits Cochons, now located in Brooklyn, NY, opened its doors as a charcuterie in New York City's Greenwich Village. After outgrowing that facility, the company moved to a larger space. This picture, taken in 1988, shows founders Alain Sinturel and Jean Pierre Pradie in their R&D kitchen in TriBeCa. When even that space had grown too small, they moved the manufacturing space to Wilkes Barre, PA, while maintaining headquarters in Brooklyn.

Les Trois Petits Cochons manufactures pâtés, mousses, foie gras, terrines, charcuterie, sausages, mustards and cornichons.



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Champion Foods' Private Label and Branded Take & Bake programs will help you create a pizzeria destination in your deli and keep your customers coming back for more.

We use the finest, hand-topped ingredients in all of our products including 100% natural cheese, the finest cuts of meat and garden fresh vegetables. Our patented crust recipe bakes crisp and delicious with an authentic pizzeria taste. All of our products are packaged to convey a fresh, made-in-store feel and are shipped ready for refrigerated merchandising.

Our new line of Take-N-Bake Split Top Calzones feature a unique, stratified ingredient fill that creates a homemade/pizzeria taste and appearance. We score them deeply in the middle creating a "Split Top" that allows customers to easily eat on the go. They come in four delicious flavors; Pepperoni, Ham & Cheese, Philly Cheese Steak and Buffalo Chicken.

We have years of experience with Take & Bake programs and currently partner with some of the country's top retailers. Contact us today to leverage our expertise and drive profitable deli business.

Champion
FOODS

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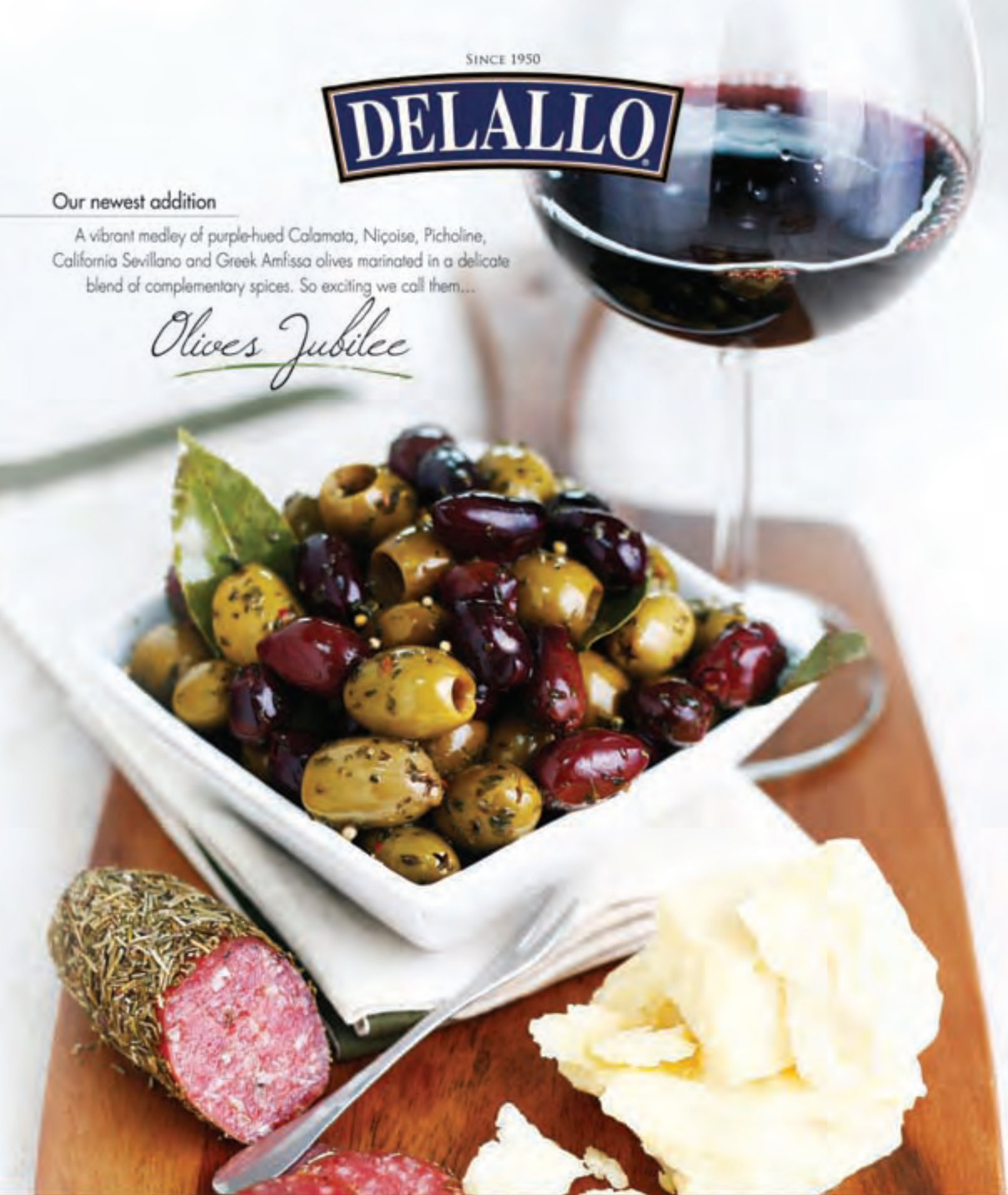
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