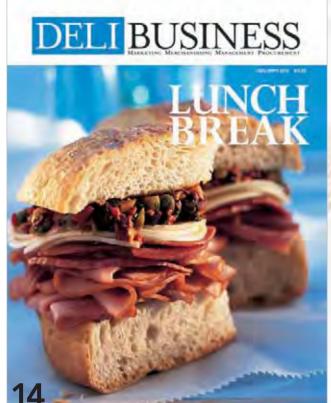






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TOMORROW'S CHEFS INAUGURAL EVENT



L to R: Johnny luzzini, Michael Blum, and Angela Meyers



L to R: Chris Rizzo, Thomas Farrell, Carmen Marc Valvo, Johnny Iuzzini, Christian Knaust, Michael Blum, Kelsy Hill

On June 12, 2012, approximately 80 New Yorkers from across the fashion and culinary spectrum gathered at the home of American fashion designer Carmen Marc Valvo for the inaugural event for Tomorrow's Chefs, an organization created to support, nurture, inspire and advance the culinary arts by providing mentorship and scholarships to at risk high school students.

The idea for Tomorrow's Chefs stems from Michael Evan Blum, sales and marketing director for Beemster Cheese.

The focus of Tomorrow's Chefs begins at the local level; the program hopes to create "food communities," in which schools, supermarkets and restaurants work together to cultivate a future for the scholarship recipient.

The recipient of the first Tomorrow's Chefs scholarship is Jesse Wright, a student from Blum's hometown of Wheeling, WV, who dreams of becoming a chef and running his own kitchen. Jesse, a product of foster homes since childhood, landed in the Children's Home of Wheeling, where his skills and passion for cooking were soon realized.

In 2010, Jesse became a student at Wheeling Park High School and quickly became immersed in the culinary arts in any way possible. As a part of the afterschool program, ProStart, Jesse worked and catered the events hosted by the ProStart class. Through the opportunity of Tomorrow's Chefs, Jesse saw he could continue his passion for cooking well into his future.

COMING NEXT ISSUE IN OCT/NOV 2012

COVER STORY

Going Greener

FEATURE STORIES

American Cheese Society Hummus Charcuterie

MERCHANDISING REVIEWS

Pasta & Sauces The Cheese Case

PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES

Packaging

PREPARED FOODS

Pizza Fried Chicken

DELI MEAT

Hams of Spain Pre-packaged

CHEESES

Bavarian Cheeses English Cheddars



COMING IN DEC 2012/JAN 2013

DELI BUSINESS will take an in-depth look at retail trends with an eye to helping retailers plan for the new year.

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www.atlantafoods.com

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

DELI WATCH

New Products



STUFFED OLIVES

West Coast Products, Orland, CA, has launched a new line of stuffed olives. The Olinda brand Sicilian style green olives are offered in blue cheese stuffed, lemon peel stuffed, habanero stuffed and pimento stuffed. Known for its commitment to natural curing and fermentation methods, West Coast's handpicked olives are cured in salt-brine for months; no lye is used in any product. Once pitted, the new line of olives is hand-stuffed and handpacked. Other products include Sicilian style whole olives in a variety of sizes, Greek Kalamata style olives, sun-dried olives, and California-certified Extra Virgin Olive Oil.

www.westcoastproducts.net



NEW BRANDING & LOOK

Roth Cheese, formerly Roth Käse USA Ltd., Monroe, WI, is updating its brand and look to better reflect the significance of the terroir of its home in South Central Wisconsin coupled with the traditions of classic European recipes and methods. Roth's Grand Cru Gruvere is the first cheese to reflect the new brand identity. The robust flavors are reminiscent of the air and land of the pastures of local Wisconsin family farms and the production methods mirror classic Swiss artisanal cheesemaking traditions. The cheese is prepared in authentic copper vats and aged on wooden boards in temperature-controlled cellars.

www.rothkase.com



AUSTRALIAN AGED CHEDDAR

Trugman-Nash, an affiliate of MCT Dairies, Millburn, NJ, has launched Old Croc Vintage Australian Cheddars available in two varieties — Old Croc Sharp and Old Croc Extra Sharp. These classic white Australian cheddars are all natural, crafted from 100 percent pure Australian milk from pasture-fed cows with no added hormones, and aged a minimum of nine and 18 months respectively. The smooth yet sharp "bite" and creamy, sliceable texture make it the perfect table cheese. Available in 7- and 24ounce cuts as well as 10/11 pound random weight loaves.

www.oldcroccheese.com



TURKEY MEAT SNACKS

Old Wisconsin, a division of Carl Buddig & Company, Sheboygan, WI, has introduced two new turkey meat snack products. Old Wisconsin Turkey Snack Slices and Old Wisconsin Turkey Summer Sausage feature the authentic, hardwood-smoked flavoring the brand is famous for but with less fat and fewer calories than traditional meat snacks. They are also trans fat and gluten free and made with only the finest ingredients and spices. Turkey Snack Slices are available in a 6-ounce resealable, stay-fresh bag. Turkey Summer Sausage is available in a 9-ounce ready-to-slice chub.

www.oldwisconsin.com



New Cheese Varieties

Finlandia Cheese, Inc., a subsidiary of Valio Ltd., Parsippany, NJ, offers a turnkey deli solution. Finlandia has created eight new varieties of cheese that are of the highest quality and taste delicious. Finlandia uses only the finest ingredients, such as pure, farmfresh milk, and ages their cheese to perfection. The new varieties include: Provolone, American, Cheddar, Monterey Jack, Havarti, Pepper Jack, Colby Jack and Jalapeno Muenster. All of Finlandia's products are supported by a comprehensive, in-store marketing program as well as employee cheese education.

www.finlandiacheese.com



SHREDDED ARTISAN CHEESE BLEND

Lactalis Foodservice, Buffalo, NY, has introduced Galbani Artisan Six Cheese Blend for foodservice operators looking to add specialty crafted and imported cheeses to their pizza and pasta dishes. Crafted to reflect authentic Italian taste, the Artisan Six Cheese Blend is made with a mix of flavors. The blend consists of imported Romano and Parmesan along with four other distinctive flavors. To find out how chefs incorporate Galbani Cheeses into their dishes, visit the www.galbanifs.com/about/galbanitales.php to view "Galbani Tales," a series of operator features.

www.lactalisfs.com



RINSE-FREE FOOD SURFACE SANITIZING WIPES

Diamond Wipes International, Chino, CA, has announced the launch of its new EPA-registered Handyclean Rinse-Free Sanitizing Wipes, which sanitize all non-porous food contact surfaces in places such as restaurants. bars, institutional kitchens, and food handling and processing areas. Handyclean Rinse-Free Sanitizing Wipes clean and kill 99.9 percent of bacteria that can cause food borne illness including E. coli and Staph, while still safe for food-contact surfaces. Diamond Wipes International is the leading West Coast manufacturer of disposable wet wipes in the U.S.

www.diamondwipes.com



MECHANICAL "HANDS FREE" HAND WASHING

Fisher Manufacturing Company, Inc., Tulare, CA, offers Fisher foot valves, which provide reliable hands free performance and stand up to the rigorous demands of busy operations. Foot valves are easier on the environment than electronic eye faucets because there are no electronics, no electricity and they use less water because when finished washing hands the operator walks away and the water shuts off. Fisher foot valves have renewable cartridges for ease of maintenance. Anodized cast aluminum pedals are strong, rust-free and lift for easy floor cleaning.

www.fisher-mfg.com



by Jim Prevor, Editor-in-Chief

Deconstructing Delis

ver in the produce department, a product-development and marketing battle always rages. The topic: how to compete effectively against canned and frozen options.

In many ways, deli has it worse. Most stores sell pre-packaged deli meats and cheeses — fresh product — in other parts of the store, such as in the meat and dairy departments. Indeed, the deli department typically competes against itself selling both pre-packaged and sliced-to-order services on the same products.

As prepared foods have become more important to most deli operations, the competition with frozen has also become more direct. Indeed, as part of its journey to America as Fresh & Easy, Tesco has found one of the major barriers to successfully selling British-style ready meals in the United States is the copious freezer capacity in many American homes that allows consumers to buy economically and stock up on a frozen food sale. Abundant freezer space also accustoms the consumer to being able to avoid frequent shopping trips and to avoid waste from having too much fresh product around.

Deli, though, has an even bigger competitor: restaurants. Sometimes the competition is the decision to "eat out," and sometimes it is the decision to "do takeout." Sometimes that competition is from specialized chains such as Subway, which are in direct competition with supermarket deli sandwich programs. Sometimes the competition is from restaurants that offer cuisines of all sorts — Thai, Italian, Chinese, Mexican etc. — that do takeout as a side business.

Some retailers compete head on with restaurants by becoming restaurants of a sort — thus the seating areas in Wegmans, Whole Foods and the like.

And in the take-out area, supermarket deli operations have for years now been highly focused on issues such as "how to deliver restaurant-quality food" and "how to offer the convenience of a restaurant" where customers can get beverages and everything they want in one place.

Yet one of the challenges for deli/prepared foods operations across the country is that they lack the ability to differentiate their appeal beyond differentiating product. In other words, the store and the deli may be upscale or basic — it may appeal to particular ethnicities or may be white bread — but as broad as its assortment may be, creating a particular consumer experience requires more than product.

One sees this in retail all the time. In most department stores, they don't simply integrate all shirts, all pants, etc. They have a Ralph Lauren boutique — complete with different cabinetry and décor than the Tommy Hilfiger boutique right next door.

When it comes to food, one sees this wherever people are in a constrained space. For example, cruise ships have been transformed. Years ago everyone dined in one dining room every day. Now the trend is "free-style cruising," in which people select from many options.

Some restaurant options cost extra and some are fully included, but what is interesting is that even the premium choices, though surely not partaken by everyone, are selected by many and not necessarily by people who are noticeably different than other customers. The key is they're selected occasionally. Maybe it's a birthday or other celebration, or perhaps it's a romantic event, or maybe someone got a bonus and wants to blow it, or maybe the family is a saver and can spring for a small indulgence.

In any case, you go on Disney's newest and largest cruise ship, the Disney Fantasy, and you see the exact same people having lunch at Cabanas, a mass market buffet, and then again paying a premium to dine at Remy, a high-end French restaurant themed around the star rat in the Disney film *Ratatouille*.

It isn't just product; it wouldn't suffice to take the exquisite dishes served at Remy and add them to the buffet. It wouldn't even suffice to take the exquisite dishes served at Remy and add them to a standard table service restaurant on the ship. The experience is integral to the value, and the branding creates value in and of itself.

Some of the industry controversy over exclusive arrangements that Boar's Head has with retailers may miss the point. The deli may not need to uniformly upgrade or downgrade or carry a bigger assortment. The deli may need to, in culinary terms, deconstruct. Some of this is done by cuisine in some operations — with a wok station one place and a barbecue bar elsewhere

Maybe, though, we need to think of food as fashion and realize that cuisine is more like functionality than style. Could a store set up an upscale chef's boutique and a trendy all organic boutique, in the same way that department stores have the Ralph Lauren

boutiques and the Quiksilver boutiques?

People live diverse lives and yearn for different experiences at different moments. If we don't find ways to appeal to the moments in their lives, we can be certain these customers will find vendors who will do so. **DB**



James 3. Trevar



by Lee Smith, Publisher

Pride In Craftsmanship

his may seem like a funny title for an editorial geared to business executives in the retail food industry; however, if you attended the American Cheese Society (ACS) Conference this year you would understand.

But let me digress for a moment. One of the biggest challenges I faced as a retail executive was staffing. I don't mean finding enough entry-level clerks to work in stores; I mean finding enough people who seriously thought of entering the retail industry as a career. Smart, talented young people working in a supermarket would scoff at the thought of continuing their career in the supermarket industry. Good jobs were available but it seemed impossible to find people passionate about the industry or any one of its components. Even with a recession and high unemployment, I'm sure it's still a battle.

Cheese, on the other hand, is driving passion to a degree rarely seen in anything but Olympic athletes. If you went to the ACS Conference, the most stunning aspect was the passion shown by people looking to increase their knowledge through internships both in the United States and abroad. This interest seemed to defy education, age or job title.

How many produce directors dream of working in an apple orchard during their vacation to learn more about produce? Do bakery managers plead for the chance to work at a fine bakery to learn cake-decorating skills?

Another compelling point was the age of attendees. Executives 40 and older dominate most conventions I go to. Experienced executives sent by their companies. The ACS Conference was filled with young people in jeans sporting tattoos and piercings. They were there because their companies sent them or because they wanted to attend and didn't care what their companies thought so they paid for the conference out of their own pockets. There were also lawyers, doctors and executives who were just as passionate and, maybe, looking for a way into the industry.

On page 45, Susan Sturman writes about the Cheese Certification program launch. Since I've been on the committee for many years, there were not many surprises — except for two. The first was the number of people who formed formal and informal study groups to prepare for the test. The second was even more surprising — the number of

people who were asking if ACS could provide a way for people taking the test to form study groups around the country.

You see, cheese is a craft and recognition is based on knowledge and skill, not titles and job descriptions. There is a craving for more education and it isn't driven by job requirements. Many of these people desire to become professional cheesemongers and they're proud of their trade. Some are looking to become cheesemakers, buy a dairy farm or become an affineur.

In some ways, this is the real coming of age for the people who went to college in the '60s. It was an age when young people wanted to make a difference and longed for jobs that would positive changes in society.

As an industry we always bemoaned the lack of passion. Now that we have it, what's going to be done about it? Will it be harnessed and allowed to grow? There is an opportunity, but methods will need to change. Would anyone ever have imagined voluntary study groups set up so people can increase their skills to become a Certified Cheese Professional?

Is there a way to use the cheese phenomenon as a starting point to develop craftspeople in other departments, such as produce, meat, floral, seafood and specialty foods? In this day and age, when college educations are getting harder to pay for and many are questioning their necessity, it may be time to put craft skills back into the industry. We've tried for so long to take any skill out of the supermarket; maybe it's time to put it back in.





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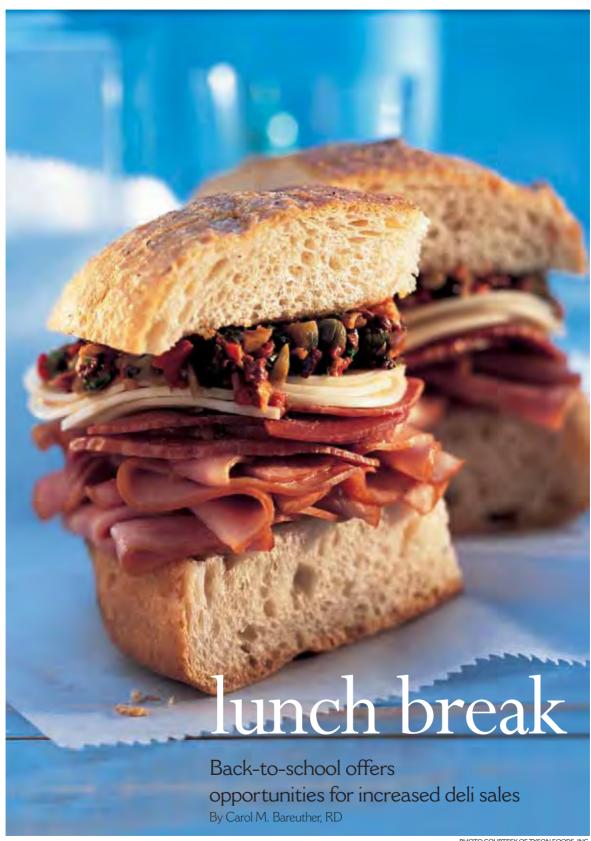


PHOTO COURTESY OF TYSON FOODS, INC.

ver 24 million K-12 students (37.7 percent) in the U.S. ate a packed lunch from home during the 2011-2012 school year; the rest participated in the National School Lunch Program. This means five days a week parents are faced with answering the what's-for-lunch question. Deli operators have an A-plus opportunity to step up to the plate with products and promotions that make brown-bagging quick, convenient and, most importantly, chock-full of foods kids will actually eat and parents will come back to buy.

Bob Valentine, manager of deli/bakery merchandising for Sweetbay Supermarkets, a Tampa, FL-based Delhaize American banner with 105-stores, says, "Back-to-school time in August and September is a great selling season. Staples sell best. That means meats such as sliced turkey, ham and roast beef, American and Swiss cheeses, snack cheeses such as string cheese, and other healthful products that can be cross-merchandised in the deli from other departments such as mixed fruit cups, bags of pre-sliced apples and celery or carrots sticks with dip from produce and single-serve yogurts from dairy."

The mainstay of bagged lunches is the sandwich. Delis can maximize sales and keep the 'same old' from getting stale by offering ingredients kids like and tying them together with innovative promotions.

Meat or poultry are found in 67 percent of all sandwiches prepared in-home, according to the Port Washington, NY-based NPD Group's *Eating Patterns in America*, 2011. Data from NPD Group's *Deli Track 2011* reveals that 39 percent of deli service-case purchases are from families with children in the household.

According to Eric Le Blanc, director of sales development for Tyson Foods, Inc., Fayetteville, AR, "The largest two segments for the service deli are Balancer Moms [defined as highly impulsive and the largest shopper segment] and Pleaser Parents. The second of these segments purchases nearly as much bologna as turkey. Ham is another crowd pleaser across both segments. We launched Ham off the Bone and Honey Ham off the Bone this summer. The sweet flavor profile of the Honey Ham is a natural for the lunch box crowd."

Parents who pack their own lunches along with the kids are looking for something more flavorful, says Valentine. "Herb roasted turkey or chipotle turkey sell well to adults, as does roast beef with horseradish Cheddar cheese. So do condiments with more robust flavor such as chipotle sauce or roasted red pepper sauce."

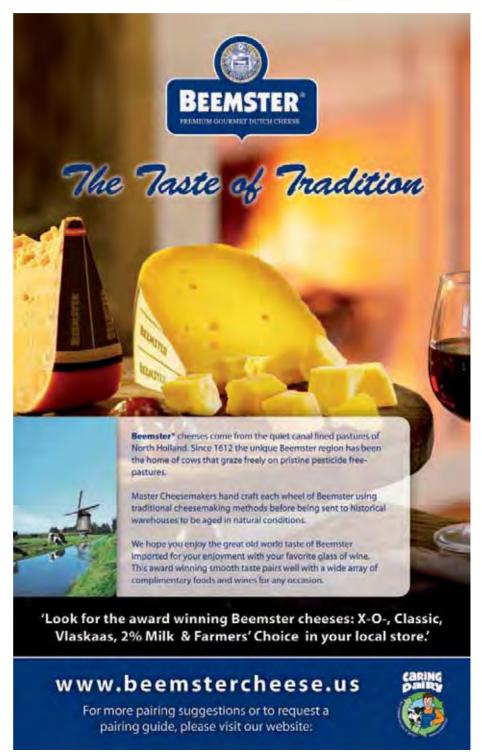
Kids love to play with their food. Offering

'dippable' foods helps parents pack a fun factor in the lunch box. For example, last year Charlie's Pride Meats, Vernon, CA, introduced a 5-item line of au jus packets in beef, Italian beef, Cajun beef, pastrami and corned beef flavors. Each packet makes 3 cups of au jus. Mom or Dad can pour a single-serve portion into a small container and turn a sliced roast beef sandwich into a French Dip. "We suggest delis introduce these au jus flavor packets with a 1- to 2-month promotion, such as buy a pound or more of our meats

and get an au jus packet free," says CEO James Dickman. "We've done this with some 15 retailers nationwide and sales of meats have increased from 5 to 15 percent."

Beyond the Sandwich

However, not all kids crave sandwiches for lunch, and the parents of this cohort are often eager to latch on to all manner of suggestions. John Moore, marketing manager for Pilgrim's Pride, Fort Collins, CO, advises delis to "offer suggestions about how cus-



tomers can prepare rotisserie chicken-based meals for lunches as well as dinners. They can do the same thing with tenders, boneless wings and filets. We've designed recipe cards and even cooking demonstration videos that show the consumer how to use deli chicken items as fast, easy and healthy meal starters as well as next-day lunches."

Individually portioned entrées are a hot trend that can be a lifesaver for parents looking for choices beyond sandwiches. Connect with kids, recommends Jeffrey Siegel, president of Commack, NY-based Farm Ridge Foods, LLC, which offers kid-friendly entrée selections including macaroni and cheese cupcakes, spaghetti and meatball muffins and flavored turkey burgers. "Position these items front and center in the service case and demo them," he recommends. "Attract Mom with a promotional price. Use signage to let customers know the products are available. Deli operators can also use signage to suggest a complete lunch box meal, for example, spaghetti and meatball muffin, carrots and a whole-grain roll."

What if a kid-size entrée is too much? Or unappealing? Some kids prefer snack or finger foods, and even these can be the center of a healthy lunch.

"The deli is a great place for parents to pick up new recipe ideas," notes Mary Hartley, RD, consulting nutritionist for Benelact Dairy, a Sturtevant, WI-based maker of low-cholesterol dairy products including Cheddar, Mozzarella, Provolone, Colby Jack and Pepper Jack cheeses. "For example, children love to get involved in the cooking process and are more likely to eat lunches and snacks they help to prepare or assemble. Let them get creative with crackers and slices of our

cheese, then add deli meats, pickles, cucumber rounds and cherry tomatoes cut in half."

Perry Abbenante, vice president of marketing for Snack Factory, LLC, in Princeton, NJ, "Pack any of the seven Pretzel Crisps Deli Style flavors in your child's lunch box to make a meal. Use Pretzel Crisps as the top and bottom of a peanut butter or turkey and cheese sandwich, the crunchy topping on a



PHOTO COURTESY OF SNACK FACTORY LLC

salad or mixed into yogurt. Pretzel Crisps can be topped with Nutella and banana slices for a sweet and wholesome lunchtime dessert."

Operators can also tap into the many adults hankering for a snack lunch by running a line item or special pricing promotion on a variety of deli antipasti ingredients. "Operators can post signage with photos on the Mediterranean bar showing simple 1, 2, 3 assembly items, such as cheese, salami and roasted tomatoes on a cracker," recommends Francis J. Wall, vice president of marketing for Bel-Gioioso Cheese, Inc., Green Bay, WI. "We've introduced a new product called Provolino. It's

cracker-sized slices of mild Provolone that pair well with meats and other ingredients such as pesto and roasted peppers, fig jam and candied pecans or grilled eggplant."

If space allows, delis can think out of the box by cross-merchandising these snack meal ingredients with multi-compartment containers that come in a variety of sizes, shapes, colors and styles.

Merchandising ABCs

As with most categories, getting consumers to try an item is the best way to get them to buy an item. According to Abbenante, "Product sampling is an easy and effective way to interact with customers and educate them on healthy choices, recipes and menu suggestions for school and brown bag lunches."

Taste promotions can get kids involved in the shopping process and expand their flavor horizons, adds Wall. "For example, demo Provolone with ham, turkey or roast beef. Fontina's mild buttery flavor is a favorite with kids as are snack-size pearls of fresh Mozzarella."

Set-up in-store demos of cheese and deli meats on crackers or sandwiches to cross-promote deli meats, breads and condiments, suggests Art Garcia, Benelact Dairy's sales director. "Or host a weekend workshop or competition in which kids make the most creative and tasty lunches using deli foods."

Time-starved moms need quick solutions rather than having to run all over the supermarket, says Sweetbay's Valentine. "The departmental barriers are starting to come down with the focus shifting to what's best for the customer. One of our core values is ease of shopping. That means merchandising items that go together as closely as possible,

Disney's Healthy Food Endorsement

n June 5, The Walt Disney Co., headquartered in Burbank, CA, announced it would advertise only nutritious foods to kids on its TV channels, radio station and website. Disney will no longer accept ads from companies whose products don't fit strict criteria for nutrients such as calories, saturated fat, sodium and sugar that have been linked to obesity and other diet-related health conditions. Kraft Foods, headquartered in Northfield, IL, has been a Disney advertiser but its Lunchables don't make the nutrition cut and ads for the product will no longer be acceptable. Is this a trend that will reach the supermarket deli?

Not according to John Moore, the Fort Collins, CO-based marketing manager for Pilgrim's Pride. "While health is important in the deli, it's freshness and value that are driving prepared chicken sales."

Nutrition isn't as high a purchasing push for deli meat as many people think, adds Eric Le Blanc, director of sales development for Tyson Foods, Inc., Fayetteville, AK. "There's a big gap in the number of people who say they read labels — around 40 percent — and those that actually do, which is in the low double and even single digits. What moms really look for when buying foods for their children is taste and whether it's something the kids like, the enjoyment of eating, and feeling good about serving something that's high quality to their family."

Bob Valentine, manager of deli/bakery merchandising for Sweetbay Supermarkets, Tampa, FL, says, "We haven't felt any effect yet. It'll be interesting to see how it plays out because Disney is such a big influencer. We do make a point to highlight healthful products to our customers but not to the extreme that Disney has."



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHARLIE'S PRIDE MEAT

for example, enabling Mom to buy the ingredients for an entire lunch box meal in one destination."

Offer parents a one-stop shop of inspired ideas, suggests Mary Caldwell, creative services manager for FoodMatch Inc., New York, NY. "How do you take advantage of customers making a beeline to the deli for lunch meats to increase the basket ring? Display a sandwich board listing ready-made sandwiches or back-to-school specials or sandwiches of the month. Or list guick recipe ideas for interesting sandwiches made with service deli items as well as Mediterranean bar fixings such as olives, olive tapenade and roasted red peppers and sign it 'Mom's Sandwich Board'. You can also offer these recipes on a tri-fold take-away. Or list a sandwich suggestion for Monday through Friday and give each of these fun names. Then dedicate a section of a refrigerated care or end cap to merchandize these ingredients together."

Sweetbay carries the ease of shopping bundling theme to its circular as well, says Valentine. "We'll run a print ad with back-to-school items such as backpacks and note-books and have another page with a grouping of lunch box snack items such as cheese, juice boxes and nuts."

Garcia recommendation is to "offer instore meal-deal promotions in which customers who buy our deli cheese can get discounts on other common brown bag items, such as bread, cut veggies or chips."

Back-to-school store tours are a great way to get school kids to try new foods, says Valentine. "We'll sample different cheeses, for example, Gouda, and also items such as hummus and salsa. It's fun to watch the little ones' eyes light up at the flavors as well as the fun facts about each item that our deli staff tells. It's also an ideal time for teachers, parents and chaperones to be exposed to

these items, too,"

The cheese case can even be used as a math tool. According to Wall, "We have a 100-pound round of Provolone that delis can use for 'Guess the Weight' contests. The winner could receive a \$50 store gift card or a back-to-school special offer that includes a certain amount of sliced meats, cheeses, and breads for sandwiches."

Take kids on a deli-inspired geography trip. "Kid's love salty foods," says Caldwell.

"Olives have a range of flavor from buttery and mild to those that offer a mouthful of flavor. Talk to kids about where olives come from and the climate. We also have a new product, Muffuletta, which is an olive salad. It's used to make a traditional New Orleans sandwich that's filled with Provolone cheese and three types of pork, such as salami, ham and prosciutto. Suggest parents put notes in lunch boxes with food fun facts. It's a great way to engage children through food." DB

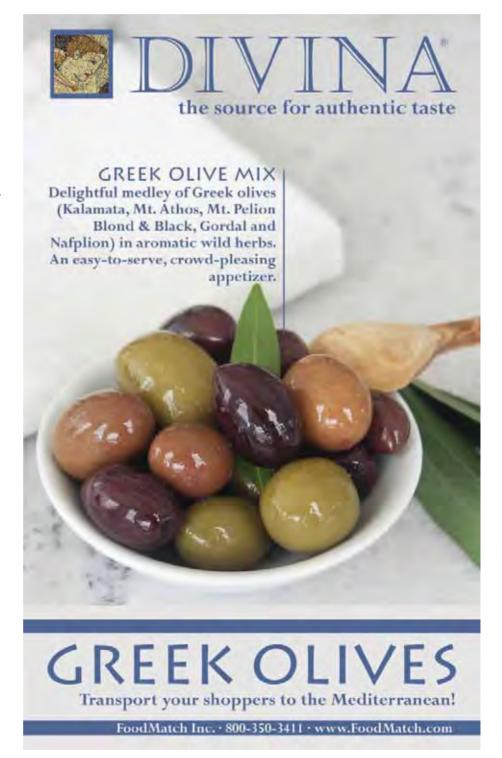


Image Is Everything

Seeking to convey a fresh image, delis turn to packaging

BY JULIE COOK RAMIREZ

oday's consumers have a world of choices when it comes to how they spend their food dollars. Those inclined to prepare their own meals have the entire grocery store — and increasingly, the farmers market — at their disposal, as they make ample use of both fresh and prepackaged products.

Not everyone has the luxury of engaging in meal preparation, however. Time-pressed and perpetually on the go, many consumers rely on carryout and dine-in for the majority of their meals. They certainly have no shortage of options there. From the ubiquitous drive-through, quick-serve restaurants to casual and even white table-cloth establishments that now offer a carryout option, the entire foodservice industry is competing for the same dollars.

Not about to be outdone by the TGIFriday's, KFCs, and Cracker Barrels of the world, the grocery deli segment has engaged in a fierce war for share of stomach — and share of pocketbook.

"Delis today are competing with local restaurants and fast-food establishments with ready-to-eat offerings of freshly prepared foods for time-strapped consumers to take advantage of," says Laura Stewart, vice president of sales and marketing, Placon, Fitchburg, WI. "From freshly-cut fruit, prepared salads and pasta side dishes to rotisserie chickens and platters of ribs, delis are offering a large selection of fresh food options and complete meal solutions that offer consumers both options and ultimately convenience."

Deli operators face a number of challenges in positioning themselves as an alternative to traditional carryout. Many consumers simply don't consider the grocery store deli when pondering what to pick up for their next meal. Driving down the road, they're barraged with signs and billboards for restaurants promising quick and tasty fare. But when they think of the grocery store, they typically picture hours upon hours spent slaving away in the kitchen. For







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WWW.REFRIGERATEDFOODS.ORG info@refrigeratedfoods.org 770.303.9905 many consumers, that's simply not something they have the time or the inclination to do.

Even when people do recognize the option of the grocery deli, they often fail to consider it a fresh alternative. Not recognizing that much of what restaurants offer is actually prepared off-site and then heated up in the kitchen, they come to view delis as the less-fresh option. Much of that perception is because today's delis offer a wide array of pre-packaged grab-and-go dishes. While the convenience factor is certainly valuable, the side effect is a consumer populace that eyes such offerings with suspicion, wondering just how long that rotisserie chicken, potato salad or sub sandwich has been sitting there.

As the competition between the foodservice and deli segments heats up, the goal of projecting a fresh image is becoming increasingly paramount for deli managers.

"The desire to create and maintain a fresh image is a goal we consistently hear from our retail customers, especially in the upscale market segment," says Steve Dietz, executive vice president, Tony's Fine Foods, West Sacramento, CA. "A fresh product offering and image represents quality, creates a point of difference between other retail formats, and better equips a retailer to compete in the foodservice arena."

The Power of the Pack

While the freshness of the food itself is of utmost importance, creating a fresh image requires an approach to packaging that highlights the product rather than hides it. After all, the whole idea behind packaging is to keep the food safe and fresh until it gets to its destination. The real star is what's inside the packaging.

"The role of packaging in the deli is to ultimately allow food and its fresh ingredi-

ents to take center stage, not the package," says Placon's Stewart. "The best packaging is the one that lets the food's freshness shine through."

Those attributes are top of mind for Farm Ridge Foods, LLC, Commack, NY. The company recently introduced The UnTyPickle Pickle, a new line of refrigerated pickles designed specifically to be sold in the deli. According to Jeffrey Siegel, owner and CEO, the goal is to sell the freshest looking and tasting pickle possible. That entailed a two-pronged approach involving shorter shelf lives and packaging that highlights how great the product looks.

"It's about giving a really fresh looking and tasting crisp product packaged the right way," says Siegel. "That's exactly what we're doing right now."

When it comes to shining the spotlight on freshness, clarity is highly desirable, notes Michelle Quirk, product manager, Genpak LLC, Glens Falls, NY. Often, she says, deli operators look for packaging that consists of a black base and a clear lid. Most of Genpak's products offer a 360° seal with low oxygen transmission, a key consideration for delis wanting to keep product as fresh as possible.

Placon also strives for clarity in its product offerings. Stewart points to its rotisserie chicken container as an example. It features crystal clear, anti-fog lids to communicate product freshness and appetite appeal, thus driving impulse purchases. "Packaging made from materials that have superior clarity can help merchandise food and ultimately act as your silent sales person," says Stewart.

Placon's Crystal Seal hinged deli containers are both crack- and leak-resistant, sealing out air to ensure food stays fresher longer, while its Fresh 'n Clear bowls and trays use a distinctive "scround" design to put the food front and center, ensuring it's prominently

displayed. Available in black and clear, the bowls are constructed from durable foodgrade recycled PETE with up to 100 percent post-consumer recycled content.

Tamper-evident packaging is another way delis are choosing to convey product freshness, says Stewart. Placon's new Evolutions packaging, for example, not only boasts "superb clarity for strong visual impact and high leak resistance" but also alerts consumers if it has been previously opened and tampered with.

With the desire to establish a fresh image top of mind, Shelton, CT-based Inline Plastics Corp. recently introduced Crystal Fresh, a new line of upscale clamshell packaging. The "clean, elegant design" features minimal ribbing and a crystal clear appearance, emphasizing the quality of the contents, which drives impulse purchases, according to Jack Tilley, director of market research. The product's unique seal has been demonstrated to improve shelf life by up to 33 percent, another key factor in conveying freshness.

Shelf life can also be enhanced through the use of products such as Clean Case, an absorbent pad that generates CO₂ to help control odor and minimize bacteria growth. The product was just introduced at IDDBA by Paper Pak Industries, La Verne, CA. According to Bob Bova, vice president, business development, the product is currently in use in both deli and fresh meat cases to keep air circulating in the case, resulting in fresher, more appealing-looking products.

"Freshness is the thing everyone is pushing for," says Bova. "If it looks good, then you're creating an image that this stuff hasn't been sitting around for a day or two."

Creating an Illusion

IPL Inc., Saint-Damien, QC, Canada, is currently in the process of introducing two new barrier technologies for injection-molded packaging, according to Jean-Christophe Magnan, senior product manager. Designed for use in refrigerated as well as shelf-stable products, the new technology completely blocks oxygen from coming in or going out of the package, giving the food a longer shelf life and helping maintain fresh taste.

IPL's timing seems impeccable. While recently introduced packaging innovations often receive the bulk of the attention, a growing number of delis are giving injection-molded packaging a new look as they seek to create an image of freshness, according to Susan Weiss, president, Plastic Packaging, West Springfield, MA. She also sees delis opting for labeling over printing as a means of making their pre-packaged items look like they were packed at the store level.



"They don't want it to look too packaged because then, even though it might be fresh, it doesn't look fresh," says Weiss. "So there's a conflict. Do you want it to look homemade or do you want it to look slick?"

While much of what's available in the deli still arrives pre-packaged, the ability to present product as the store's own outweighs any benefits that may be derived from touting a familiar brand name, says Ron Moresco, owner, Moresco Distributing Co., Petaluma, CA.

"Delis try to avoid pre-packaged national brands and instead empty out containers and say things such as 'Our Own Potato Salad," says Moresco. "Stores want to put their name on the things they place in the deli case or in their store's branded containers."

According to Moresco, some deli foods are better suited to "fresh packaging" than others. Specifically, he says, "Higher-end stores that sell perimeter fresh foods for grab-and-go are better suited for fresh packaging ideas." He believes those stores are typically taking "quality items" and putting them in their own containers.

When creating a fresh look, delis can't forget about sustainability. After all, it's a major hot button issues in the food industry today. Packaging manufacturers have done their part, developing cutting edge options with the highest percentage of recyclable materials possible. Take Inline, for example. All its plastic containers are manufactured from DPET plastic material. This fully recyclable PET material is produced using a unique, energy-efficient proprietary process. It's been shown to have a carbon footprint as low as materials made from 50 percent post-consumer recycled plastic. According to Tilley, that's the ideal solution for delis seeking to promote a fresh image and environmental sustainability.

Placon's Stewart argues against the perception that recycled material cannot merchandise products well. On the contrary, she says it's possible to "put a premium on food presentation and customer convenience" without sacrificing sustainability. Placon makes food grade PET products using EcoStar materials that offer "superior clarity" with up to 100 percent post-consumer content.

Paper Pak makes its products from recycled fibers. Yet Bova understands the argument that sustainability and freshness don't necessarily go hand-in-hand. That's particularly true when it comes to compostable materials because any certified compostable products are required to start breaking down as soon as they take up moisture. All too often, that means the packaging will start breaking down as soon as food is

placed in it.

Still, Bova says packaging manufacturers are striving to overcome such challenges in order to provide the best possible products for their customers. The options may be limited at the moment, making it somewhat more difficult to convey freshness using sustainable packaging, but Bova and others in the industry are confident it's simply a matter of time before there are just as many

sustainable packaging options as conventional ones.

"It's harder [to create a fresh image using sustainable packaging] because it's such a young industry and there are only a fraction of the options that you have with conventional packaging," says Moresco. "In the future, I'm sure we're going to see sustainable options that closely resemble conventional packaging for every application." **DB**



An Authentic Take

Selling opportunities for authentic and Americanized Mexican foods

BY LISA WHITE



PHOTO COURTESY OF KONTOS FOODS

exican foods are undergoing a transformation. These items have become so entrenched in this country and such a part of American menus that the authenticity of the dishes has been compromised. The good news is this hasn't been detrimental to the category. On the contrary, Americanized Mexican foods have helped expand the segment, providing growing opportunities for supermarket deli retailers.

"Menuing Mexican foods offers a variety of opportunities for supermarket delis, as traditional Mexican food and flavor profiles continue to be one of the top three global flavor profiles preferred in the U.S., along with Italian and Asian," says Robin Tobor, direc-

tor of marketing at Mission Foodservice, Irving, TX.

The U.S. Census Bureau reports the Hispanic population has surpassed 50 million and accounted for more than half of the 27.3 million population increase in the last decade. The Hispanic population in this country grew by 43 percent in the last decade, accounting for about one of every six Americans.

"In reviewing recent data, combined guacamole sales coast to coast have positive comparative sales, with distribution being strong from the Northeast to California," says Kristyn Lawson, vice president of sales at Yucatan Foods, Los Angeles, CA. "The category was up 18 percent in 2011 versus 2010."

A growing number of Mexican restaurants has increased



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Americans' exposure to the cuisine's foods and helped increase the popularity of many dishes. "Grocery chains are realizing that, when they look at competing Mexican grocers, customers are not only Mexicans," notes Mario Dovalina, general manager of Pepe's Wonderful Mexican Foods, a supplier based in Chicago, IL.

"It's important to be creative but not go too far out of the realm," says Demetrios Haralambatos, corporate chef of Kontos Culinary, based in Davidsonville, MD. The company recently introduced Pan Plano, a pita bread designed for the American and Hispanic market. Flavors include pico de gallo, jalapeño cilantro and chipotle with sweet onion. "This offers many fusion possibilities as a sandwich or in a fajita."

The Opportunities

A Mexican foods section can set the deli department apart from the competition in a number of ways. Depending on the demographic, authentic Mexican dishes and ingredients can help make the deli a draw for consumers. In Hispanic areas, diverse neighborhoods or upscale regions with sophisticated clientele, the offerings can be varied.

Pepe's offerings include 5-pound boiling pouches for foodservice, which allow delis to offer 10 to 12 different dishes that can create a statement. "The average supermarket is looking to include carnitas, mole, frijoles and rice," Dovalina says. "Mexican customers can pair these sides with rotisserie chicken for a meal."

Retailers looking to add Mexican fare to a prepared foods program should gauge their customers' interest; they can start with something as simple as beans and rice, then add tortillas and move on to more traditional menu items. "Delis can begin by offering something such as carnitas once a week and then, based on demand, include these items as staples," adds Dovalina.

Pepe's top sellers include carnitas in red sauce, salsa picante and beans and rice. Menudo (a spicy tripe and hominy soup) is becoming more popular in traditional grocery stores, as are pork rinds, also called pork cracklins.

Retailers don't need a full-blown Mexican foods program to make a statement. "Stores can choose three to four items, remembering that price and timing are factors to consider," explains Gabriel Robles,

president and CEO, Queso Campesino, Denver, CO. "We've even seen rural areas where supermarkets are becoming a go-to place for fresh and affordable Mexican dishes. In today's economy, people will go to the grocery store before a sit-down restaurant."

While first generation Mexicans are more apt to look for ethnic meats and cheeses to create their own dishes, retailers need to keep in mind that second generation Mexicans as well as non-Hispanics are seeking prepared dishes due to the added convenience.

The prepared foods segment of the deli continues to grow, with increasing numbers of consumers taking home pre-cooked Mexican items. "My take has always been to make the foods authentic, because no one wants quasi-ethnic food," says Vars Injijian, former vice president of sales and marketing for Karoun Dairies, Sun Valley, CA. Since this interview, Injijian has joined J. Brass Co., a food brokerage in La Verne, CA. "It's important that delis offer ingredients, such as Queso Fresco and cheeses traditionally used in Mexican dishes, for creating a good enchilada or burrito."

The versatility of the many ingredients appeals to both Mexican and non-Mexican consumers. Popular Mexican foods, such as tacos, burritos, quesadillas and nachos, are easy culinary platforms for deli operators to menu and/or customize. They typically require little preparation and can be made with a variety of ingredients already in the supermarket deli.

"Over the past 10 years, the tortilla has evolved beyond a core Mexican flavor carrier to being menued in a wide variety of non-Mexican applications," says Mission's Tobor. "From deli sandwich wraps, pinwheels, lunch-style snack wraps, healthy breakfast wraps to traditional Mexican applications, flour and corn tortillas are one pantry item that can be used in a variety of different ways."

Not only are many Mexican ingredients versatile, but they also have opportunities for global fusion. "One trend we're seeing is the growth of street tacos, a small, versatile platform, which typically features global flavors and ingredients that are menued throughout various day parts," Tobor says. "Some of the most popular street tacos being menued include traditional Mexican, Korean BBQ, Pacific Rim, vegetarian and breakfast tacos."

Another trend is traditional Mexican ingredients and spices used in a variety of non-Mexican applications. Examples include chorizo and carnitas being used in breakfast tacos, and combinations of Mex-





PHOTO COURTESY OF MISSION FOODSERVICE

ican peppers being used as either an ingredient or a spice in a variety of meat entrées and popular sides — such as corn, beans and mac and cheese. "Delis can get creative, topping potato salad with Mexican seasoning, for example," Kontos' Haralambatos says.

Across the country, quick-serve restaurants are putting guacamole on everything from sandwiches and salads to hot dogs, paninis and hamburgers. To capitalize on this trend, Yucatan Foods has created guacamole hummus with a Mediterranean flavor and guacamole ranch that has versatile uses for different dishes.

"Traditionally Hispanic foods include many styles of cuisine from Spanish-speaking countries that create opportunities for fusion foods such as Brie, corn and mango quesadilla topped with Yucatan guacamole or gournet wraps that use fresh veggies, black beans, seasoned chicken and Yucatan guacamole," adds Lawson. "With the regional differences of Mexican foods, there is a huge palate of flavors and foods to create healthy meals and snacks."

In addition to spicy guacamole in 8- and 16-ounce cups, Yucatan offers options for custom in-store fresh guacamole that can be sold by the pound behind the glass or cupped.

Merchandising Mexican

Retailers that want become a Mexican food destination must properly assess their customers and their preferences. "Freshness is key and price is secondary," Robles advises. "It's important retailers let cus-

tomers know these items are available."

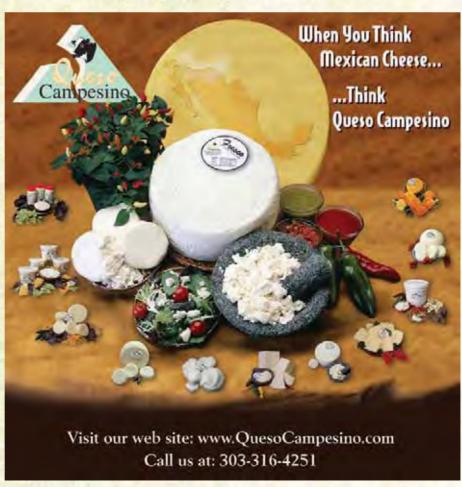
Sampling is an important aspect to any Mexican food program, but signage, shelf talkers and hand-outs are key for those just getting started. Karoun offers signage

and point-of-purchase materials to help promote its brand. "It's important for retailers to emphasize what dishes are made with and to authenticate ingredients using signage," Injijian says.

One of the biggest challenges is incorporating global flavors and dishes. "With its colorful appeal and exciting flavors, Mexican food is perfect for entertaining throughout the year, creating a party or entertainment section," says Lawson. "It's always challenging to keep in-stock levels high and get additional shelf space for top selling items such as guacamole, as the demand often is higher than store-level supply, especially during peak sales periods, like Super Bowl, Cinco de Mayo, Memorial Day, July 4th and throughout the football and holiday season."

Mission is currently in the process of finalizing its Deli Product & Recipe Program, which includes several new products that work in a variety of locations throughout the supermarket deli. "We also converted our line of corn and flour tortillas to a shelf-stable format, which makes all of our products easier to store in deli environments with limited freezer and refrigerated storage space," notes Tobor.

DB



Capitalizing on TAILGATING OPPORTUNITIES

Tailgating season offers a number of marketing and merchandising opportunities

BY LISA WHITE

hen it comes to themed merchandising, tailgating season has joined holidays, Super Bowl, and summer barbecuing.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines tailgating as "relating to or being a picnic set up on the tailgate, especially of a station

nary defines tailgating as "relating to or being a picnic set up on the tailgate, especially of a station wagon." This activity is typically portrayed by football fans grilling meat and picnicking at the rear of a vehicle in a stadium parking lot. It's estimated that between 20 and 50 million Americans tailgate in a stadium parking lot each year.

The origin of tailgating is much disputed. According to tailgating.com, various universities have laid claim to starting this trend. Some trace the origin to an 1869 Rutgers-Princeton game — horse-drawn carriages and grilling sausages. Others assert it started at Yale in 1904. After a train taking hungry fans to one of the school's first football games broke down, subsequent game attendees made a point to pack a picnic for games, reportedly starting the tailgating trend.

However it began, tailgating has become a popular activity for fans of professional and college football as well as an activity common at live events, such as concerts and festivals.

"Every season is tailgate season," says Weyd Harris, national sales manager at Conroy Foods, Pittsburgh, PA. "Too many times, people associate tailgating with the NFL, but it's far beyond that. College football attracts a lot of tailgaters. Here in Pittsburgh, we love to tailgate and have parties for hockey and baseball, as well. Savvy retailers will promote tailgate-focused items year-round, especially if they're located in a pro or college sports town."

Capitalizing on Tailgaters

Creative tailgating displays can effectively crossmerchandise a variety of deli items. Point-of-sale displays, signage and complementary items not only bring added attention to the department but also encourage impulse buys.

Conroy offers wood racks designed to highlight foods geared for tailgating. "We also suggest using our tailgate-themed shipper to attract incremental impulse sales to the deli department," Harris says. "These attractive shippers hold up to



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Profile of a Tailgater

- 60 percent are between ages 25 and 44
- 79 percent are men
- 59 percent have a college degree
- 46 percent tailgate six to 10 times a season
- 42 percent spend more than \$500 a season on food and supplies, while 31 percent spend between \$200 and \$500
- 95 percent prepare food at the stadium, while 5 percent bring fast food or prepared food
- 59 percent use a combination of grills, stoves and smokers to cook, while 39 percent use a grill
- 44 percent of tailgate food is purchased by both husbands and wives

Source: Tailgating.com

four varieties of Beano's Deli Condiments, and the contents can be customized to retailers' requests. Shippers of Buffalo Sandwich Sauce and Chicken Wing Sauce also

are perfect for the tailgate season. Power-Point offers many background options that can easily be customized to tailgate themes."

The Snack Factory, LLC, Princeton, NJ, has been involved with a number of partner promotions that would be suitable for the tailgating crowd. A recent buy-one-get-one-free campaign offered consumers who bought a brick of Cabot Cheese two free bags of The Snack Factory's Pretzel Crisps. "The display was positioned by the cheese section, so customers would see the products together. It was a very successful pairing," says Perry Abbenante, vice president of marketing.

The company has participated in tail-gating-geared cross-promotions with hummus and dip companies. "A successful tailgating section includes multiple elements, such as great displays and a spot to do something impactful. It also provides ideas that are compelling for customers," Abbenante adds.

Value is another important factor to incorporate in tailgating displays. "When something is free, it says something," Abbenante continues. "There are so many levels of a great display and promotion, but you have to have the right item at the right time."

Displays should incorporate a wide range of products and various promotions that

Top Cities for Tailgating

recent study by KVH Industries (a manufacturer of live mobile television systems for cars, RVs and boats), DIRECTV Inc. (a digital multichannel television provider) and a group of tailgating experts that includes Joe Cahn, a recognized tailgating authority, determined the top tailgating cities. The criteria included number of stadium parking lots, overall tailgating environment, tailgating fan enthusiasm and sales of tailgating accessories. The winners were:

- 1. Baltimore
- 2. Denver
- 3. Houston
- 4. San Diego
- 5. Cincinnati

provide consumers with simple menu ideas, options for different demographics and food that's easy to transport. Retailers should devote a large enough space to make a state-



ment and include a multitude of price points for those seeking snacks and others looking for an elaborate meal.

The Snack Factory offers promotional tools, including a branded umbrella, to help build tailgating displays as well as sign posts designed to catch consumers' attention. "Although typically centered around fall and football, tailgating displays can go up as early as the last week of August and go through to the Super Bowl the last week in

February," Abbenante says. "There's much flexibility in this theme for retailers. They can incorporated different brands and various themes for these promotions."

Meat and poultry are staples of tailgating, whether picnickers are grilling, preparing sandwiches, creating appetizers or enjoying deli platters. "Turkey is so versatile it can be incorporated into many types of foods that are perfect for fall tailgates," says Jeff Hayman, foodservice turkey marketing manager at Kelso, WA-based Foster Farms. "Items such as BBQ turkey sliders, BLTT — bacon, lettuce, tomato and turkey — or even a turkey bruschetta are perfect items for a deli to prepare either made-to-order or incorporated into a platter."

Retailers can promote a healthy tailgating display with turkey, which can be paired with all the traditional tailgating deli sides and condiments. "Turkey works great with so many different breads, condiments and sides. Cut sandwiches into football shapes during football season or circles for basketball. Create a variety tray that includes turkey sandwiches on one-third, potato salad in the middle and turkey bruschetta dip with chips on the last third. This is a one-stop shopping party platter that is easy to pick up and go," Hayman says. Foster Farms provides retailers with recipe support, menu support, point-of-sale materials and sampling programs that highlight key on-trend offerings for tailgating displays, such as seasonings and rubs.

Tailgating Options

There are a variety of food options for tailgating, from meat to condiments, sand-wiches to salads.

Conroy's Beano's Deli Condiments are geared for tailgating. Its website includes television commercials for these products, which are focused on tailgating. "Our packaging in 8-ounce squeeze bottles is the perfect amount of sauce for a tailgate party. We also offer a wide variety that has a flavor for everyone's palate," Harris says.

The Snack Factory recently featured an appetizer contest on its Facebook page to encourage ideas for versatile snacks. "Our Pretzel Crisps can be paired with dips, meats and cheeses for tailgating or eating alone," Abbenante says. "Our new flavors, including buffalo wing, jalapeño Jack and chipotle Cheddar, lend themselves to the tailgating atmosphere."

The American Tailgating Association's website (americantailgaterassociation.org) is a good resource for merchandising and marketing ideas. Retailers can provide the tools for tailgating on a budget or include kid-friendly food for tailgating families. Promotions can target those who are grilling and consumers looking for simpler tailgating options, such as pre-made sandwiches or appetizers.

Tailgating season has become an American tradition, with everyone from football fans to families taking part. Retailers that successfully capitalize on this segment's growing opportunities will see increased sales and more register rings.

DB



'Tis the Season

The right mix can ramp up holiday sales

BY BOB JOHNSON

The search for special foods to spice up holiday gatherings or make the kitchen feel more festive creates impressive opportunities for the deli. Deli platter sales nearly quadruple in the final weeks of December. From Thanksgiving to Christmas, appetizers enjoy a spike that makes the fourth quarter easily their best. And several other higher-end deli items reach their peak during the holidays.

"Sales have traditionally gone up around the holidays," says Jason Stemm, who, as vice president of New York, NY-based Lewis & Neale, heads up the U.S. promotion program for the Consorzio del Prosciutto di Parma. "I think a lot of people are doing more entertaining. People are also looking at doing something a little more special at home."

Supermarket delis can capitalize on the holiday spirit; presenting the right items in the right way can have an impact that lasts through the year. But holiday merchandising should be discriminating, because some major categories — including mainstays such as deli meat and cheese — buck the trend and actually decline slightly over the fourth quarter.

It's All about the Platters

Nothing says holiday deli merchandising like platters. Deli platters provide a unique opportunity to make a simple purchase that brings something truly special to a social gathering.

"This season we're helping retailers to maximize their grab-and-go selection with our newest innovation, the Ready 4-Pack Tray," says Giuliana Pozzuto, marketing director at George DeLallo Co., Mt. Pleasant, PA. "These prepackaged collections come in two varieties — The Olives Ready 4-Pack and the Antipasti Ready 4-Pack — each showcasing four of our top-selling bar items. Both collections are packaged in ready-to-serve trays with each item sealed individually for freshness."



According to George Christodoulou, director of retail sales at Castella Imports, Hauppauge, NY, "We see our premade platters spike. They have everything, including the toothpicks. You just peel and serve." Castella offers four premade platters — pitted olive medley, marinated artichokes, Feta cubes and stuffed zesty peppers with garlic, herbs and cream cheese.

The holiday season is the time to roll out the platters because the impact of holiday

entertaining on deli platter sales is nothing short of staggering. "In December, the deli trays take off. The last week or so in November of 2011, deli trays were \$4.6 million. The last week in December they were up over \$16 million," notes Alan Hiebert, education information specialist at the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association (IDDBA), Madison, WI.

IDDBA gets the most detailed sales information available from FreshLook Mar-

keting Group, Hoffman Estates, IL. Their data from 2011 show that the increase in deli platter sales in the fourth quarter over the third quarter was more than 40 percent.

"The holiday season used to be Thanksgiving to Christmas, but it has expanded to just after Labor Day. The spike is significant, but entertaining is done year-round," says Christodoulou.

This spike in sales during the holiday season means opportunities to introduce customers to platters as an option for gatherings year-round. "These items are famous year-round for most any occasion — from Sunday Super Bowl get-togethers to graduation parties — but amplified during the winter holiday season. Consumers are busy and hurried during this time of year yet want to bring something elegant to the table, which is why olives and antipasti have become the gem that they are — stunning, yet convenient, taking party trays to a whole other level," adds DeLallo's Pozzuto.

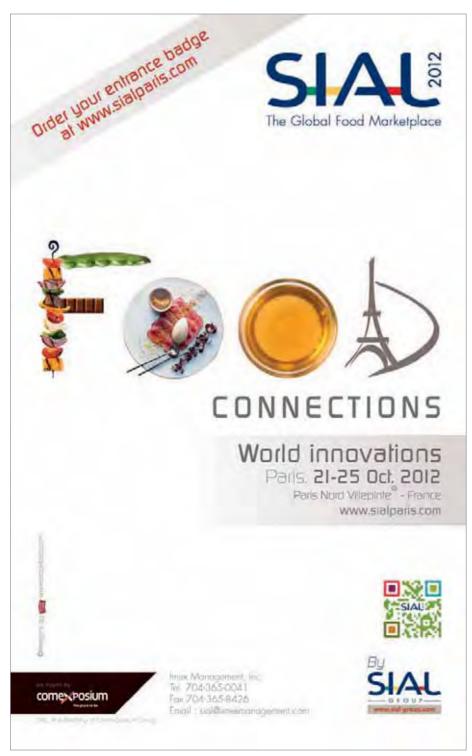
The appetizer category also increases for the holidays; the FreshLook numbers show better than a 5 percent in deli appetizer sales for the entire fourth quarter compared to the third quarter. Entrées and entire meals from the deli enjoy a temporary spike for Thanksgiving, but decline later in the season. The FreshLook numbers show cheese and meat sales at the deli were slightly lower in the fourth quarter of 2011 than in the third quarter.

Other deli items that can add a special touch to holiday dining and social gatherings increase in sales. "When it comes to the end of December, the entrées go down, but some of the salads, sandwiches and side dishes go up. Deserts increase, too, but deserts aren't a big category in the deli," Hiebert says.

Deli department planning for the holiday season best begins months in advance. According to Lewis & Neale's Stemm, "In October and November we start seeing shipments from Italy increase. It almost starts in September. September shipments were twice the volume of January in 2011. Thanksgiving to Christmas is the peak selling season."

Some suppliers report the pace of ordering for the holidays picks up as early as late summer. "For us, the entire fourth quarter picks up. People start ordering at the end of September or beginning of October," notes Camille Collins, marking director at Les Trois Petit Cochons, Brooklyn, NY.

And the time to begin planning for the November through December merchandising opportunities is already here. "We're talking to our retailers right now [June]





about their holiday programs," according to Castella's Christodoulou.

Upscale for the Holidays

During the holiday season, when many consumers are looking to the deli to supply a touch that makes gatherings special, retailers

should take advantage of the opportunities to merchandise high-end items.

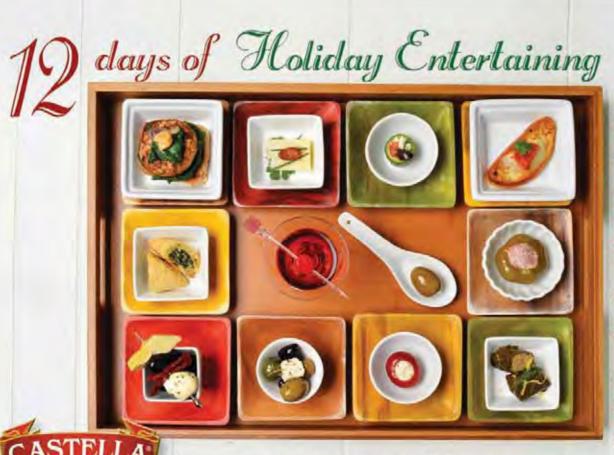
"It's important to carry upscale items because the holiday season is a time for inhome entertaining of family and friends—and a time to show how much you value these relationships— and serving upscale

helps in showing this," says Dave Brandow, director of sales & marketing, corporate foodservice and export at Piller's Fine Foods, Waterloo, ON, Canada. "Delis can 'kick it up a notch' by providing these products in unique platters. This helps the hosts provide the wow factor to their guests."

Merchandising upscale deli items that help make gatherings more festive can increase sales. "I think it's very important to carry upscale deli items during the holiday season because shoppers are actively seeking those specialty items to give as gifts or to use in entertaining — the 'specialness' of those foods contributes to the festivity of the season," says Laurie Cummins, president and CEO at Alexian Pâtés and Specialty Meats, Neptune, NJ.

Pâté and caviar both enjoy greater popularity in the holiday season, according to Cummins. "Certainly pâté is one of the items that does better during the holiday season, and so is caviar. We always have a spike from October through the middle of January because of the increased demand from out regular customers and the addition of 'seasonal' customers," she says.

Because these upscale items are largely being served at parties, the larger sizes come to the forefront late in the year. "In general



- Turkey Chipotle Slider
- 2 Graviera with Caramelized Almond
- 3 Mediterranean Cucumber Cup
- A Bruschetta on Crostini
- 5 Spinach Feta Puff
- 6 Pomegranate Martini
- 7 Green Olive Stuffed with Provolone
- 8 Cherry Pepper Stuffed with Provolone and Prosciutto
- 9 Skewer with Mozzarella, Sun Dried Tomato, Kalamata and Artichoke
- 10 Feta Olive Salad
- 11 Cherry Pepper Stuffed with Herb Gream Cheese
- 19 Stuffed Grape Leaves



PHOTO COURTESY OF GEORGE DELALLO CO

the larger blocks of pâtés, mousses and hams do well. People are buying for parties so you see a spike in the larger sizes," Les Trois Petit Cochons' Collins says. "For the holiday season, bulk mousses that contain foie gras increase. We have a block foie gras made with liver and sauterne wine."

According to Collins foie gras sales increase during the holidays everywhere; this year California will be an exception because a state law banning sales of foie gras went into effect on July 1.

Upscale prosciutto products also reach their peak at the deli during the holidays. According to Alberto Minardi, general manager at Principe Foods, Los Angeles, CA, "Higher-end prosciutto is increasing. We have an increase of 20 percent over last year on San Daniele prosciutto. [San Daniele] is a small village about 100 miles northeast of Venice. There are only 31 producers there, and only six or seven of them

are USDA approved for importing."

Visibility and Convenience

In addition to stocking the deli with holiday items, it's worth going the extra mile to let consumers know that these items are available and to help them learn how to use them. Merchandising plays a vital role because much of the holiday trade comes from impulse decisions to buy something out of the ordinary.

"I think it's important that the merchants put a lot of effort and resources into communicating they have these items, which includes prominent in-store signage, print advertising, informing and training all the store personnel." explains Alexian's Cummins "It's the best time of year to sample products. The traffic volume is greater and shoppers want to know what's new,

what's amazing, what's special and what's easy to entertain with. This encourages year-round business so it's a win-win for both the manufacturer and the retailer."

This could be the best time of the year for cross-merchandising and actively demonstrating products. "Cross-merchandise, cross-merchandise," Minardi advises. "Combine that with active demos. You want to have the manufacturer doing the demo, the broker doing the demo, or your own people after they've done the training. You want someone who can tell the story and the romance of San Daniele. That works."

Another way to give your customers suggestions for holiday entertainment is to simply put the items where they're visible and convenient. "Most of the items that continue to grow are in the cheese case or the grab-and-go case — convenience items such cheese and prosciutto or party trays.

Pre-sliced products and combination products are increasing," Minardi continues.

Because holiday customers are usually short on time, it helps to offer convenient grab-and-go items that add a special touch to gatherings. "For so many customers, a deli's gourmet entertainment selection is a holiday miracle! Grab-and-go gourmet items make it easy for customers to amp up their entertainment offerings with fresh flavor and a vibrant appearance," adds DeLallo's Pozzuto. "Olives and antipasti are the natural complement to deli items — specialty cheeses, cured meats, crackers, spreads and everything in between."

Visibility is crucial to spurring the kind of impulse purchases made during the holidays. According to Lewis & Neale's Stemm, "You want to make sure it's visible. People might not always have prosciutto di Parma on their list, but they want to put together a platter that's special. We put together a poster with quick visuals of ways to entertain with prosciutto di Parma. We're pretty active in working with retailers to support their efforts."

Information how to use relatively unfamiliar high-end items is helpful. "Give consumers an idea what they can do with the items. Recipe tear-off sheets help. We have a recipe on our website [www.3pigs.com] for beef Wellington. One of our mousses is used in beef Wellington," Collins advises.

This can be the best time of year to offer suggestions for a wide variety of items. "The entire Mediterranean category does better during the holidays. We do a lot of feature suggestions. For example, you're doing a Greek night and you know about Kalamata olives, but do you know about Greek black olives and have you tried our stuffed grape leaves? We also suggest pairings," Castella's Christodoulou says.

A combination of exciting products and well-designed displays and signage can turn the deli into the holiday entertainment destination. "Always remember that the deli is a home-entertaining solution provider build displays, offer custom services and you'll be rewarded with incremental sales and re-introduce current and new customers to all your deli has to offer," Piller's Brandow recommends. "Limited-time offerings, such as winter salami or snowman salami chubs, can make your deli a holiday-entertaining destination. Have your deli be known for these types of products and create a 'treasure hunt' destination for your existing customers and to bring in new customers. In both scenarios you create interest that will highlight your deli and reacquaint your customers with all you have to offer" DB

Baby, It's Cold Outside

Soups offer comfort and satisfaction when the weather turns frigid

BY JAN FIALKOW

hen winter sets in, consumers turn to comfort foods. Salads and light meals are fine when the temperature is high and the humidity is oppressive, but when the temperature dips, they want heartier fare. And nothing says hearth-and-home quite the way a bowl of steaming hot soup does.

According to Mike Leccese, culinary support chef, Select Store Brands, Ontario, CA, "There's a lot of interest in soups when the weather gets cold. They show up on more menus and in more retailers. Today's consumer realizes that there's more to soup than Campbell's."

"The demand [for soup] is very strong; it's going in many directions at a fast pace," says Levon Kurkjian, vice president of marketing, Kettle Cuisine, Chelsea, MA. "In terms of fresh soup, the Top 10 has stayed the same for years. They have a huge market share — probably 80 percent of sales. But now retailers are demanding more rotation. They're looking for changes three to four times a year. They want more breadth. The non-traditional soups are beginning to take some of the market share that the traditional soups have claimed."

Generations that grew up on condensed soup have developed more sophisticated palates and want intense flavor profiles. The deli can offer a wide variety of tastes and styles, enabling each person at the table to indulge his or her preferences. Soup bars cater to a wide spectrum of tastes, from familiar to exotic, stock-based to creambased, vegan to carnivore.

Perhaps the most overriding trend right now is the quest for ethnic flavors. "Global flavors — such as Mediterranean, Asian-inspired, and Mexican — bolder tastes and healthy attributes are in demand right now for many soup lovers, especially the 20-somethings, the Food Network generation," says Lynnea Jodway, marketing coordinator, Sandridge Food Corp., Medina, OH. "Many consumers are seeking out products that fol-



low these trends, and they desire ethnically authentic flavor profiles."

Within the ethnic category, Leccese sees a strong push for Latin flavors. "The Latin theme is strong and picking up in classic takes. What we've thought of as Hispanic is transitioning," he explains. "Mole sauce is becoming a background — the chilies and spices are popular. The sauce is thinned out and has squashes and vegetables added. Heat and smokiness are big right now and these flavors are being added to classic soups."

Kurkjian sees the ethnic trend reaching into new territory. "A lot of ethnic trends are still very strong. Consumers are demanding more ethnic and regional flavors; they want more than Southwestern, Mexican, Chinese and Japanese. They're branching out and looking for different and more interesting flavor profiles — such as Indian, Southeast Asian, North African and Midwest as

well as regional seafood flavors such as East Coast, West Coast and Pacific Northwest," he notes

Comfort with a Twist

The search for the new doesn't mean an abandonment of the familiar. In today's marketplace, it often means a fusion of the two.

Comfort with a twist is one of the fastest growing trends, says Kurkjian. He explains this as "something that's familiar but a little different. For example, chicken noodle soup — people know it and love it, but now they're looking for a twist. Perhaps tarragon or whole-grain noodles. They want to tweak the familiar. And this goes beyond soups."

According to William Bigelow, vice president of corporate development, Blount Fine Foods, Fall River, MA, "The 'classic' flavors still dominate the marketplace but bold and ethnic flavors are starting to gain in populari-



PHOTO COURTESY OF SELECT STORE BRANDS

ty. An example is our new Chicken Posole Soup. It's a classic Mexican soup that has a deep, rich flavor profile and authentic spices." Blount offers a two-pronged solution to seasonal soup demand: a robust offering of fresh Panera Bread and Legal Sea Foods retail soups in 16-ounce ready-to-heat cups and a broad selection of foodservice soups that can be offered hot-to-go in the deli.

Manufacturers are seeing "a turn on classics," notes Select Store Brand's Leccese. "There's been a resurgence of lobster bisque but with new flavors that include more vegetables and aromatics. Consumers are still interested in hearty soups, especially creambased soups such as bisques and chowders. We're looking at Latin indigenous flavors — for example, smoked New Mexican Chile Chowder. The smoky New Mexican chiles balance out the creaminess.

"One trend that's showing up in restaurants is turning braised meats into soups, for example, short ribs, pork shoulder or stewed meats with big vegetables," he continues. "It hasn't filtered down to the deli yet, but it's coming, probably within a year or two.

"Across the spectrum, flavor profiles are including chili peppers, smoky elements, fennel and coriander. There's a lot of fusion going on," Leccese concludes.

The overriding attributes that consumers look for — whether they want on-trend or familiar — are freshness and quality. "Freshness is always in high demand — think less sodium, pure ingredients and no preservatives — more natural, homemade flavors that consumers can feel good about eating," explains Sandridge's Jodway. "Many consumers prefer the recognizable, not-astrendy favorites, as well. Regardless of any trends, flavor remains the top concern when choosing a soup."

Having the right selections of fresh soup — creams and/or broths — available and in front of the consumer year-round will keep interest in the category and will constantly remind the consumer of its fresh and conve-



PHOTO COURTESY OF SANDRIDGE FOOD CORP

nient attributes," Jodway adds.

The Health Connection

Soup has always had a perception as being healthy; chicken soup is a cross-cultural panacea for almost every stay-home-forthe-day malady. That image dimmed somewhat when consumers turned to high-sodium canned varieties, but fresh soup is regaining the mantle of healthfulness.

"Fresh soup is perceived as 'better for you' and overall, the soup category is in a strong position to address rising health concerns," relates Jodway. "Soups are generally filling, relatively low in calories and good sources of select vitamins and fiber — from vegetables and beans — and protein — from chicken, beef or beans.

"Several of our soups suit different dietary needs and health concerns, with attributes such as gluten free, dairy free, low fat and vegetarian/vegan," she continues. "With the USDA's latest recommendation to reduce sodium intake to 2,300 milligrams or less per day, many manufacturers are reducing the levels of sodium in their prepared food offerings. Our chefs have developed a new line of better-for-you fresh refrigerated soups featuring intense flavors that rely on select seasonings and spices rather than a heavy hand of salt to reach robust tastes. Also, our latest capital expansion includes technology that can help us significantly reduce sodium in many products while maintaining and/or intensifying savory flavors."

Health concerns also include food safety. According to Blount's Bigelow, "Healthy options and food safety are important to both deli managers and their customers. Food safety is always a priority when we're developing new flavors and recipes. Our products are made to be — and stay — safe, and to present well when offered hot-to-go in the deli.

"Healthy choices and 'clean' labels are very much on the minds of customers and consumers as well. Buyers continue to ask for more choices in things such as lower sodium, gluten free and vegetarian while consumers are concerned with health and the ingredients that make up the foods they're eating. Our team works very hard to offer healthy options without any sacrifice in flavor, quality or presentation," Bigelow adds.

Merchandising Options

Fresh, hot soup to-go is a draw for many consumers, but the deli has an opportunity to stake out a position that appeals to consumers who want hot soup, just not immediately.

"The pre-pack business is growing, but the numbers are all over the place," says Kettle Cuisine's Kurkjian. "Getting reliable data is a challenge. But pre-pack chilled soup is the fastest growing category; it's outpacing shelfstable and frozen."

"Chilled, pre-pack options continue to gain traction, which is why we've expanded our Panera Soup offering heading into fall," explains Bigelow. "The 16-ounce retail cups we launched in the last year have performed very well in every market for us. To build on that success, this fall we're introducing three new soups from Panera Bread — Creamy Tomato Bisque, New England Clam Chowder and Black Bean Soup, which is vegetarian and gluten-free.

"Our consumer research points to two primary reasons for the early success of chilled, pre-pack soup options and both are familiar messages: economics and convenience," he continues. "The ability of a deli to offer a restaurant-quality soup — at a reasonable price — that can be heated quickly and easily at work is a welcome item. These soups deliver some of the best social media chatter we see on our pages."

According to Jodway, "More and more retailers are offering fresh pre-packed soups because consumers demand them. Fresh chilled soups have a freshness factor that a can of unrefrigerated soup on a shelf simply lacks. This is what consumers are seeking out — freshness, as well as convenience. The shelf space is expanding, not just in the grab-and-go but in the prepared foods sections of stores. Retailers are putting wells and kettles in to cater to the consumers picking up their lunch for the day or grabbing dinner for the evening."

The economic slowdown of the past few years impacted soup sales, but they have rebounded strongly. "The economic downturn hurt," says Kurkjian. "The problem lasted about a year, a year and a half. People saw premade soups as a luxury. Now, the consumers are back, and they're looking for fresh taste, purity and convenience. The price points [of deli soups] make it difficult to replicate them at home."

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PROFIT BY THE CUP



Specialty Salami Sales Flourish

Traditional European-style salamis can bring a high-end ethnic flair to the deli

BY LAUREN KATIMS

hile Americans have traditionally relegated salami — sliced — to sandwiches, the classic European-style meat is making significant inroads with consumers looking for intense flavor profiles. Retailers are creating specialty sections for salumi and charcuterie — Italian and French cured meat products — which have been popular in their native lands for centuries. Savvy delis are pairing them with the highest-quality cheeses, wines and accompaniments, marketing the meats as exemplary taste experiences.

To be clear, all salami is salumi, but not all salumi is salami. Salumi is a broad category that encompasses meat (usually pork) products that have been preserved in salt (and spices) and then aged; the French refer to salumi as charcuterie. Salami is defined as ground meat (usually pork) and spices, which are then encased and often cured.

According to Chris Bowler, president of Creminelli Fine Meats, Salt Lake City, UT, these products are a "sophisticated, very much natural and traditional style of food, as opposed to innovative."

Fine European salamis often include natural flavors such as aged wine, black summer truffles and wild boar, flavors that are now showing up in their U.S.-made brethren. These flavors appeal to increasingly sophisticated palates and often complement other items in the deli, making specialty salami an opportunity to increase sales.

"There is a versatility to the usages," says Michael Cruz, director of marketing for Columbus Foods, San Francisco, CA. "There really is no limitation. You don't need to eat a lot of this product to get a great flavor experience." The company recently made a brittle with its artisan hot Sopressata — a combination of sweet, spicy and savory. That's right, the company fashioned candy made from sugar syrup cooked to a high temperature, often with added nuts, but substituted Sopressata for the nuts. "Any time you can combine flavors in a unique way, you have a way to expand usage occa-



sions," he says. "Break out of the usual sandwich and pizza — add it to salads, on top of pasta, mixed with seafood."

Although creating a defined specialty salami section requires very specific demographics, making specialty salami part of a salumi/charcuterie section is within reach for most deli departments. To present these traditional products to their best advantage — and thus grow sales — retailers need to up their own educational ante; associates must have the knowledge to inform consumers about the meats.

"It takes a commitment," says Bowler. "I don't think you can do it successfully by bringing in one product, then another." Being well versed in a large selection is key to drawing and maintaining consumer interest.

Flavors around the World

A commitment to high-end salami caters to consumer desire to explore different food cultures, and salami's many flavors and textures make it versatile.

An increasingly diverse population base and a trend toward local flavors are influenc-

ing salami flavor trends, says Columbus's Cruz. "Latin flavors and regional American flavors are 'hot' now."

"With specialty cheeses exploding in the delis in the last few years, specialty salami is a natural fit and opportunity for retailers to increase their consumers' basket," notes Adisa Kalkan, marketing manager, Volpi Foods Inc., St. Louis, MO. The company has created a line of salami called Un Mundo, or one world, which uses spice combinations and curing methods from many countries, including Spain, France, Germany, China and Hungary.

Spanish salamis, such as chorizo and fuet, have been of interest lately, adds Kalkan. "Pairing Spanish chorizo with Cava [Spanish sparkling wine] and Manchego cheese is a perfect solution for a consumer who is looking to entertain with more ethnic products and flavors."

Creminelli offers its own version of finocchiona, a fennel-flavored salami with its origins in Tuscany. The Italian salami tradition is long-standing and extensive. "They've been making Sopressata salami with garlic and wine since the 16th century. This is about an introduction to traditional as opposed to inventing new recipes," adds Bowler.

Salami from Central Europe — Germany, Russia and Poland — is often smoked and air dried, giving it a different flavor from their Western European counterparts. The tradition started when the Roman armies realized smoking extended viability and palatability. They may have not understood that smoking kills bacteria, but they knew the meat lasted longer and tasted better than non-smoked meat.

The smoke would dry and ferment the meat, along with providing a different flavor profile, says Dave Brandow, director of sales and marketing, corporate food service and exports at Piller's Fine Foods, ON, Canada. "We've taken those traditional products and made them more easily acceptable and more easily used by today's consumers, with products such as pre-sliced packaged and chubs [individual salamis, usually in the 3- to 12-ounce range]."

Merchandising Specialty Salami

Adding chubs to specialty cheese sections is a straightforward way to supplement the section.

Volpi's 8-ounce chubs are shelf stable, which allows retailers to cross-merchandise them in other departments, such as bakery or wine, without refrigeration. Regional flavors allow the chubs to be paired with various types of foods, creating destinations within the store.

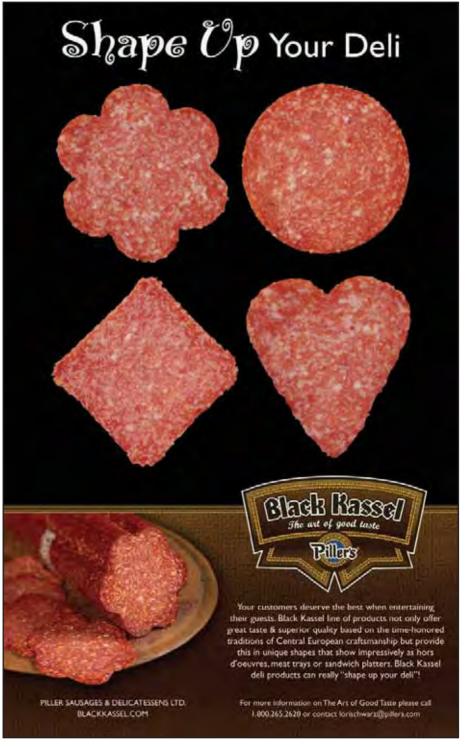
Learning how to prepare, slice and display

the meats requires training, and Creminelli offers interactive, extensive half-day programs. "It's a lot of basic product knowledge; people don't know what the products are. We teach them the ABCs of the products, ingredients and where they come from in Italy and France and whatever region," explains Bowler.

Associate training involves learning about product care; for example, natural casings need to be peeled off salamis. Some of these

products may have mold on the outside because they are traditionally prepared, says Brandow, so they should be sectioned off from other products.

Visual appeal is also important. "Make sure the case is functional but attractive," recommends Bowler. "This is a new frontier for traditional delis," he adds. "The focus is very much on the flavors and textures; it's a tasting experience as opposed to filling up a sandwich."



The Quintessential Cheese Plate

Assembling a nonpareil tasting of cheeses

BY MAX MCCALMAN

f 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.

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 bookends 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 — cheese made with pasteurized 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.

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.

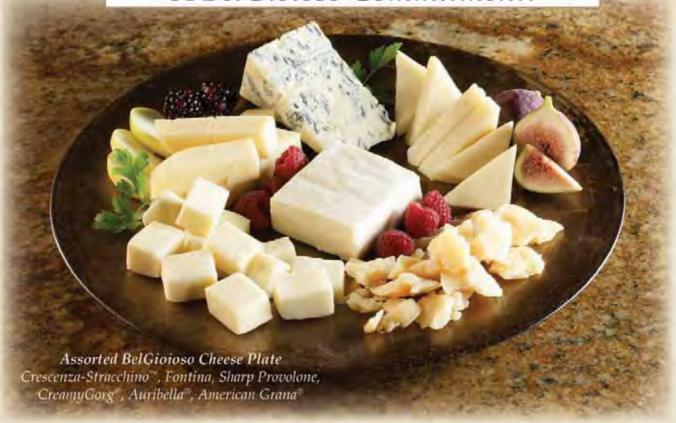
With regard to the animals themselves, if the cheeses are of similar quality, I'll place the goat cheese first, then the sheep, then the cow. Usually this works well in the relative heft of these three major dairy animals. The fat globules in goat milk are relatively small compared to the sheep-milk fat globules, and those are relatively small compared to the cow milk. The smaller fat globules are a little easier to digest. The placement of cheeses made with mixed milks depends on the mix. For example, a cheese made with goat and sheep milk might very well fit best between the all-goat cheese and the allsheep 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

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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.

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. 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 guickly. 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.

Even worse than imprecise portion sizes is the too-cold temperature at which many cheeses are presented [in restaurants and sampled at retail]. 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 were talking about some other food with a far less admirable track record for foodborne illnesses!

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.

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.



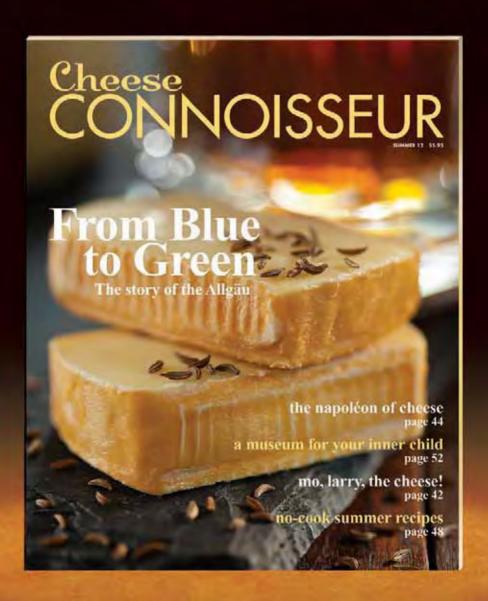
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Max McCalman is the author of Mastering Cheese, Lessons for Connoisseurship from a Maître Fromager; Cheese, A Connoisseur's Guide to the World's Best; and The Cheese Plate. He is dean of curriculum, maître fromager and director of affinage at the Artisanal Premium Cheese Center in New York City.

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The Secrets Of Switzerland

A land of mountains, pastures, tunnels and cheese

BY LEE SMITH

ntering Switzerland is to be confronted with perfect farms with clear boundaries and clean, brightly colored farmhouses. A few animals are on pastures of green grass. The perspective and proportion seems slightly askew — much like the folk art of Grandma Moses.

The greens are too green, the changing colors too vibrant. The houses with perfect gardens are too far apart. The cows look randomly placed, the soaring hills making them appear to be standing on their front legs. White goats populate one farm and in the next a drove of pigs graze on pasture.

But Switzerland also encompasses a harsh reality. Historically, it hasn't always been the prosperous country it is today. While the land captivates, it's also hard and unforgiving. Land suitable for farming is sparse and much of what is available is in high-mountain pastures where is it's impossible to grow crops. Farming life is a family affair and the work is strenuous.

In some worlds, cheese is an afterthought. Here, it is life. There may be no other country where cheese has played such an important role in everyday living. For 2,000 years, life here has been supported by cheese. Cheese provided the needed protein and nutrients to supplement a spartan diet; in many families cheese was — and is — the primary protein source.

Farms tend to be small with, on average, less than 20 cows; six to 10 cows are not

uncommon. They're milked three times a day and the raw milk immediately made into wheels of cheeses. After an initial aging period, the best of the cheeses are moved to aging facilities where master affineurs mature the cheeses to bring out the best flavors.

Unlike many cultures. Switzerland has an attitude that borders on hostility when it comes to factory, mass-produced cheeses or foods in general. Even though there is large production of the more common Swiss cheeses such as Emmentaler and Gruyère, the vast majority is still hand-produced and the majority of all cheeses are made from raw milk. Emmentaler and Gruyère must be made from raw milk to obtain the coveted



AOC designation.

Quality is the word most used to describe Swiss food. The country has the highest animal welfare standards in the world; the animals are pasture-grazed and free of hormones and antibiotics. The cuisine is simple, hearty and delicious. Soups are a staple and made from fresh ingredients.

Fine cheese, like fine meat and locally grown produce, is the norm. And the Swiss are willing to pay for their high standards with one of the highest food costs in the world.

The History

Swiss cheeses are believed to date back to the time of the Celts, long before the Romans introduced rennet-made cheeses. Rennet, the coagulant made from a cow's stomach, is full of enzymes and causes milk to acidify and whey to separate from curds. Today, rennet cheeses are by far the most common cheeses in Switzerland and include Emmentaler, Gruyère, and Raclette.

The earliest cheeses were sour-milk cheeses called Bloderkase in the Toggenberg Valley and Suurchas in the Rhine Valley. They were probably made from goat's and ewe's milk, since cattle were pretty much unknown. The Romans introduced cattle as draft animals and it was many years before they became an important source of either milk or meat.

These early cheeses nourished the families of individual farmsteads during a time when communal dairies and shared pastures didn't exist. If milk is left to rest, the fat or cream rises to the top and is skimmed off to make butter. What's left will eventually curdle or turn sour due to naturally occurring lactic acid bacteria. For thousands of years, the curds have been collected, put into wooden forms and left to drain. Once removed, they were eaten very young or left to age for later consumption.

Today, these cheeses would long be forgotten except for passionate traditionalists like Kosi Knaus. For a few weeks each year, Kosi goes high in the Alps and continues the tradition of making sour-milk cheese. Although this is a very minor part of contemporary cheese production, there is a growing interest in these ancient cheeses. The cheeses are low in fat and calories, with a mild taste similar to Ricotta.

With the introduction of rennet, cheese no longer had to be made from sour milk. These rennet cheeses were known as sweet cheeses and while their popularity fluctuated, eventually they became dominant. They had a much longer life span, and gradually, the wheels increased in size; today, Swiss cheeses are some of the world's largest cheeses, with





wheels of Emmentaler exceeding 200 pounds.

Underground Secrets

Since there are very few passages over the Alps and all are, for the most part, impossible to pass during the winter, the Swiss decided to go through the mountains. The original tunnels, dug by hand, were used to move people and equipment through the mountains. The peak of tunnel building the best is its natural aging cave at the foot of the Alps in a village named Ursy. Cheeses from these caves are sold under the Cavern brand.

The caves and caverns have a stark beauty. They're dark and mysterious with rows of cheese as far as the eye can see. The walls are covered with plastic to prevent the naturally occurring water from dripping on the cheese and also to help control humidity.

The primary cheeses of Switzerland are

land produces over 400 different cheeses, including Raclette, Appenzeller, Tête de Moine, Sprinz, Hoch Ybrig, and Vacherin Fribrourgeois.

Switzerland also has specialties that are difficult to find but well worth the search. Belper Knolle, a wonderful little gem made by the Glauser Dairy in Belp, is worth pretty much whatever it costs. It resembles a truffle and is just about the same size — bigger than a golf ball and smaller than a



occurred during World War II when tunnels

were used to transport troops and store

ammunition and supplies. Some of the

tunnels were large enough to hide airplanes.

By the 1980s, it was apparent there were far

more tunnels than needed and many of the

tunnels were dead ends that went nowhere.

round temperatures and high humidity are

The tunnels with their cool, steady year-

HOTOS BY LEE SMITH

Emmentaler and Gruyère. Both are raw-milk AOC cheeses. The flavor of Emmentaler is deep, rich and sweet with nutty overtones. The paste is slightly grainy and crumbles ever so slightly. The "tears of joy" are present in the large eyes — liquid that accumulates in the eyes and is the sign of perfect maturation. It has no bitterness and the nose is sweet and clean.

While Emmentaler is the king of Swiss cheeses, Gruyère is the queen. Smaller and with a rind brushed with only water, it's smoother, creamier, and more delicate. At its best, it's beautifully sophisticated and the perfect cheese for melting.

perfect for aging cheeses, and some of them have been sold to cheesemakers. Among the most famous are the Kaltbach caves, which have been used to age cheeses since 1953. Emmi purchased them from the original

owners in 1993.

Mifroma, another well-known cheesemaker and affineur boasts of its mission to bring fine Swiss cheeses to the world. An integral part of its ability to bring the best of

More Cheese and Cheesemakers

While Emmentaler and Gruyère top the list of well-known Swiss cheeses, Switzer-



tennis ball. It's always a little misshapen and covered in a mixture of black pepper dust and Himalayan salt. The interior is a snow-white raw cow's milk cheese studded with garlic. This innovative cheese has become popular with top chefs and sought after by gastronomes. It's shaved just like a truffle and goes well on salads, pasta, fish or chicken.

Consumers — and buyers — may find Swiss cheeses similar in style, but Switzerland has a long history of fine cheeses that include the very unusual to a wide range of blues, soft-ripened and Alpine-style beauties.

With the booming specialty cheese industry expanding in all markets, it behooves buyers to learn more about the cheeses of Switzerland and their very fine quality.

DB

An Industry Game Changer

The American Cheese Society just

launched its Certified Cheese

Professional Exam, an industry

standard bound to have a long-term,

positive impact.



By Sue Sturman Project Chair ACS CERTIFICATION PROJECT AMERICAN CHEESE SOCIETY DENVER. CO heesemongers are a passionate group, particularly the newest and youngest. The passion is visible in their work behind the counter as well as in the cheese tattoos on their bodies. Their passion is essential to an industry the National Association for the Specialty Food Trade (NASFT) rates as the largest single sector in the specialty food business, representing some \$3.44 billion annually in the U.S.

That passion can now be tapped; the American Cheese Society (ACS) just launched its Certified Cheese Professional Exam, an industry standard

bound to have a long-term, positive impact. Candidates who earn the ACS Certified Cheese Professional designation will have demonstrated a basic level of mastery in all domains of the industry, from raw materials through make processes, affinage, distribution, marketing, sales, regulations, nutrition, and sanitation.

The program creation process has been long; the concept was launched at the 2004 conference in Louisville, KY, when Kathy Guidi and Laurie Greenberg posited the industry needed a program akin to sommelier certification programs. Some 35 participants brainstormed and formed a planning group on the spot.

The first efforts were dedicated to research and discussion. It became clear that since ACS is the national representative body for the North American specialty cheese industry, it has the authority to offer a certification that would be recognized across the industry. By creating the certification exam, ACS would open up large opportunities for growth for its membership, particularly in the area of professional development and education.

Its principal sources of information about cheese have been the Internet, books, and learning-by-doing. In this year leading up to the first exam, candidates have formed study groups, independently and within companies. Precious few professional training programs are available in North America, and those concentrate heavily on tasting cheese, which is fundamental, but resources to train professionals in the business aspects, marketing, regulatory requirements, and best practices in sanitation are scarce. The ACS Certification Committee developed a panoply of resources for exam preparation: a bibliography that reflects many of the source documents used in developing the exam questions, a searchable database of existing training programs in North America, a handbook and webinars for exam takers, and a Body of Knowledge (BOK) document. All are available on the ACS website (www.cheesesociety.org/events-education/certification-2/). Once candidates have passed the exam, their contact information will be posted on a searchable database on the ACS website so employers can find them.

The BOK is an outline covering 12 domains of the

industry: raw materials; cheese make processes; affinage; cheese types and categories; assessment and evaluation; storage and handling; transport and distribution; marketing/merchandising/selling; service; nutrition; and regulations and regulators. Much of what it contains is on the exam, but the two are entirely separate entities with separate sets of contributors. The BOK will continue to grow, with industry experts developing content and all new content subject to peer review. As content is developed, it will feed ACS's educational programming — webinars, conference seminar sessions and the like. The exam program will provide ACS with statistical feedback to help evaluate

areas of weakness that can then be addressed.

The exam program and BOK were developed under the guidance of Knapp International, certification industry consultants with more than 30 years' experience. Under their tutelage, teams of industry experts surveyed the industry; wrote the BOK; drew up exam specifications; established candidate eligibil-

established candidate eligibility requirements; developed governance structure; wrote exam questions; documented and referenced the questions; reviewed and edited the questions; reviewed the exam itself, the applications and appeals from rejected applicants; established an ACS Code of Professional Conduct; outlined recertification requirements; and set the passing score. Over 100 industry peers contributed their time and expertise to this program over the past eight years.

Response from the industry has been impressive. Nearly 200 people applied to take the exam, which topped out at 150 candidates weeks before the application deadline, and people have already been approved for the 2013 exam. A number of major industry players are sending candidates, including Whole Foods, DCI Specialty Foods, and Atlanta Foods International. The domestic sponsors contributing to the initial development are Emmi/Roth Käse USA, Affinage, Atlanta Foods, DPI, Rogue Creamery, Dairy Connection, Artisanal Premium Cheese, Beehive Cheese, The Cheese School of San Francisco, DiBruno Bros., Formaticum, Larkin, and Vermont Butter & Cheese Creamery; the international sponsors are KerryGold, Mons Fromagerie, and the Cheeses of France Marketing Council.

What will the future bring? In the near term, likely an increased level of expertise; more consistent information and education about fine cheeses for the consumer; more consistent and higher quality care for cheeses at every point on the supply chain; a greater level of authority and respect accorded to ACS when it weighs in with regulators; and vastly expanded career opportunities for cheese professionals. In the long term, who knows? Perhaps cheesemaker certification, higher levels of certification or some model of more specialized certification. The future is unknowable, but it looks promising.

Blast From The Past

Cypress Grove Chevre

ary Keehn started Cypress Grove Chevre in 1983. In the early days, she raised her own goats, showing them and winning prizes. When she began developing chèvre in 1982, she

transported goat's milk in 10-gallon cans in the back of a Volvo station wagon. This is the 20th anniversary year of her much acclaimed cheese, Humboldt Fog, an elegant, soft, surface-ripened goat's milk cheese made instantly recognizable by the ribbon of edible vegetable ash that meanders through its center. Humboldt Fog is subtly tangy with a clean, lemony taste, a lush, creamy texture and a white, bloomy rind.

The picture bottom right represents the old retail barn at the company's creamery in Arcata, CA. The picture top right is the current working barn at the Arcata creamery.







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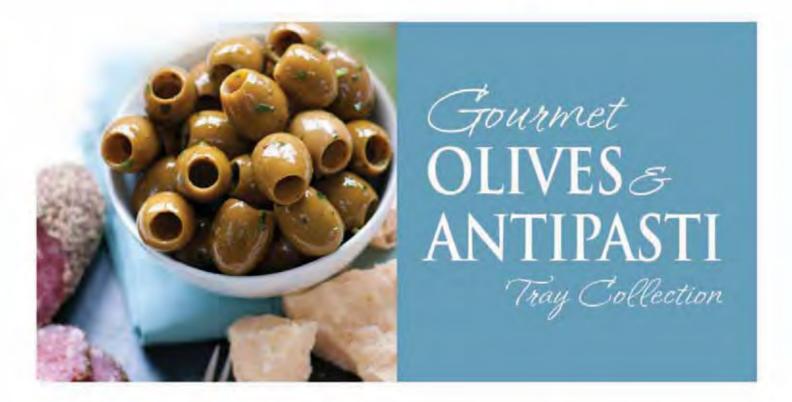






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