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Consumers seek healthy, flavorful options



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Increased shelf life and added visibility
are among the benefits

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A perfect pairing companion

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RFA'S 38TH CONFERENCE DRAWS RECORD ATTENDANCE, BOARD MEMBERS NAMED

The Refrigerated Foods Association's 38th annual conference drew record crowds, with 250 attendees from across the United States and Canada.

The conference was held at the Ritz-Carlton Resort in Amelia Island, FL on Feb. 26-March 1.

Ross Bernstein, best-selling author of nearly 50 sports books, kicked off the event with his inspirational message. Other presenters and topics included Shawn Stevens, whose message "Avoiding Prison Time for Food Safety Failures" was timely and crucial; Frank Yiannas of WalMart fame's discussion on "Food Safety Culture"; Suzy Badaracco's forecast on trends in the food industry; and a critical Technical Update from RFA technical director, Martin Mitchell.

The conference also included networking opportunities and social events, including a service project and food drive aimed at combatting hunger. The annual Golf Tournament allowed players a chance to network on Amelia Island's award-winning course. Suppliers displayed their wares and presented money and time-saving opportunities at the Exhibit Reception and during the One-on-One CEO Sessions.

Also at the event, Mark Rosenfield of Reser's Fine Foods, Beaverton, OR; Venkat Munukutla of Michael Foods, Minnetonka, MN; and Jeff Pitchford of Sun-Rich Fresh Foods, Richmond, BC, Canada were elected as new board members. Re-elected to serve three-year terms were Josh Knott, Knott's Foods, St. Paris, TN; George Bradford, Mrs. Stratton's Salads, Birmingham, AL; Karen Bishop-Carbone, Boston Salads, Boston; Lauren Edmonds, St. Clair Foods, Memphis, TN; Bryan Westerby, The Suter Co. Sycamore, IL; and Mike Swan, Keybrand Foods, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada. Both Mark Reser of Reser's Fine Foods and Timm Miller of PSSI, Kieler, WI, rotated off the board.

The RFA's Executive Committee consists of president, Steve Loehndorf of Reser's Fine Foods; vice president, Josh Knott of Knott's Foods; treasurer Ken Fonger of Mrs. Grissom's Salads, Nashville, TN; and secretary, Mike Swan of Keybrand Foods.

COMING NEXT IN JUNE/JULY ISSUE

COVER STORY

13th Annual People's Awards

FEATURE STORIESMediterranean Foods
Olives
Appetizers and Party Foods**MERCHANDISING REVIEWS**Flatbreads
Salads & Sides
Cross Merchandising**PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES**

Cheese Platters

COMING IN AUG/SEPT

DELI BUSINESS will be taking a look at Back to School

PREPARED FOODS

Pasta

CHEESES

French Cheese

ANNUAL SUPPLEMENTDeli Meat Guide:
2017 Overview
Salami
Ribs & Wings
Fried Chicken**SUBSCRIPTION & READER SERVICE INFO**

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ANNOUNCEMENTS



THE PROSCIUTTO DI PARMA NAME IS BACK IN CANADA

The Consorzio del Prosciutto di Parma, Parma, Italy, announced "Prosciutto di Parma" will take full hold of its name in Canada thanks to a free trade agreement – Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) – between the European Union and Canada. Specifically, the agreement provides for the co-existence of the protected designation of origin "Prosciutto di Parma" and the "Parma" brand currently owned by the Canadian company Maple Leaf.

www.prosciuttodiparma.com



MURRAY'S CHEESES WIN TOP AWARDS

Murray's Cheese, New York, won top awards at the U.S. Championship Cheese Contest. Winners were Hudson Flower, wOld Chatham Shepherding Co, Best of Class, Flavored Soft & Semi-Soft Sheep's Milk Cheese; Greensward, Murray's Cheese and Jasper Hill Farm, Second Award, Smear Ripened Soft Cheese; Barden Blue, Consider Bardwell of Vermont, Third Award for Blue Veined Cheeses with Exterior Molding; Cornelia, Point Reyes Farmstead Co., fourth in Smear Ripened Semi-Soft Cheese.

www.murraycheese.com

NEW PRODUCTS



NEW FARMSTYLE CHEESE

Tillamook County Creamery Association, Tillamook, OR, has reformulated its shredded cheese. Tillamook Farmstyle Cut Shredded Cheeses offer a hand-grated texture and deliver melt, stretch, texture and flavor. The new offerings will replace Tillamook's fine-cut shredded cheese. Farmstyle Cut Shreds are free of artificial growth hormones and artificial colors or flavors. Additionally, the company debuted Tillamook Sharp White Farmstyle Cut Shredded Cheese, available in 7-ounce and 2-pound blocks.

www.tillamook.com



WEIGHING GUIDE DEBUTS

Mettler Toledo, Columbus, OH, offers the Grocer's Guide to Metrology, which provides explanations, background and insight into some of the key factors that affect scale accuracy. The easy-to-read guide includes information on concepts, including linearity, hysteresis and geolocation and helps retailers understand how these principles, when properly accounted for, can help ensure accuracy and compliance while boosting profitability. The METTLER TOLEDO Grocer's Guide to Metrology is available for free download at www.mt.com/retail-metrology.

www.mt.com



CHEESE DIPS UNVEILED

Alouette Cheese, New Holland, PA, has launched new cheese dips. The line is made from rBST-free Grade A milk and cream and is 50 calories with 2.5 g of fat per serving. Varieties include Onion Medley, with Vidalia onions, leeks and chives; Cucumber Ranch, which contains cucumber pieces and premium soft cheese; and Mediterranean Vegetable, with fire-roasted eggplant, crunchy zucchini and sweet red peppers with savory herbs like oregano, cilantro, cumin and rich, creamy cheese.

www.alouettecheese.com



ALL NATURAL PORK

Creminelli Fine Meats, Salt Lake City, has a number of new natural pork products that are antibiotic free. Calabrese Salami and Smoked Provolone is spicy salami made with five types of chili pepper and peppercorns; Casalingo Salami and Gouda Cheese features the flavors of sea salt, organic black pepper and all-natural pork; Prosciutto and Mozzarella includes thin slices of American prosciutto and Mozzarella. The products are packaged in clear trays for easy merchandising.

www.creminelli.com



PLANT-BASED PROTEIN

TH Foods, Loves Park, IL, has introduced new products in its Crunchmaster line. Tuscan Peasant Crackers include whole grains inspired by an old-world recipe. Simply Olive Oil and Sea Salt, Garlic & Italian Herb, and Rosemary flavors are available. Protein Snack Crackers are crunchy, baked crackers with whole grain and 5 g of protein per serving. The protein comes from brown rice and chickpea flours and are free of soy and whey products. The crackers also are available in Sea Salt, Roasted Garlic and Barbeque flavors.

www.thfoods.com



A HEALTHY SNACK OPTION

Snyder-Lance of Hanover, in Hanover, PA, has introduced Snack Factory Fruit Sticks and Veggie Sticks. Created from fresh fruit and vegetables, light and crispy Fruit Sticks and Veggie Sticks are gluten free, Non-GMO Project Verified and free from added sugars. Varieties include Apple Fruit Sticks, Apple Cinnamon Fruit Sticks, Apple Strawberry Fruit Sticks, Peas & Carrots Veggie Sticks and Snap Pea Veggie Sticks.

www.pretzelcrisps.com

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



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WILL DISCOUNTERS CAUSE A DIVIDE IN DELI OFFERINGS?



By
Jim Prevor
Editor-in-Chief

With Aldi the fastest growing food retailer in America, and Lidl about to burst across the American scene, the deep discounters will be attracting the lion's share of attention for some time. Wal-Mart is already responding with numerous efforts to regain its once-certain status as the low price leader and, in general, one can expect three certain things:

- There will be enormous pressure on manufacturers to cut margins, cut costs and reduce prices, as retail concepts of all sorts look to compete with the deep discounters and try to do it at the expense of vendors rather than at their own expense.
- The service deli will be under enormous pressure, with retailers seeking to compete with deep discounters — including Wal-Mart. Labor costs are escalating with demands for higher minimum wages, and labor markets are tightening as unskilled immigrants become more hesitant to enter the country.

It would not be surprising if the need to drive costs out in order to be competitive with Aldi and Lidl is so great that even long settled expenses — such as the utility of maintaining a service deli — are to be abandoned.

- In contrast, the service deli will become the most emphasized aspect of those retailers looking to differentiate themselves from the deep discounters. The drivers of low cost are clear; it's all about less labor and less assortment. As retail stores become more like restaurants with more service and more assortment, especially more cooking, they attract a different clientele.

Since the launch of the Wal-Mart supercenter, there has been an internal debate in Bentonville, AR, as to whether offering a service deli makes sense for the company's supercenter concept. Operating service delis in each supercenter has always been problematic for Wal-Mart, because the company's push was to drive expenses out of the system, and service delis added costs and complexity.

Yet, for the past three decades, Wal-Mart executives have decided to keep the service deli. The internal argument has been that there are precious few opportunities for customers to interact with staff. The deli thus serves a larger purpose of humanizing the operation and creating the opportunity for regular interaction and even relationship-building between staff and clientele.

We will see if this value is viewed as sufficient to sustain Wal-Mart's service model. It would not be surprising if the need to drive costs out in order to be competitive with Aldi and Lidl is so great that even long settled expenses — such as the utility of maintaining a service deli — are to be abandoned.

And not just at Wal-Mart. Many deli operations that primarily sell sliced meats and cheeses will also see the service component as more expense than benefit. Despite the lengthy and costly process of growing service delis across North America, one could expect the price-focused stores to abandon the proposition that service is a necessary offer.

In truth, the quality of the available packaged meat and cheese offering has improved so substantially that the vast majority of customers can be satisfied with the food quality in most self-service delis.

Not every store of course. Some foods — say a rare roast beef — just aren't available from manufacturers in a pre-sliced package. And sometimes the experience can be cultural. This author, from a Jewish family, growing up in New York, spent his formative years on shopper visits with Mom specifying the thickness of the slice of meat or cheese. The memories of buying deli mustard and scallion cream cheese and a baker's dozen bagels with the New York newspapers on Sunday — well that will always mean something special. But most of the country has not known this kind of nostalgia.

Yet all is not lost... Those stores looking to position themselves as a step up from the mainstream will invest heavily in service. They will offer more ethnic foods, focus on regional cuisines, and bring in more chefs to cook on site as a form of "eatertainment."

They will chop and dice and feature lots of 'islands' with different cuisines. They will integrate more with great breads from the bakery and help the meat and seafood department to prepare a lot more interesting items.

So American retailing will diverge, with one-half focused on price and another focusing on experience. One industry, divided forever, in twain. **DB**

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "James F. Prevor".

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FOOD IS ENTERTAINMENT



By
Lee Smith
Publisher

In this issue, we have an article about private label that I encourage everyone to read. It's no secret the supermarket brick and mortar landscape is changing. Catering to a consumer demographic defined as people living within a mile and a half radius of your store is the old-school model. Today, with internet sales growing at a furious pace, consultants shun brick and mortar as ancient history.

Yet, brick and mortar is definitely not dead. Most people still do the majority of their shopping at stable, physical locations. The difference is most people have moved from the one-store-for-everything model to multiple outlets. Some of those dollars will be spent online.

Will online shopping continue to grow? Yes. Will it drive traditional retailers out of business? No. Why? Because food shopping is a form of entertainment. No one is going to get especially interested in staples like paper towels, so online ordering and delivery will work out well. However, it will not work for perishables. Consumers want to see, touch, smell and

Instead of the low-price strategy, private label is becoming more important in supporting a retailer's corporate mission, and perishables are the centerpiece.

taste. They want to pick out their own peppers and green beans. They want to see someone slice their lunch meat and taste a new salad or cheese. They want to sneak in one giant cream-filled doughnut just for themselves. Online will never deliver the smell of fresh-baked bread or fried chicken.

This is where private label comes in. Instead of the low-price strategy, private label is becoming more important in supporting a retailer's corporate mission, and perishables are the centerpiece. Even the low-price leaders like Wal-Mart focus on perishable departments, and they do not skimp on quality.

Where private label is developing legs is in the better quality realm. In the deli, private label has a long history of being the best a deli has to offer, not the lowest price or lower quality. Some of the finest supermarket delis have built their reputation on signature products.

When I first started in the business, the company I worked for was known for offering the best deli departments in the area. Sales rivaled that of the produce department and, around the holidays, were close to 20 percent of total store sales. The key items were in-store made ham, turkey and roast beef. Every store made its own egg, tuna and chicken salads. Fresh fruit and fruit salads were made daily, and a really good rotisserie chicken program was a sales driver. Made on real rotisseries out front where people could watch, chickens were never on sale and never more than two hours old. We once tried putting them on sale and demand outstripped supply. One store gave out more than 100 rainchecks a day.

Private label was never mentioned, but that is what we had – the best private label program in the county. The need for signature items, recipes that appeal to locals, and quality that will make someone drive out of their way are key.

The best retailers today do exactly that. Everything may not be made in-store, but products should reflect a retailer's mission statement and tie into the total private label program. Rather than in-store made roast beef, it may be a cheese department that ages some of its own cheeses. Others may have a sushi bar or restaurant.

Today's customer, depending on where they live, split their shopping trips between a traditional supermarket, superstore or discounter, specialty store, local markets and online. It may be a club store for once-a-month big shopping, a local grocery store for weekly shopping, a specialty supermarket or upscale retailer for special occasions, a favorite bakery or deli, farm stands for local produce and honey, and online for gifts and hard-to-find specialties. In order to be successful, a retailer must stand out and represent something special.

Customers must want to shop in your stores. They need to find a reason to choose you from the many choices and formats available. The reason may be great customer service or a sampling program. It may be as simple as sneaking in one super wonderful doughnut or in-store made roast beef. It may be your impressive cheese program or olive bar or glorious sandwiches.

So step out of the box and go for greatness. **DB**

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to Lee Smith.

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Sandwiches Have Global Influences



Consumers seek healthy, flavorful options

BY BARRY SPARKS

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On any given day, 49 percent of Americans eat at least one sandwich, according to a U.S. Department of Agriculture study. That works out to approximately 300 million sandwiches each day. These powerful figures help to explain why more delis are implementing sandwich programs.

Sandwiches appeal to all demographics, but also to the grab-and-go consumer, health-conscious, thrifty, foodies, vegans and vegetarians as well as adventurers seeking ethnic cuisine. This is a food item that can be eaten for breakfast, lunch, dinner or as a snack.

"Everyone loves a sandwich," says Jenni Bonsignore, marketing manager at

Valley Lahvosh Baking Co., located in Fresno, CA. "Sandwiches are universal. There truly is a sandwich for everyone."

This food incarnation has long been a part of the American diet. Over the years, turkey, ham, roast beef, peanut butter and jelly and grilled cheese have become staples when placed between two pieces of bread.

"I don't think these tried and true sandwiches are ever going to go away," says Bonsignore. "But sandwiches are definitely changing, and I think that's a reflection on today's consumers being more in tune with their food."

Paul Atwater, premium deli brand manager at Hormel Foods/Deli by Design, located in Austin, MN, says what's considered a staple sandwich varies, depending on

the region. "If you live in New Jersey, you are going to see sandwiches that may be completely different than what you would see in Northern California," he says.

Some regional staple sandwiches include lobster rolls (New England), cheesesteaks (Philadelphia), crab cakes (Maryland), Po' boys (New Orleans), Cubans (southern Florida), brisket (Texas) and pulled pork (the South).

"What we're seeing is today's sandwich programs are becoming more tailored toward regionality, and offerings have become more proximate to the customer," points out Atwater. "Whether that means flavor profiles or locally-sourced product, retailers are building more around what's important to their customer rather than purely the operational aspect of what's easiest to execute."

Millennials' Globalized Palate

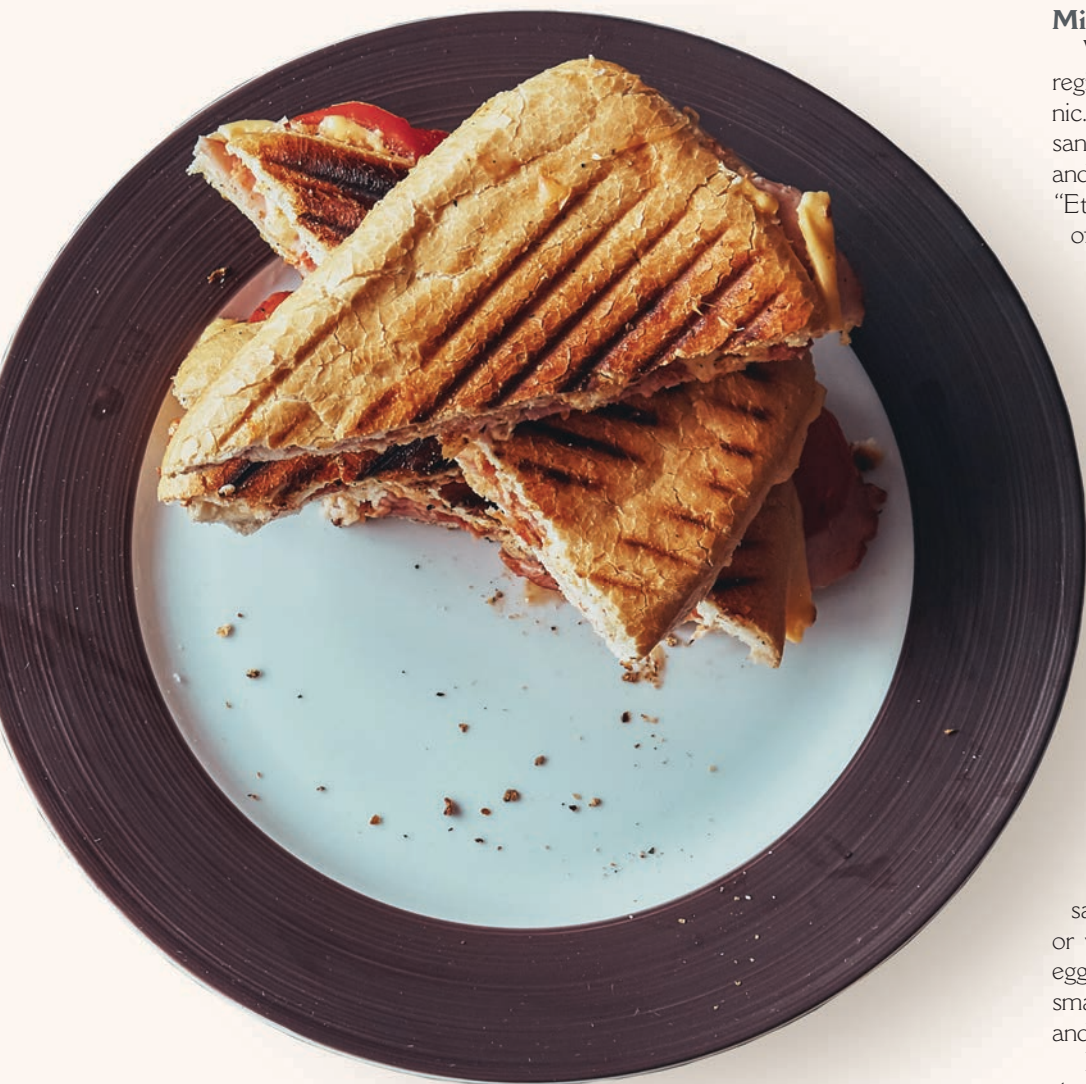
While sandwiches are becoming more regional, they also are becoming more ethnic. "I would say the ethnic diversity of sandwich recipes has emerged as the latest and most powerful trend," says Atwater. "Ethnic cuisine has already become more of a standard fare for consumers, especially Millennials, as they are exhibiting a globalized palate more so than any other generation before them."

According to a National Restaurant Association study, 80 percent of consumers eat at least one ethnic cuisine a month. Forty percent of Millennials say they like to try new kinds of ethnic cuisine and "anything new and different."

Dishes ranging from Mexican tortas to Vietnamese bahn mi sandwiches are showing up in delis, as the envelope of flavor and texture continues to be pushed to include ethnic items.

Mexican tortas are typically served on oblong rolls and can be eaten hot or cold, either grilled or toasted, in a press similar to a Cuban sandwich. Tortas can be filled with ham or various meats, avocados or scrambled eggs. Accompaniments usually include smashed avocados, chili pepper, tomato and onion.

Bahn mi sandwiches have been described as spicy, salty, sour, sweet and aromatic. These are served on a French baguette with a thin, crunchy crust and may include roast chicken, pork or home-





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made pâté. Other accompaniments include pickled radish and carrot, cucumber, chili pepper, cilantro and mayonnaise.

Today, sandwiches don't just appeal to the "grab-and-go" crowd who are on their lunch break or rushing between errands. Health-conscious consumers are seeking sandwiches that are nutritious, flavorful and good for them.

"People want to eat healthy, but they also are interested in taste, texture and a sense of adventure," says Karen Toufayan, vice president of marketing and sales at Toufayan Bakeries, which is based out of Ridgefield, NJ.

Gluten-Free And Organic

As a result, Toufayan Bakeries has been very aggressive in producing gluten-free and organic products. The company has four varieties of gluten-free wraps — original, savory tomato, spinach and garden vegetable. This wrap line is outselling the regular wraps, according to Toufayan. The company also offers organic sprouted whole wheat pita, wraps and smart pockets.

"Gluten-free products are now better tasting," emphasizes Toufayan. "Consumers are looking for healthier alternatives and these products are connected with a number of health benefits. Gluten-free and organic products reflect what consumers want."

In addition to looking for healthy alternatives, consumers are seeking quality. According to a study by US Foods, a foodservice distributor located in

Rosemont, IL, sandwiches are one menu category in which the ingredient quality is all-important. Consumers increasingly demand the best in meats, cheeses, condiments and garnishes.

"Sandwich customers are willing to pay more for quality," says Bonsignore. "They are less interested in the basic sandwiches than years ago. Instead, they want premium ingredients and options, and the more options delis offer, the more customers they tend to have."

The desire for quality paves the way for high-end programs.

"For many customers, price is almost secondary. I think the market for upscale sandwiches is definitely there," she says.

This is a high-growth opportunity.

"When you can combine specialty meats and cheeses with artisan breads baked fresh in the deli to create a signature sandwich, and experience, you can continue to challenge the top with regard to both ingenuity and price," says Atwater.

According to Toufayan, stores that embrace quality breads and fillings are experiencing an increase in sales.

Bread Is Key

Eight out of 10 consumers say the quality of the bread is key to creating a great sandwich, according to US Foods' report.



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Consumers are looking for new bread varieties, flavors and textures. Consequently, artisan breads, flatbreads, whole grains, ciabatta, gluten-free breads and East Indian naan are more popular.

It's also not uncommon to find bagels, English muffins, pita bread, sourdough bread and French rolls serving as the foundation for sandwiches.

"For a long time, bread was taken for granted when it came to sandwiches, but that has changed. Consumers and retailers recognize how it can make a considerable difference in the sandwich experience," says Bonsignore.

While submarine sandwiches accounted for almost 55 percent of deli sandwich sales and traditional bread sandwiches, such as those on white, whole wheat and rye breads garnered the second spot with about 31 percent in 2014, according to Statista, an online statistics company headquartered in Hamburg, Germany, the percentage of ethnic breads used in sandwiches is growing each year.

Consumers expect options, and there's no need to limit the deli's sandwich choices when it comes to breads, meats, condi-

ments and toppings. It's important to appeal to those who want to be taste indulgent as well as the health conscious.

Megan Dorsch, marketing manager for Nueske's Hillcrest Farm's Meats, located in Wittenberg, WI, says interest in adding bacon to sandwiches continues to be strong and creates sandwiches that keep customers returning.

"We've seen interest in thicker slices of bacon being added to sandwiches. Different cooking methods for bacon, like braising

and grilling, have become more popular for these thicker slices," says Dorsch.

Applewood smoked boneless ham and turkey breast are among the top sellers as sandwich ingredients.

"We see sandwiches with a brunch feel on the rise, using these two ingredients. The Croque Madame (fried or baked ham and Gruyère cheese sandwich topped with a fried egg) and Croque Monsieur (the same ingredients without a fried egg) seem to be gaining ground with the resurgence of weekend brunches," she says.

Leveraging Capabilities

Atwater believes sandwich programs provide an excellent opportunity to leverage internal capabilities for retailers. "These programs can create a platform for the deli, bakery, produce, meat and cheese departments to work together and achieve synergies through cross-merchandising and shrink-reducing efforts," he says.

With more than \$1.5 billion in sales last year, according to Atwater, sandwich programs in traditional grocery stores should not eliminate any segment of consumers when it comes to marketing. The popularity of sandwiches spans across demographics and these offerings can be promoted for their different attributes.

Atwater says the key to creating a retail destination for a sandwich program is visibility and accessibility.

"If you're preparing sandwiches for grab-and-go customers, the freshness aspect is imperative. It must be clearly communicated," he says. "With regard to made-to-go, an area in the store has to be created that customers will gravitate to and recognize. In both scenarios, driving awareness through signage, social media and advertising, and building a branded destination, is critical to a program's success." **DB**

It's not uncommon to find bagels, English muffins, pita bread, sourdough bread and French rolls serving as the foundation for sandwiches.



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DELI PICKLES: A SANDWICH STAPLE

Placement, quality and zest elevate the category

BY BOB JOHNSON

Merchandising pickles, like real estate, is all about location because there are as many ways to display them as there are uses for this most versatile companion.

"They are a great snack or great for entertaining. Cross merchandising with platters, meats, holiday items, seasonal items and grab-and-go items is encouraged," says Patty Amato, senior vice president at Farm Ridge Foods, based in Islandia, NY. "Pickles are more than just a complement to a sandwich or burger."

Farm Ridge boasts a fresh pickle, from farm to container in just five days that is hydro cooled to maintain freshness and crispness, which can be sacrificed during heat processing.

Amato believes effective merchandising can be as simple as displaying pickles suggestively in proximity to some of their many natural companions.

"The most popular pickles are best displayed with the potato and macaroni salads, and the cole slaw," says Amato.

There is a considerable potential market among customers who had no intention of buying pickles when they came to the deli, but are open to persuasion that a refreshing but zesty bite would go down well.

"It is a fat-free, sugar-free and gluten-free item, and that appeals to a lot of people," advises Eric Girard, vice president for sales and marketing at Van Holten's, headquartered in Waterloo, WI. "A big use for pickles is mindless snacking that is a little healthier. The best place to put them is next to the cold sandwiches, but another place is on top of the deli counter to invite impulse grabs while people are waiting for their order."

In higher end delis, one way to generate more pickle sales is to feature specialties like cornichons in proximity to companion delicacies. These are made with mini gherkin cucumbers 1 to 2 inches in length and harvested before reaching full maturity for an extra-tart bite.

"Positioning the cornichons in close proximity to the deli case is key, as cornichons are a natural fit with pâté, Jambon de Paris, French-style cooked ham or any other deli meat," says Camille Collins, marketing director at Les Trois Petite Cochons, based in New York City. "Our shelf-stable cornichons, or small baby gherkins, work well when displayed on top of the deli case where consumers can easily see them. Some of our retailers are also successful with displaying our cornichons jars in baskets or wooden crates alongside the deli case."

Les Trois Petite Cochons is best known for its pâtés, mousses, sausages and other charcuterie, but the company also makes award-winning Dijon mustard in addition to cornichons.

"Other products to cross merchandise with cornichons are Dijon or whole grain mustard, petits poivrons or petits toasts," says Collins. "All of these items, in addition to the cornichons, are excellent paired with sliced meats in the deli – particularly Jambon de Paris or Saucisson and, of course, pâté."

Van Holten's, the innovator that came up with pickle in a pouch, makes a cured product that is shelf stable, but Girard says the preference for displaying these products chilled or warm depends on the region of the country.

"We're seeing pickles go with a lot of hot meals, especially in the South," he says. "Above the Mason Dixon line, they do better cold; but below the Mason Dixon line, they do better warm."

Popular pickles come in many sizes, but producers are finding consumers intrigued by newer products that offer a sweet taste or pack a powerful hot and spicy punch.

"Everybody loves pickles; the demographics fit everybody," says Amato. "Pickles are incredibly hot right now. Hot

and Spicy is in. From Atomic Spicy and Devilish Dill to Sweet Horseradish and Spicy Mustard – heat gives it a kick."

Van Holten's is also finding an expanding market for pickles that deliver bolder flavors.

"We're seeing a trend toward hot and sour flavors; sour in particular has been growing for us," says Girard. "Dill is number one, and I imagine always will be, but we're seeing the palate move toward stronger flavors."

Les Trois Petite Cochons has a new cornichon drawing from French recipes that is both sweet and spicy in flavor.

"We have had great success with our newly-launched cornichons piquant," says Collins. "Pickled in the traditional French way in vinegar and spices, cornichons piquants are crunchy baby gherkins with a sweet and spicy flavor. They are the perfect accompaniment to pâté and charcuterie."

Although per capita pickled cucumber consumption may have steadily dropped over the last four decades from 6 to 3.4 pounds, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture 2016 Vegetables and Pulses Yearbook, that still leaves an opportunity to take a bite out of a billion pound market.

DB





AMERICAN SAUCE STORY: History of Beano's Original Deli Condiments

After graduating from college in 1985, brothers, Jim and Bill Conroy, founded a restaurant right outside of Pittsburgh, PA called Beano's Pizza & Suds. They served a variety of pizzas, submarine sandwiches, and Italian entrees. They worked long hours and the business became very successful.

One of the heavy hitters on the menu was a submarine sandwich. It featured a homemade submarine dressing that became very popular with patrons. It was so popular that Jim, Bill and Jim's wife, Leslee, began researching the idea of bottling and selling their signature submarine dressing to grocery stores. They visited local grocery stores, went to national submarine sandwich chains, and read trade magazines. Much to their surprise, they discovered that there wasn't a dressing or condiment specifically designed for the submarine sandwich. They also found that the submarine sandwich category was one of the fastest growing food categories in the country.

With this information, the three of them formed Conroy Foods, Inc. and created the Beano's brand, named for their restaurant. They worked their separate jobs during the day, and in the evening they would all come together to bottle their family recipe, sometimes working until early hours of the morning. Their first customer was a local grocery store chain headquartered in Pittsburgh. At the time, they had roughly 125 stores in 3 states and Jim personally delivered samples to each and every one of their deli managers.

The response was enormous and the orders started pouring in (no pun intended). In 1991, as their distribution grew, they sold the restaurant and fully devoted their time to manufacturing Beano's Original Submarine Dressing and to the development of new items.

They currently sell their condiments in all 50 states, Canada, UK, and Central America. The list of sauces & condiments has grown dramatically since 1989. Below is a list of their current offerings.



Deli Condiments: 3 varieties of Submarine Dressings, Honey Mustard, Pineapple Honey Mustard, Cranberry Honey Mustard, Chicken Wing Sauce, Buffalo Sandwich Sauce, All American Sandwich Spread, Horse Radish Sauce, Deli Mustard, Peach Habanera Sauce, Jalapeño Mustard, Sweet Chili Pepper Sauce, Roasted Chipotle Sauce, Southwest Sauce, Wasabi Sandwich Sauce and Sriracha Sauce

White Pizza Sauces: Sun Dried Tomato, Basil and Imported Oregano



Sandwich Shakers: Garlic & Parmesan, Spicy Red Pepper, and Provencal (Rosemary, Oregano & Thyme)

Simple and Saucy Line of Natural Deli Condiments: 100% Pure Olive Oil & Red Wine Vinegar, Deli Dijon Mustard, Whole Grain Deli Dijon, Honey Mustard and Sriracha



Conroy Foods works very closely with their partners to develop tailored marketing and merchandising plans. They utilize effective merchandising tools to increase sales including permanent floor racks, counter top racks, and customizable shippers with a variety of seasonal headers. One of the company's greatest assets is the aptitude of its employees and their ability to work precisely with their partners to assure that what is promised is delivered.



Beano's Original Submarine Dressing fresh from the production line.

Today, after several expansions, Conroy Foods remains the **original deli condiment company** and stays true to their corporate philosophy: to be the best at what they do, using the finest ingredients available to develop great tasting, high quality sauces with unique and easy to use packaging.



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**LIVE, LOVE,
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NEW TECHNOLOGIES TRANSFORMING DELI PACKAGING

Increased shelf life and added visibility are among the benefits

BY JEFFREY STEELE

Food in the supermarket deli is continually benefiting from the advent of new packaging technologies. The ever-larger array of packaging materials, applications and advantages is enough to keep any supermarket deli buyer hopping, just to keep up.

Among the growing trends are the increasing use of transparent plastics, two-piece containers, rib-less lids, home meal replacement packaging with microwaveable bases, and tamper-evident packages with resealable tops. Also among emerging trends are growth of proprietary perimeter sealing systems, containers with multiple built-in compartments for varied snack or salad items, upscale packaging that conveys a sense of premium food quality and sustainable containers that boast lower carbon footprints.

End of the Expected

If there's a good way to sum up the evolution of supermarket deli packaging, it's the take provided by Jason Horbac. "Meeting the status quo is on its way out," says the associate communications

manager for Sayreville, NJ-based Sabert Corp., a manufacturer of food packaging designed to enhance and advance the way people enjoy food. "We are living in an on-demand world, and packaging has to accommodate that lifestyle. It must boost sales in [this environment]. With Sabert packaging, we do that through our variety of material types, quality and sustainability."

Among the most recent developments is an extensive shift away from ribbing on lids, says Jeff Lucash, vice president of sales for Madison, WI-based Placon Corp., manufacturer of a diverse line of custom thermoformed plastic supermarket deli food packaging. "Although ribbing increases lid strength, it removes the view of the food from consumers. People purchase with their eyes, so clarity is vital in food packaging."

Additionally, there is a substantial departure from the use of OPS lids in favor of PETE lids, says Lucash. "Again, clarity is superior, but consumers are also looking for recyclable materials to do their part in protecting the environment," he adds.

While one-piece hinged containers have been a deli staple for

some time, they are increasingly being supplanted by the two-piece type with a base and lid. This packaging more clearly showcases food, while also conveying a more refined look than that of hinged containers. Material with a premium look communicates the sense there is also high-end food inside, says Lucash.

Home meal replacement packaging is also being widely used in supermarket delis. Given its microwavable base, the type geared for freshly-prepared foods provides end users with both convenience and functionality. That means, says Lucash, "delicious and nutritious meal options can be purchased in your supermarket deli and easily warmed up at home" without the need for replating the food items.

This spring, Placon will unveil its own microwavable product line. These will deliver a modern look and premium design, to "capture an entire meal for consumers," says Lucash.

Jack Tilley, spokesman for Shelton, CT-based Inline Plastics Corp., which manufactures a versatile line of deli containers for any application, notes as grab-and-go foods become more popular with consumers seeking to quickly purchase prepared

Container clarity spurs purchases of healthy snacking items and pre-prepped salads in the deli.

foods for family meals, grab-and-go packaging is becoming more and more vital for delis. In response, Inline recently introduced its RoundWare line of 4-inch round clear clamshell containers. "Targeted at foods such as deli salads, cheeses and green salads, these clear containers are tamper-evident and provide extended shelf life due to their perimeter sealing systems," says Tilley.

Designed to meet the needs of growing numbers of customers who are on the run, RoundWare is made from patented DPET. DPET offers an approximately 13 percent lower carbon footprint than products made with RPET.

There are a number of benefits of the newer RoundWare that flow from its rigidity, clarity and multiple compartments. Rigid containers provide stackability,

which enables retailers to maximize shelf space. Container clarity spurs purchases of healthy snacking items and pre-prepped salads in the deli. And multi-compartment containers are gaining in popularity for applications that include cradling a variety of snack items.

"Our new SnackWare line of single and multi-compartment containers allows store deli departments to offer a variety of snack options in a single container, such as cheese or meat cubes, olives or any other deli item," says Tilley.

Upscale Versus Value

Although upscale packaging may cost more, the offsetting benefit is that it results in more food being sold, leading to significantly more profit for supermarket delis.

Investing in packaging yields a decided



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Sustainability is a more critical trend in deli packaging.

benefit, says Horbac. “The majority of foods bought through a supermarket deli are eaten on the go or at home directly from the packaging,” he asserts. “You have to have packaging that satisfies the consumer, and you have to really become the restaurant or supermarket deli of choice, with convenient choices for all your food offerings. It’s packaging that performs.”

He adds that Sabert Corp. partners with a research company to fully comprehend consumer trends surrounding packaging, and responds accordingly.

Upscale deli packaging may carry higher initial costs than the utility type, but the benefits derived often result in cost savings that considerably outstrip the upfront expense, says Tilley. “For example, upscale containers highlight the quality of the food contents, resulting in increased sales and inventory turns.”

Many [packages], such as Inline’s Safe-T-Fresh container line, offer tamper-evident sealing that extends shelf life and prevents losses due to tampering.

For its part, Placon designs upscale packaging to help supermarket delis merchandise perishable food items and “frame their good food,” says Lucash, adding that “if the right packaging is utilized to showcase the product, it sells quicker, and oftentimes for a higher price in the refrigerated case.”

Sustainability Surging

Of course, sustainability is a more and more critical trend in deli packaging. At Sabert, all packaging is sustainable because it is recyclable.

“I think consumers are already very knowledgeable about the food they’re eating,” says Sabert’s Horbac. “But now consumers are taking it one step further, making sure food is in packaging that allows for a sustainable future for themselves and their children.”

Delis are seeking materials that go beyond clear PET, he says. They increasingly want polypropylene microwaveable packaging and the pulp packaging materials that are compostable but also can be heated

in a microwave. These packages “can be used with sandwiches, smaller meals and complete carry-out meals in the supermarket deli,” observes Horbac. “What’s great about the pulp material is that it screams ‘sustainability.’ That allows the supermarket deli to really show consumers they care about social and environmental concerns through their packaging.”

The 100 percent molded fiber pulp compostable products Sabert recently unveiled comprise its Green Collection line. The environmentally-friendly collection includes products such as soup bowls, containers, catering platters and plates.

Recently unveiled are a new 6-by-9-inch rectangular pulp container that holds 36 ounces of salads, appetizers and small meals as well as a larger 54-ounce container size.

“They’re perfect for a hot or cold buffet bar,” says Horbac. “The consumer can definitely see it’s environmentally friendly, telling a story through packaging. But the containers have crystal clear recyclable lids, allowing delis to tell a quality story, as well.”

Sustainability through recyclable and reusable packaging is becoming more and more important to consumers, according to Lucash. Placon containers are made with the company’s EcoStar food grade material reclaimed in the United States.

EcoStar is recycled post-consumer

PET made from curbside plastic bottles and thermoforms that otherwise would have only added more refuse to landfills. “Consumers can feel good about purchasing a container made with recycled material,” he says.

Use of recyclable materials using RPET is widespread. “Consumers want to know what materials are being used to package the food they are going to eat and serve their family, and how to discard it when they are finished using it,” says Lucash.

Tilley notes the phrase “sustainability” can connote different meanings in varying contexts, including recyclability, low carbon footprint and recycled content.

“Packaging does not necessarily have to be made from recycled materials to have a low carbon footprint,” he adds. “Our containers are made from a low-carbon footprint DPET material, which has been shown to have a carbon footprint equivalent to a container made from 50 percent recycled plastic.”

In general, improved design, environmentally-friendly materials and precise packaging improve food displays in supermarket delis, says Lucash.


These attributes can also extend the shelf life of the food, ultimately resulting in prompt and amplified sales, he adds.

The key to improving packaging will be thoroughly grasping what consumers want in more diverse food offerings, says Horbac.

“That will lend itself to packaging that performs, whether it’s packaging for grab-and-go or takeout items,” he says. “Packaging is playing a bigger role than ever in meeting today’s appetites in supermarket delis.” And with today’s technology, there is more than meets the eye. **DB**



The Food Bar Way Of Dining



A look at how these operations change the way people eat

BY KEITH LORIA

With today's busy lifestyles, more families are finding dinnertime has become about convenient meal participation, with a desire for differentiation and individualization for the entire family.

That's why food bars remain a popular fixture in supermarket delis, as more consumers seek affordable and convenient meal options.

David Vittorio, director of marketing at Blount Fine Foods in Providence, RI, says an interest in healthier foods has really shaped the food bar in recent years, but it's the power of choice that has driven the increase.

"The food bar is essentially used by stores to compete with the restaurant trade and, in order to do so, it has to have better quality food and a number of different offerings to attract a wide range of customers," he says. "It can be a Chinese restaurant, an Italian restaurant, an Indian restaurant, all at the same time. That makes it appealing to a shopper."



Julie Clements, senior director of product development for Kettle Cuisine, based in Lynn, MA, notes street food and more global dishes are leading the way, giving consumers more options to dine in with the foods they could previously only get when dining out.

"Those who are getting it right are offering a wide range of options, from slow-braised meats, stews and curries to modernized mac and cheese varieties," she says. "As a supplier, we can offer restaurant-quality bulk items with long shelf life, giving retailers the opportunity to create a

premium food bar experience with authentic cuisines and exciting seasonal rotations without the burden of high development, waste and labor costs."

Mary Shepard, director of sales/partner with Fortun Foods Inc., headquartered in Kirkland, WA, says Millennials have been driving the trend in recent years, and the way to appeal to them is with fresh, clean ingredients.

"Prepared foods are more prevalent than ever before," she says. "We have a generation that wants good quality and restaurant-quality food to take home."

Shepard notes comfort food is still a very big staple at the food bar, as consumers often get hungry when shopping and are drawn to the extensive options available in the deli.

Mike Seeger, vice president of retail sales for Kettle Cuisine, notes the really good operators are treating food bars as "destinations" that need to be reinvented daily and refreshed throughout the day.

"Offering consumers savory options that they may not have considered or wouldn't expect to be available during a quick trip to the grocery store is what the best retailers are doing to separate themselves from the competition," he says. "The trend has been growing over the last five to 10 years alongside the growth of the specialty food offerings and the food television explosion. If you see or hear about it on television, you now expect it at your grocery store."

The Mediterranean Bar

Brandon Gross, vice president of marketing for FoodMatch, Inc., based in New York, says the evolution of the Mediterranean bar has been significant over the past few years and has helped drive the food bar trend.

"Previously known more as an olive bar, product selection was often as wide as an 80/20 split in favor of olives over antipasti, salads and spreads. Today, we focus on maintaining closer to a 50/50 split between the two categories, as many product innovations are coming from the antipasti/



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appetizer channel," he says. "I also think the bar is being used more as a destination for star ingredients. By that I mean the Mediterranean bar is a perfect place for customization. A standard bowl of greens, pasta or grains can be turned into a special meal by adding a few ingredients off the bar, like roasted garlic, roasted tomatoes, marinated artichokes or grilled olives."

An optimal schematic includes a combi-

nation of staples, innovations and seasonal/rotation selections. Staples include favorites like Kalamata olives; roasted tomatoes; marinated artichokes; stuffed olives; Greek olive mix; balsamic onions; marinated mushrooms; and roasted or pickled peppers. Innovations include new and exciting items like grilled olives, grilled artichokes or antipasti mixes that feature charcuterie, olives and antipasti.

Gross says providing seasonal selections are the final piece to the puzzle. Choosing items that either have limited crop cycles and availability and/or pair with seasonal recipes is a great way to keep the bar fresh and interesting.

What's New?

Convenience remains the primary advantage that retailers offer with prepared foods and items from the food bar, which is why analysts have been touting the idea of retailers expanding these sections in recent years and why food bar suppliers have upped their game.

For instance, Fortun Foods has increased its number of sauces available in food bars during the last year.

"They are a big component to make an ordinary protein or seafood into a gourmet meal at home," says Shepard. "We have fresh finishing sauces for retail that are gluten free and true restaurant-quality sauces. Examples include a Spanish Romesco with saffron or Lemon Dill Caper with white wine."

Gross notes that, as the category evolves, FoodMatch is innovating in a number of areas.

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"First and foremost is product selection and flavor. Introducing seasonal selections, such as marinated Kalamatas in summer to coincide with the arrival of a new crop, experimenting with new flavor combinations — olives marinated with curry and lemon— and providing more finished concepts like charcuterie, cheese and antipasto kits, is helping us continue to drive the category," he says.

According to Clements, flavors that are gaining the most traction with consumers across both Millennial and Gen X shoppers incorporate culinary influences from North Africa, South American and Asia. There is also a movement toward traditional American cuisines with twists, such as Ancho Cherry Pulled Pork or Charred Lemon Potato & Okra Stew.

Challenges Exist

One common misconception about food bars from a consumer perspective is that these aren't safe because the food is left out in the open, but operators can stifle this myth by having employees monitoring the area and keeping the bar full and clean at all times.

"We know that customers buy with their eyes first, so visual appeal is the number one purchasing motivator," says Gross. "If in-store teams break the work down to hourly maintenance, we feel they can keep the bar fresh by only spending a few minutes every hour or two. Every few hours, check the bar for spills and restock cups and lids. If a pan is low, refill as needed. Finally, at around 3 or 4 p.m., spend a few minutes prepping for the dinner rush. This will set you up for success during peak hours."

The upkeep of the section simply requires a commitment and a belief in the revenue and store traffic that a great food bar can generate.

"Like any perishable department, food safety is at the top of the list of concerns," says Kettle Cuisine's Seeger. "Proper training for the employees handling the food as well as vigilance in adhering to the guidelines of temperature control, food handling and storage is a must. We go so far as to offer 'standard operating procedures' assistance to our retailer partners as a key resource to support department training."

Another challenge is keeping current.

"Staying on trend requires attention to all things food across the retail and foodservice space and focusing in on the changing demographics of your consumers," says

Seeger. "Retailers can best accomplish this by partnering with suppliers that not only offer a full line of food products that meet the evolving demand of customers, but who also care as much about your success as their own."

Marketing Matters

A successful food bar will depend more on just what is being offered. Getting the word out and marketing it correctly can do

wonders, says Blount Fine Foods' Vittorio. Adding good signage is also important.

"Customers want to be educated and know what they're eating, so having good point of purchase materials and clear signage about what is available and information on the nutritional content is important," he says. "Providing nutritional decks and clean labels is also key. When you take the time to educate consumers, you're going to have a repeat customer." **DB**

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GUACAMOLE RIDES THE AVOCADO WAVE

Americans are continuing their love affair with the avocado, as consumption has grown from 2 pounds per capita to 7 pounds in just this century, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture statistics.

As this fruit, also known affectionately as the alligator pear, grows in popularity, research by the Mission Viejo, CA-based Hass Avocado Board finds two-thirds of consumers eat guacamole.

For many areas of the country, there is tremendous room for growth of this tasty, healthy and versatile food that can be cross merchandised as a dip, sauce or ingredient to help boost sales of many deli products.

"We've cross merchandised guacamole with complementary items that have higher penetration rates, like chips, pretzel crisps, cheese and meat items," says Jessica Brown, director of marketing for Yucatan Foods, a guacamole maker based in Los Angeles. "We can fit it into a lot of meal solutions because guacamole can be eaten at breakfast, lunch and dinner."

The Hass Avocado Board, and more than 95 percent of the avocados out there are Hass, found in its 2016 Tracking Study that 86 percent of target consumers cite

the variety of uses as an important reason for buying this fruit.

"The good thing about guacamole is it goes with so many things that are in the deli," says Nikki Frisz, associate brand manager for Wholly Guacamole, headquartered in Orange, CA. "It pairs well with many foods, like cheeses and crackers, or with most deli meats."

Delis near the border with Mexico all carry the most popular prepared avocado food, guacamole, and this healthy tree fruit with well-known health benefits has gone mainstream in a big way.

"Around here in Southern California, most delis have guacamole," says Alberto Castro, general manager of Diversified Avocado Products, located in Trabuco Canyon, CA. "That goes for everything from upscale supermarket chains to independent Mexican markets. You could put some chips next to the guacamole, or you can mix it with tuna salad or salsa."

In areas that do not have large Mexican-American populations, there is opportunity for using placement to spark tremendous increases in sales of both guacamole and related items that are more familiar.

"You can display guacamole among the other dips, like hummus, to present an entire line," says Brown. "It adds incremental dollars to the department. Guacamole penetration is up 1 percent over the last six months. It is at 13.6 percent [penetration] now, but hummus is at 23.7 percent. There's a lot of room for growth."

From its location just 100 miles from Mexico, where most avocados in the U.S. market are grown, and even closer to the key domestic orchards in Southern California, Diversified offers a variety of products, including a base that lets the deli add favored ingredients to make their own unique guacamole.

"For the service deli, you normally make large quantities in the kitchen and put it next to the salads and other foods that are sold by the pound," says Castro. "The stores buy the base, either a plain avocado base or seasoned, to make a mild guacamole. At the store, you can add pico de gallo salsa or combine it with fresh avocados. It could be [served with] plain avocado or combined with garlic, salt or onion."

Other suppliers also offer starters the deli can utilize to create their own signature guacamoles.



A perfect pairing companion

BY BOB JOHNSON

"For foodservice, we have a guacamole kit; the deli uses it to add their own seasonings on site," says Brown. "When we were established 26 years ago, we were in foodservice, and we evolved into retail. We have a 16-ounce authentic flavor and 8-ounces in four different flavors. We also sell six packs of 2-ounce containers."

A good reason for going with relatively small packages is guacamole must be eaten quicker than almost any other produce item once it has been opened.

"One of the complications with avocados is that once they hit oxygen, they go bad pretty quickly," says Frisz. "Primarily, we are in produce, but we're in the deli in some stores. We have 8-, 12- and 16-ounce trays, and we also have 2-ounce containers that come four to six to a package."

Yucatan Foods has a container that lends itself to protecting the guacamole after it has been opened.

"Our container is resealable, so you can keep it refrigerated for two or three days after you open it," says Brown.

In the deli, there is little you can do to shield the guacamole from damaging oxygen, which makes temperature control all the more vital.

"You have to keep it cold; you have to prevent it from browning," says Castro. "If you treat it properly, you can make it just two times a day. You have two enemies — oxygen and temperature. There's nothing you can do about oxygen, but you can keep the product chilled."

avocado contains approximately 15 percent of the FDA's recommended daily amount of saturated fat. In addition, avocados have 60 percent more potassium than bananas. They are also rich in B vitamins, vitamin E, vitamin K and folate. This fruit is also a benefit to a diabetic diet."

In the deli, there is little you can do to shield the guacamole from damaging oxygen, which makes temperature control all the more vital.

These complications are well worth it, however, because sales of this unusual-looking fruit figure to keep increasing as people become more health conscious and seek nutritious options.

"Avocados have been marketed as a healthy dietary choice and as a good source of beneficial monounsaturated oil," says Christina Romero, researcher at the Agricultural Marketing Resource Center, located in Pomona, CA. "A whole medium

The Hass board consumer survey found "being good for you" was cited as a purchase reason by a healthy 91 percent of target consumers.

"I would be surprised if any of the markets do not have guacamole," says Frisz. "Our business has grown in the last three to five years, and we've also seen the competition increase."

Guacamole offers supermarket delis ripe opportunities for add-on sales. **DB**

TURNING PRIVATE LABEL INTO PROFITS

Strategies to capitalize on this growing segment

BY CAROL BAREUTHER



Midwestern customers with a hankering for fried chicken will drive for miles to reach one of the 84 Harps Food Stores located across Arkansas, Oklahoma, Missouri and Kansas. The Springdale, AR-headquartered chain's signature Martha Harp's Golden Fresh Fried Chicken is the finger-lickin' reason.

Shoppers know the original recipe dates

back more than half a century to Martha Harp herself, the wife of late president, Don Harp, whose parents started the chain in 1930. Talk about nostalgic taste. Ditto for the Martha Harp Family Size Rotisserie Chicken and Martha Harp Loaded Baked Potato Salad, also both offered in the deli. This is a powerful example of the sales potential of private label branding.

"The trend in the supermarket deli today isn't which items to sell in private label, but

private label itself," says Brian Sharoff, president of the Private Label Manufacturers Association (PLMA), headquartered in New York. "That's because the deli is no longer the counter you stand in a line behind and wait until someone calls 'next.' Today, the deli offers hundreds of ready-to-serve items. This has completely changed the nature of the deli and has become a focal point for retailers who want to differentiate themselves from competitors with

fresh, innovative private label offerings.”

Private label across the entire deli represented 31.6 percent of total sales for the 52 weeks ending January 28, 2017, according to data provided by the Chicago-headquartered Nielsen Perishables Group. This was down slightly from a 31.7 percent share a year ago; however, from a growth standpoint, private label is up 2.4 percent in dollars.

The best strategy to expand the private label segment of deli offerings is for operators to make sure selections fit with the retailer’s overall brand identity, says Marissa DeMaio, director of retail marketing for the Atalanta Corp., in Elizabeth, NJ. “Private label brands are identified at different levels, for example, premium, middle-of-the-road or low-end value. You should know what your shoppers want and be careful in your selection. If your audience is middle or low end, then don’t get too out there with esoteric items.”

Deli meats and prepared foods are showing the strongest growth in private label products, according to Nielsen Perishables Group data. More specifically, sales of deli meat rose almost 6 percent, driven by pre-sliced deli meat, which increased more

“The best strategy to expand the private label segment of deli offerings is for operators to make sure selections fit with the retailer’s overall brand identity.”

— Marissa DeMaio, Atalanta Corp.

than 30 percent during the 52 weeks ending January 27, 2017. Deli prepared foods grew almost 2 percent, driven by private label deli prepared chicken (up 4 percent) as well as private label deli salads (up 2 percent), dips (up 13 percent) and soups (up 10 percent.)

Promoting Private Label

One of the biggest challenges for operators is not treating private label as the most important brand, says Mike Seeger, vice president of retail for soup manufacturer, Kettle Cuisine, in Lynn, MA. “By giving your own brand the proper attention and maintaining a consistent and strong brand

message across all categories, consumers will build a strong loyalty and trust.”

There are three ways deli operators can effectively promote their private label or store brand products.

One way to do this is to move beyond focusing purely on price.

“Tell the story,” recommends Eric Le Blanc, director of marketing for Springdale, AR-headquartered Tyson Foods, which supplies the chicken to Harps Food Stores for the retailer’s in-house Martha Harp brand fried and rotisserie products. “What makes the product special? Use signage, circular ads and social media. This builds an emotional connection between the prod-

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uct, the customer and the store's brand."

Secondly, promote brand allegiance with distinctive selections.

"Baby Boomers like national brands, so for this reason you still need to offer these. However, Millennial shoppers are more interested in authenticity. What we see proliferating in private label for us is charcuterie items like speck, prosciutto and chorizo as well as cheeses. If a retailer has a premium brand image, we will work with them to source, for example, Parmigiano Reggiano from a specific artisanal maker. They can call it out by saying 'we've traveled the world to bring you the best', which is in line with their private label brand strategy," explains Atlanta's DeMaio.

This type of differentiation also takes place in the prepared foods arena.

"Deli operators want private label items that can strengthen their own brand," says Michael Schneiderman, vice president of international sales for Shamir Salads Ltd., an Israeli-based producer of home-style prepared chilled salads in 80 varieties, such as hummus, tahini, eggplant, spicy carrots, beet salad and coleslaw. The company supplies two U.S. distributors.

Retailers who want to set up a private label pizza program look for restaurant quality with ingredients that are exotic or familiar with a twist, according to Justin Ring, director of sales for Schaumburg, IL-based Nation Pizza and Foods. "This can mean locally sourcing ingredients for toppings so the retailers can claim 'fresh' and 'local'; upgrading the cheese from Mozzarella to Gouda or Asiago; or, since pepperoni is the number one pizza topping, choosing a spicier version or using large deli-sliced pepperoni to create unique

product offerings."

Beyond ingredients, packaging is an important point of distinction in the private label segment.

"I recommend moving away from the same corrugated box-style that everyone uses. Instead, use a baking tray or eco-friendly tray, or simply shrink wrap. Anything to make the product look fresher works. While alternative packaging may cost more, it usually pays off in better merchandising and a higher return on the dollar from increased sales," says Ring.

Target Key Customers

Third, tap into the next generation of shoppers' eating habits with private label products. For example, Millennial shoppers want fresh, healthy foods that are pre-prepared and portable, according to the PLMA's 2016 *How America's Eating Habits Are Changing*. The report reveals Millennials frequently shop at supermarkets, specifically heading to deli, dairy and

bakery departments, with three-fourths of these shoppers making purchases in the deli. Spotlighting this age-group's on-the-go eating habits, one third 'always or frequently' purchase heat-and-eat food from the supermarket, 29 percent pick up prepared or ready-to-eat food, and 27 percent buy grab-and-go prepared foods from a supermarket or convenience store.

Soups are a top sales category in private label deli, with chicken noodle, broccoli cheddar and New England clam chowder continuing as the top performers, according to Kettle Cuisine's Seeger. "These familiar flavors appeal to consumers looking for a quick lunch, snack or dinner. It's important to ensure these soups are the anchors of the prepared foods selection through multiple sizes and plenty of shelf presence. Additionally, we're seeing the stronger retailers drive incremental sale across their hot bar and chilled offerings with a "Buy 1 for now and 1 for dinner tonight" strategy."

The PLMA study reveals a potentially lucrative payoff for supermarket deli operators who adapt their menu of offerings, especially those that are private label, to the new eating habits of Millennial shoppers. Contrary to expectations, these shoppers are more loyal to their favorite stores than their parents. Nine out of 10 regularly shop in only one or two stores, representing a dramatic departure from recent PLMA studies that showed consumers spreading their shopping dollars among a variety of stores and store formats.

"Today's retailers have an opportunity to create a destination for their shoppers with their own brand. With a broad and well-balanced selection supported by strong store advertising and circulars, private label brand loyalty is at an all-time high," says Kettle Cuisine's Seeger. **DB**





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The Distinct Identities Of Asiago



A versatile cheese with history behind it

BY HANNAH HOWARD & LISA WHITE

To get a real understanding of Asiago, it is important to know its back story and how it has evolved.

As the population of the isolated Asiago Plateau, which lies between the Po River and the Southern mountains of Italy's Valsugana Valley, grew during the 1500s, cows replaced sheep as the predominant grazing animal in the region's mountain valleys. Cows produce more milk, and in turn, more cheese. Beginning in the early 1600s and over the ensuing centuries, cheesemakers of the plateau perfected the recipe for aged Asiago — also called Asiago d'Allevio or Asiago Stagionato.

These wheels were much the same as they are today — relatively small in size, weighing in at 17.5 to 26.5 pounds and crafted with partially skimmed milk from cows that grazed on the valley's grasses and wildflowers. The cheese is traditionally aged to three different maturities — Asiago Mezzano, four to six months; Asiago Vecchio, more than 10 months; and Asiago Stravecchio, more than 15 months.

When World War I erupted, everything changed for this cheese. On May 15, 1916, 2,000 Austrian artillery guns opened fire against the Italian lines near Asiago, which sat on the Italian side of the border between the Kingdom of Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Battle of Asiago was the start of a grueling three-year defense of Italy's borders, which ravaged the Asiago Plateau. The region's mountainous countryside turned out to be a boon — the rough terrain helped diminish the Austrian enemy's supply lines, protecting Italy from its invaders.

A Whole New Asiago

Suddenly, the countryside was flooded with upwards of 400,000 Italian troops, fighting to secure their country from the Austro-Hungarian forces. In an effort to feed the troops, Asiago cheesemakers rose to the occasion. They could produce large quantities, but the traditional cheese took too long to age. They needed a lot more cheese in much less time.



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So instead of making aged Asiago with part skim milk that matured for months, fresh Asiago was produced. This new cheese was made with whole milk and pressed, aged and ready for consumption in about a month.

"In spite of the destruction and loss of life," says Nancy Radke, of Nancy Radke Culinary Consulting in Savannah, GA, "a new cheese, Asiago Fresco, was born."

Distinct Cheeses

It's an understandable misconception that fresh and aged Asiago are different versions of the same cheeses. They are, in fact, different cheeses altogether.

Most assume Asiago is aged PDO, also known as Asiago d'Alveo or Asiago Stagionato. This is the traditional hard, savory Asiago made from partially skimmed cow's milk. But only about 20 percent of Asiago production is this aged variety, and much of it is slated for export.

Asiago Mezzano, matured for four to six months, is a semi-firm cheese. Its curd is compact, its color a pale yellow. As Asiago ages, its texture becomes harder and its flavor becomes more intense, complex and expressive. Asiago Mezzano is redolent of toasted hazelnuts and yeasty dough, with a sweet, caramelized finish. As the cheese matures — Vecchio is aged for at least 10 months and Stravecchio for 15 months or more — hints of nutmeg, black pepper and salted caramel emerge.

About 10,000 wheels of Stravecchio are crafted each year.

"Fresco has a buttery and tangy flavor, while Mezzano is yeasty and sweet," says Danielle Caponi Bolla, director of the U.S. Information Office for Asiago PDO. "Vecchio is nutty and fragrant and Stravecchio has spicy and intense notes."

Fresh Asiago, PDO, also known as Asiago Fresco or Asiago Pressato, is delicate, with a pliable, almost squeaky texture and a milky flavor. There are notes of tangy

yogurt and rich cream — sweet, with balanced acidity. The cheese is made with fresh whole milk, placed into molds, pressed under pressure and kept that way to accelerate its brief aging process — two months at the most. The pressed curd "results in the proliferation of small apertures — not really 'holes,'" says Steven Jenkins, author of *The Cheese Prime*. Still, the curds pull apart easily, giving the pale, straw-colored cheese a holey, knobby appearance.

Although Asiago is an old cheese, it has evolved with a lot of different identities. While the body of the cheese hasn't changed dramatically over the years, some companies have introduced rubbed Asiagos, and chefs are starting to experiment with new and different ways to incorporate it into menus, such as rubbing it with different spices and exploring new ways to develop unique flavor profiles.

What's Out There

BelGioioso Cheese Inc., located in Green Bay, WI, makes three types of aged Asiago, including Asiago Fresco, aged 60 days; Asiago, aged five months; and Aged Asiago, aged 12 months.

These varieties are available in whole wheels as well as 5- and 8-ounce retail cuts that are vacuum-packed for a year's shelf life. The company's five-month Asiago is also available in 3- or 6-pound deli cuts for behind the deli counter, shredded in 5-ounce cups that have a 120-day shelf life or sliced in 8-ounce packages.

According to Allison Schuman, national



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sales manager at Schuman Cheese, based in Fairfield, NJ, the majority of Asiago in the United States has a high lipase content and stronger lipolytic flavor than the original Italian Asiago.

"At Schuman Cheese, we model our Cello Asiago after a traditional Italian medium Asiago. Similar to the Italians, we do not use lipase," says Schuman. "We age our Asiago for a minimum of six months, and we aim for a semi-soft texture that is a cross between Parmesan and Cheddar."

Aged Asiago, PDO is hard enough to grate for use as an addition to salads or as a topping, since it melts easily.

"In regards to Asiago as an ingredient and how to use it, we have found it is a cheese that pairs beautifully with so many other flavors, adding a delicious nutty creaminess without overpowering," says Bolla. "Asiago Fresco is a great melting cheese, while the aged versions offer some extra sharpness and work well grated."

Asiago Fresco is often used in sauces, as a grilling cheese and as an ingredient in scrambled eggs.

"This is a really good cooking cheese and, depending on the age, it will either be

To successfully sell Asiago, experts say it's important to be able to distinguish the variations of this cheese and identify details, such as whether it is imported or domestic, fresh or aged.

milky and slightly acidic or more aged with additional fruit forward notes," says Steve Millard, senior vice president of merchandising and operations for Murray's Cheese, based in New York.

It's also been incredibly successful for baking, both as an inclusion in dough and as a topper.

Schuman's Cello Asiago cheese has a savory, nutty note that works in everything from cooking to pairing with wine on a cheese board.

"Foodservice and food ingredient companies have been trying to find ways to capture the distinctively sharp, nutty flavor of Asiago in their recipes for years," says Schuman. "At Schuman Cheese,

we've even worked with chefs to create a no-burn Asiago for a more appealing appearance in a finished food product."

Selling Successfully

There are many versions of domestically-made Asiago in the United States that have helped increase the awareness of this flavorful cheese.

To successfully sell Asiago, experts say it's important to be able to distinguish the variations of this cheese and identify details, such as whether it is imported or domestic, fresh or aged.

"This isn't always easy, because there is a unique standard of identity for Asiago," says Schuman. "It can be a milky, mild cheese or have a deep, complex flavor. Operators may also find it helpful to educate consumers about the many ways they can enjoy Asiago. Most people don't know they can use it as an everyday cheese to put some unique flair into their favorite recipes for poultry, beef and pasta."

In order to successfully market the cheese, supermarket retailers also need to know how to recognize it and the difference in names, such as Fresco, Mezzano, Vecchio and Stravechio.

"Clarifying these distinctions is the main goal of Asiago's promotional plan for 2017 with educational advertising and events being planned," says Bolla.

BelGioioso cheeses are merchandised in the specialty cheese section of the deli department and display well in groups.

"The wedges can be displayed in boxes, baskets or stacked in crates," says Jamie Wichlacz, marketing public relations manager. "The cups are stackable and can be displayed easily on shelves or grouped with other pre-grated or shredded cheeses."

It's important to note that the European Union awarded Asiago with PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) status in 1996. This name-protected designation ensures that this product honors the environmental and cultural region in which it originated and is still made today.

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BUTTER SPREADS THE WEALTH

**Discover what's behind
the latest trends**

BY KEITH LORIA

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recently reported that butter is at a 40-year high in per-capita consumption, and last year accounted for \$2.8 billion in sales. The popularity of premium butters, including European-style butters, is increasing due to the rise in foodies and home chefs, and more of the product is finding its way to retail stores.

Charles Duque, managing director, Americas for CNIEL: The French Dairy Board, Paris, notes that the butter category has exploded over the past few years thanks to better nutritional information regarding good fats and taste.

"European-style butter is very in vogue and is being produced in that style by American manufacturers," he says. "France has a number of excellent butters on the market, which bring a creamy texture and excellent taste to any bread, and cooking with butter makes for great desserts and pastries. It is one of the cornerstones of French cuisine."

There are a variety of butters and non-dairy spreads available on the market, and Duque says it's up to the producers to educate the consumer about the different options available.



"France has at least 10 butters on the market from a variety of regions and some PDO (Protected Designations of Origin) butters, which provide a certain level of unmatched quality," he says. "When people walk into a store, they are not always familiar with what the different brands are or how they taste, so retailers should have tastings to allow their customers to get the full idea."

Alison Hooper, co-founder of Vermont Creamery, based in Websterville, VT, which makes European-style cultured butter, says the category is still seen largely as a dairy item to most consumers and retailers, but thinks a rise in foodies and a more adventurous Millennial palate will add to its adaptation in the deli section.

"Sometimes we will see European-style butter in the deli or an item that is a slower mover like a flavored or compound butter, but that is still not the norm," she says. "What you find in the deli are butters with interesting shapes in a cup or roll. It's usually something other than a stick or a 1-pound print."

Nate Formalarie, brand communications manager for Cabot Creamery Co-operative, Waitsfield, VT, notes the trend in high-end and flavored butters, and he's keeping a keen eye on its progress.

"Retailers seem to be embracing but-

ters, especially European-style butters, in the deli section," he says. "It is not something Cabot is pursuing at the moment, but could be down the road a bit."

Benoit de Vitton, North American representative for France-manufacturer Isigny Sainte-Mere, which has operations in Fort Lee, NJ, says butter has become more prominent in the supermarket set-

ting spurred by increased awareness of its health benefits.

A French Influence

"There was an article in *Time* Magazine about two years ago talking about why butter is good for you, and it has been trending ever since," he says. "People are buying domestic, they are buying imported, and there are some looking at more traditional processes. Depending on where you shop — for instance Whole Foods will have a number of offerings — there is a choice."

Président brand butter, the number one butter brand in France, is made from cultured creams in the northwestern part of France, which is referred to as the "Grand Cru" of European dairy regions.

"European-style butter has continued to rise in popularity amongst American consumers," says Stefanie Mignolet of the Lactalis American Group, based in Buffalo, NY. "With a velvety texture and subtle nuttiness, this product is perfect for cooking, baking or spreading on foods."

While the brand isn't at every retailer, it can often be found at high-end and gourmet stores, and can be cross merchandised with some of the deli items that people buy, such as bagels, breads and muffins.

"Available in a variety of sizes and formats, including salted and unsalted, Président Butter Bar, Sea Salt Butter and Spreadable Butter have nutty tastes and creamy textures that easily enhance any meal," says Mignolet.



Earlier this year, the company introduced *Président Butter Quarters*, a line that is pre-measured in individually-wrapped sticks.

Denver-based *Epicurean Butter* recently introduced a *Black Truffle* line, which marries Italian Black Truffles and AA grade butter. The company also offers a white truffle butter. Both can be found in stores nationwide.

Getting the Word Out

Premium, culinary-inspired innovations from national brands as well as from regional family-owned creameries and artisan culinary professionals are helping further drive the butter business.

The French Dairy Board recently held an interactive butter and spice event at the French Cheese Board in New York City, opening a French Dairy concept store where it brought in a master spice and herb chef who blended butters to create new flavors in a variety of simple recipes.

Sweet and savory and DIY butters are several of the most popular flavors people were raving about.

Duque says the well-attended event opened up some minds and taste buds for people who may have been oblivious to the multitude of butter options on the market.

Hooper is still not really seeing the flavor category emerging, other than butter becoming a single-use item that chefs will custom create when this ingredient is highlighted on a menu.

In The Store

Whether in the deli department or some other area of the store, flavored butters need to be refrigerated. For this reason, retailers should be opening up some space in the deli department to provide consumers with more options for these products.

A challenge for these retailers so far in 2017 has been not keeping up with the demand, which is causing prices to skyrocket on top butter brands, and possibly keeping new customers away.

For delis looking to sell more butter, Hooper says there's an easy solution — offer up warm bread that can be sampled on site with the different flavors.

"This will allow those who have never experienced anything other than 'regular' butter a chance to see what's available," she says. "That will really boost sales and help the category grow."

Still, Hooper laments, the main challenge is that butter is considered a

commodity sold in the dairy. Consequently, the mark up is lower than in the deli, but the expected velocity is higher.

"The dairy is not going to want a slow-moving item in the case when there is so much competition for shelf space for items like yogurt," she says. "We need to change the perception, and that can be done with some good ole' ingenuity."

When it comes to cross merchandising butter, de Vitton says a good food partner

for the higher-end product is food found in the specialty sections. Because it needs to be refrigerated, keeping small units near breads and meal kits is a great way to get the items in front of shoppers.

"It's still very niche," he says. "You see some truffle butters becoming trendy. I've even seen some chocolate butters, and I think there will be more flavors coming out in the years ahead."

This is good news for the category. **DB**



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Although the family business has been egg rolls since 1986, Van Nguyen first arrived in the United States from Vietnam when a Cultural Exchange Program with the U.S. State Department brought him to Washington D.C. as a teacher in 1966. His wife Kim joined him almost two years later with their daughter Theresa and only \$40 in her purse.

Adjusting to a new country and culture while trying to build a company was challenging, rewarding and memorable. Van and Kim's passion to embody the "American Dream" fueled their work ethic and drove their passion to build a successful business.

With founding shareholder Canh Nguyen, Van and Kim opened

VAN Oriental Foods and set up their first full operation in a small warehouse in Irving, TX. Built with the same core principles they lived their life by — faith, family and friendship, the company thrived by sharing a belief in the Golden Rule and the power of heart-centered leadership — essential ingredients in Van's Kitchen.

This philosophy hasn't changed since 1986. Today, their daughter Theresa carries on the traditions as the second-generation chief executive of the company.

Theresa, along with her husband, Carl, infuse every interaction, every choice, every decision and every egg roll with her parent's philosophy. They deeply appreciate the sweat, tears and sacrifice that formed the family business they lead today in Dallas and seek to build on this rich legacy. Theresa's vision for the company's future is a combination of new and old — fresh, innovative recipes and traditional, heartfelt values.

Their focus has always been on making one thing — honest food the honorable way. They take this responsibility very seriously — always striving to nourish and care for their customers, employees and communities with authenticity and integrity.

As they continue to expand into new markets, homes and kitchens across America, the goal of Van's Kitchen is to provide high-quality, affordable, authentic and delicious food choices for busy moms, dads and families — giving back to the community and exceeding expectations with every bite.

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**THE PUREST,
CHUNKIEST,
BEST-TASTING
GUACAMOLE**

**VISIT US AT THE IDDBA,
BOOTH #2653**

AVOCADO.COM

- Artisan made guacamole from 95% handpicked Hass avocados and 5% seasonings
- Our guacamole stays fresh and delicious longer with our distinctive re-sealable tubs
- Yucatan's commitment to high quality guacamole has boosted our brand's sales **UP 13%** from last year!
- New Yucatan Plant is a World Class Guacamole Processing and Packaging Plant

Source: Nielsen Total U.S. xAOC - Multi Outlet Refrigerated Dip Category 52 weeks ending 12/31/16

SINCE 1950

DELALLO

SINCE 1950
DELALLO

Garlic & Pepper
Antipasto

Net Wt. 8 oz. (227g)

• MAKE YOUR DELI A •

Mediterranean destination

Create a complete Mediterranean destination in your deli with our prepackaged Olives & Antipasti. DeLallo's Ready Pack Program adds a new dimension to your offerings with top-selling Olives & Antipasti packaged in convenient snack (4 oz.) and entertaining (7-8 oz.) sizes. These best-loved bites are an inspiring addition to your deli, ready to merchandize with specialty meats, cheeses, dips and hummus.

George DeLallo Co., Inc. | Jeannette, PA 15644 | 1-800-433-9100 | www.delallo.com | [@delallofoods](https://www.instagram.com/delallofoods)