

# DELI BUSINESS

MARKETING MERCHANDISING MANAGEMENT PROCUREMENT

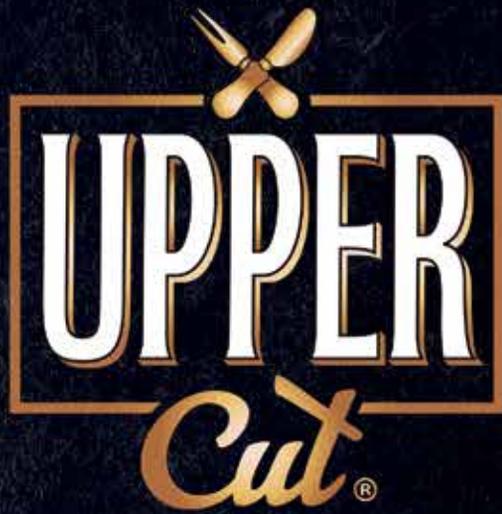
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**Contact:** Jason.Jones@FoodStoryBrands.com

**UpperCutEats.com**

Source: Nielsen, Total US xAOC, 52 Weeks Ending 8/9/25,  
Deli Snacking Cheese and Meat Category



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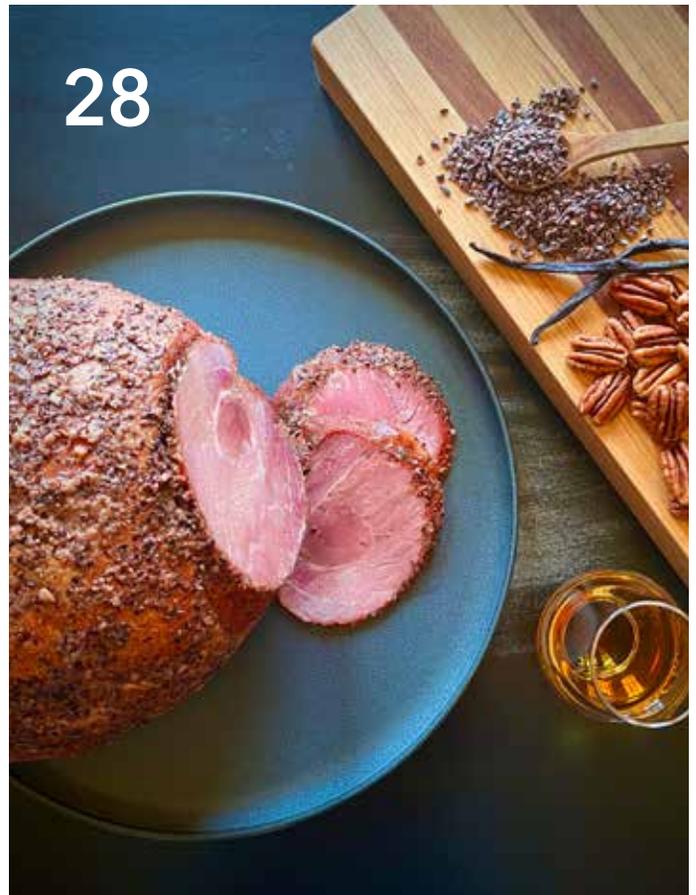
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# DELI BUSINESS

MARKETING MERCHANDISING MANAGEMENT PROCUREMENT

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## DELI BUSINESS AWARDS SMOKING GOOSE INNOVATION AWARD

DELI BUSINESS magazine presented Smoking Goose, Indianapolis, IN, with the 2025 Deli Innovation Award in July for its Sliced Charcuterie Packages.

DELI BUSINESS readers voted online for their top three products out of 10 finalists, revealed in the spring issue of DELI BUSINESS. Smoking Goose received 305 first-place votes. There were 1,503 online votes cast across the 10 entries. Giant Eagle, Inc., Cranberry Twp., PA, won second place with 259 first-place votes for its Strawberry Pretzel Salad Dip.

“The whole team here at Smoking Goose is so proud to earn the DELI BUSINESS Innovation Award,” says Corrie E. Cook, narration director, Smoking Goose. “We’ve been fortunate to partner with amazing cheesemongers and deli staff across the country for 14 years now, as the 40-plus varieties of charcuterie we make here in Indianapolis find homes on deli counters and menus in all 50 states.”

The winning Sliced Charcuterie Packages are delivered in a reusable, stand-up retail display. Not only do the stand-up retail displays set these packages apart and make attractive, tempting displays easy for deli staff, but they also open self-service options for



The winning Sliced Charcuterie Packages from Smoking Goose are delivered in a reusable, stand-up retail display.

customers at the deli counter. There are 10 varieties of charcuterie available in the stand-up retail displays, included free with wholesale customers orders.

These pre-sliced, pre-portioned packages are ideal for charcuterie boards, cocktail hour, and game-day snacks without the need for a slicer, prep space, staff labor and more.



PHOTOS COURTESY SMOKING GOOSE

Smoking Goose, Indianapolis, IN, won the 2025 Deli Innovation Award for its Sliced Charcuterie Packages In Stand-Up Retail Display.

“Our butcher buttons are bursting with pride with this award, and we’re thrilled that the freestanding retail displays we deliver to our wholesale partners nationwide can shine a spotlight on

the great work that deli staff do every day serving their customers,” says Cook. Brooklyn Cured, Brooklyn, NY, was awarded the inaugural 2024 Innovation Award for its Snack Packs.

### TRANSITIONS



#### ROSEANNE CRAVE STEPS INTO OWNER PARTNERSHIP

Crave Brothers Farmstead Cheese, Waterloo, WI, announces Roseanne Crave has officially joined the company’s owner partnership, marking a new chapter in the multigenerational family business. Crave, who currently leads sales and marketing, steps into a leadership role. As the daughter of Crave Cheese’s co-founders, George and Debbie Crave, she grew up immersed in the world of dairy farming and cheesemaking. Her transition into the owner partnership is a natural evolution of a lifetime spent learning the business.  
[www.cravecheese.com](http://www.cravecheese.com)



#### HORMEL FOODS ANNOUNCES KEY LEADERSHIP

Hormel Foods Corporation, Austin, MN, announced two leadership appointments in its retail business segment. Paul Peil, a 35-year veteran with the company, has been promoted to the role of vice president of marketing for fresh and ready meats. Peil will oversee fresh pork, Jennie-O, Hormel Cure 81 brand, and the deli category for retail customers. Christie Crouch joins the company as vice president of marketing for snacking and entertaining and will lead all brand-building initiatives for the company’s portfolio of snacking and entertaining brands.  
[www.hormelfoods.com](http://www.hormelfoods.com)

### ANNOUNCEMENTS



#### BROOKSHIRE GROCERY COMPANY TAPS AFRESH’S AI-POWERED PLATFORM

Afresh, San Francisco, CA, announced a new strategic partnership with Brookshire Grocery Company as they prepare to deploy Afresh’s cutting-edge store ordering and inventory management solutions across deli, produce, and market (meat and seafood) departments. The rollout will span four of Brookshire Grocery Company’s banners: Brookshire’s, Super 1 Foods, Fresh by Brookshire’s and Spring Market.  
[www.afresh.com](http://www.afresh.com)

### NEW PRODUCTS



#### PEPPERONI DEVELOPED IN RESPONSE TO CONSUMER DEMAND

Columbus Craft Meats, Austin, MN, has launched its first stand-alone pepperoni deli product: Columbus Uncured Pepperoni. The pepperoni is crafted with whole cuts of hand-trimmed pork and seasoned with cracked fennel and paprika — delivering a bold, spicy and smoky flavor profile. It is available at select retailers nationwide, including Kroger, Albertsons Portland and Mid-Atlantic, Giant Carlisle, Hy-Vee, Save Mart, Associated Wholesale Grocers, Associated Food Stores and Ralphs. The product is sold in a 4-ounce tray.  
[www.columbuscraftmeats.com](http://www.columbuscraftmeats.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](mailto:DeliBusiness@phoenixmedianet.com)



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# Grab-and-Go: MEALS MADE EASY

Six top trends to drive deli sales.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

**G**rab-and-go sells. Just ask David Cingari, executive chef at Cingari Family Markets, a 12-store supermarket chain headquartered in Stamford, CT. “Over the past three years, we’ve seen a 30% increase per day and per week in purchases of our grab-and-go prepared entrees and side dishes. Customers tell us they’ve become a shopping list staple due to time savings and affordability. They also comment on the price savings compared to restaurant takeout and delivery fees.”

The most popular selections, says Cingari, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America who developed the menu, are the Italian Chicken Cutlet, Panko Parmesan Chicken Cutlet, and Chipotle Chicken, Black Bean, and Corn Quesadilla, which are prepared in a central commissary and delivered to the stores daily. The newest items are Lobster Rolls and Sesame Garlic

Grilled Salmon, served with Honey-Roasted Carrots and Basmati Rice.

Charcuterie boards and shrimp platters have been big sellers this summer for customers entertaining at home or going out for a day of boating. In-store display signage, digital screen displays, social media, and weekly demos are ways the retailer promotes its grab-and-go meal line.

Prepared foods are the top contributing category to deli sales, accounting for \$32.2 billion, or 57% of total deli sales in 2024, based on Circana’s Total U.S., MULO+ data for the 52 weeks ending Dec. 29, 2024, and representing a 5% increase in dollars. However, prepared foods are just one segment of grab-and-go foods sold in the deli, with meats, cheeses, and entertaining categories being key contributors as well.

The unofficial category of deli grab-and-go is defined more by function than form. It’s all about ready-to-eat or ready-to-heat-and-eat

consumption, pre-packed for quick pickup and portability, without stand-in-line wait times or staff interaction. As lifestyles become increasingly fast-paced, especially for commuters and younger consumers, demand for convenient food options has surged, making grab-and-go one of the fastest-growing segments in the food industry.

Here are six top trends that will drive sales of deli grab-and-go in 2026:

## 1. BASICS & BEYOND: THE SKY’S THE LIMIT

Salads and sandwiches are the classic go-to choices for grab-and-go deli options. The salad category in Deli Prepared ranks as the third-largest, after entrees and prepared meats, totaling \$5.8 billion, up 6.9% in 2024, based on Circana’s Total U.S., MULO+ data. Sandwiches are fourth, worth \$3.8 billion, up 2% during the same time.

“Green salads are top for us, with 80%



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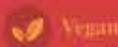
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Vegan



No Preservatives



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Authentic Taste



of sales traditional favorites like Chicken Caesar, Cobb and Chef,” says Maureen Davis, national director of sales and strategy, deli prepared foods, at Salinas, CA-headquartered Taylor Farms, which makes case-ready selections. This summer, the company introduced a new assortment of flavors in its pre-packaged wet salad line. “Second is sub sandwiches and wraps.”

There has been an evolution in what consumers want in grab-and-go selections, like sandwiches, according to Jonathan Stack, president and chief innovation officer at Fresh Creative Cuisine. The Baltimore, MD-based company recently opened a new 80,000-square-foot ready-to-eat production facility featuring over 200 specialty menu items and a test kitchen for private label product development.

“Beyond a standard hoagie or sub, we’re seeing demand for sandwiches with trendy flavors, ethnic ingredients, and global cuisine elements. In sandwiches, for example, that means using artisan breads or trading meats for vegetarian or Mediterranean-style fillings. It extends to other handhelds as well, such as empanadas, or twists like dessert-style empanadas, samosas, egg rolls, Chicken Vindaloo in a pizza topping format, or using naan in place of a customary crust to make pizza,” says Stack.

Last year, Mama’s Creations, in East Rutherford, NJ, introduced its Mama Mancini brand Grab-and-Go Gourmet Paninis in three flavors: Meatball Parmesan, Chicken Parmesan and Nashville Hot. On a similar note, BelGioioso Cheese, based in Green Bay, WI, has introduced Provolone and Fontina Sandwich Stacks for sliced sandwich cheese. It is square, stacked, and built for paninis or upgrading to premium sandwiches.

Many deli operators are doing a good job of expanding their grab-and-go selections to suit consumer needs and wants.

“You’ll find power bowls, Asian-inspired options, global wraps, individual charcuterie boards, and meal kits alongside the tried-and-true deli salads and sandwiches,” says Mike Kostyo, vice president of Menu Matters, in Arlington, VT.

## 2. DINNER GOES DOUBLE TIME

Meal preparation, regardless of the occasion, has drastically changed over the past two decades, moving away from



PHOTO COURTESY ST. PIERRE

scratch cooking toward a hybrid meal that is a combination of items that are semi- or fully prepared and some items cooked from scratch, according to Anne-Marie Roerink, president of 210 Analytics, LLC, in San Antonio, TX. “That’s where grab-and-go comes in. While we often think about a slice of pizza or ready-to-eat salad as grab-and-go, rotisserie chicken falls into this same solution set for consumers.”

Chicken breasts, popular as a behind-the-glass entree, have migrated to the grab-and-go case. One reason, according to Chris Darling, chief commercial officer for Mama’s Creations, “is the surge in consumers seeking GLP-1 weight loss medications, who want a quick and healthy meal. We have

several chicken entrees, including fully cooked Roasted Chicken Strips in multiple flavors, Fajita Seasoned Oven Roasted Chicken Breast Strips, and international-flavored items, like Teriyaki Chicken and Fried Rice.”

This summer, Taylor Farms introduced its line of Freshly Prepared Meals, primarily targeted to supermarket deli operators too small for a private label program, yet who want the distinction of carrying a known national brand. The six-item line includes four chicken-based selections, such as Broccoli Chicken Alfredo and Chicken Parmesan, as well as Grilled Salmon and Vegetables and a Margherita Flatbread Pizza.

## 3. SNACKS ARE THE NEW MEALS

Over half (53.3%) of consumers eat snacks instead of a meal because they are on the go, according to Technomic’s 2023 *Snacking Occasion Report*, as shared by Rhyme, TX-based Fresh Innovations LLC, makers of Yo Quiero Brand grab-and-go guacamole, salsa and queso dip products. Additionally, more than 51% of consumers eat snacks instead of meals at work, and 49.9% eat snacks instead of meals at home.

“Consumers are thinking more about healthy eating when snacking,” says Tara Murray, vice president of marketing. “Data also shows that while shoppers come into the deli for dinner, it’s convenience stores where they are



## WHAT THEY ARE *Saying*

“People like to try new things, and delis are capitalizing on this in their grab-and-go programs. The sky’s the limit.”

— Jonathan Stack, Fresh Creative Cuisine, Baltimore, MD

buying snacks. There’s a huge opportunity for supermarket retailers here.”

Snack boxes, charcuterie boards, bento boxes, and similar items aren’t going away anytime soon, says Menu Matters’ Kostyo. “Many consumers simply prefer to eat this way because it’s fun, offers a lot of options, and fits a wide range of occasions.”

Grab-and-go meats accounted for nearly one-third (29.8%) of deli meat dollars, down 4.4%, based on Circana data for 2024.

Protein-powered snacking is a hot grab-and-go trend, according to Jamie Wichlacz, marketing and public relations manager at BelGioioso. “Consumers are actively seeking high-protein options, such as our fresh mozzarella and snacking cheeses, to fuel their day.”

Grab-and-go cheeses represented 12.2% of deli cheese dollars, essentially flat in sales at -0.2%, based on Circana data for 2024.

Shelf-stable hummus, full of plant-based protein and packaged in 2.9-ounce grab-and-go cups with breadsticks, is new from Mezete. This Jordanian brand, part of the Kasih Food Production Company, specializes in authentic Middle Eastern foods.

“What we offer, snack dips like hummus, as well as plant-based soups, stews, and sauces, intersect several mega trends, including the rise in snacking, a desire for healthfulness and global flavors. Middle Eastern flavors are one of the fastest-growing cuisines in the U.S.,” says Mark Pataky, commercial director.

Dietz Nuts, protein-packed, savory meat bites sold in portable single-serve bags, are a top grab-and-go offering from Dietz & Watson, in Philadelphia, PA, says Lauren Eni Canseco, chief marketing officer. “One of the top trends in grab-and-go foods is the demand for convenience without sacrificing quality and taste.”

Dietz Chips, 3-ounce packs of no-added-brine pickles in four flavors, such as Spicy Garlic Dill and Sweet Horseradish, are also snack favorites.

Snackable Petite and Sliced Dill Pickles are the latest additions to the POSHI (Power of Simple Healthy Ingredients) lineup. This Miami, FL-based company produces shelf-stable, all-natural, ready-to-eat vegetable snacks.

“Our artichokes, asparagus, and olive snacks have always been steady favorites,” says Doruk Karakasoglu, vice president of sales. “They have a satisfying crunch and flavor, and people love them either solo or paired with sandwiches and platters. This taps into the growing trend of people replacing traditional meals with flavorful, better-for-you snacks throughout the day.”

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## WHAT THEY ARE *Saying*

“Data also shows that while shoppers come into the deli for dinner, it’s convenience stores where they are buying snacks. There’s a huge opportunity for supermarket retailers here.”

— Tara Murray, Fresh Innovations LLC, Rhome, TX

To make it easier to build a meal, Mama’s Creations’ Darling suggests segmenting displays. “Group entrees, sides, and desserts together in upright refrigerated cases. Use color-coded signage to call attention to each.”

### 6. SERVE A ‘WHAT’S FOR DINNER?’ BUNDLE

One of the key areas of opportunity for grab-and-go is Millennials, who are now raising families, doing their own grocery shopping, and preparing meals, according to Menu Matters’ Kostyo. “Eighty percent of Millennials say they have trouble deciding what to make for dinner at least one day a week, according to our research, and nearly a quarter have trouble five days a week or more. This is something that grab-and-go can really solve.”

Delis can create “What’s for Dinner” bundles.

“Grab-and-go meal deal combos can take the guesswork out for shoppers and be a basket builder for the retail deli,” says Mama’s Creations’ Darling.

Promote cheeses as part of “grab-and-make” kits for lunch or dinner, such as an Italian Picnic Box with Fresh Mozzarella, heirloom tomatoes, basil, and balsamic glaze, suggests BelGioioso’s Wichlacz. “Or, or a panini kit with Fontina Sandwich Stack, rustic bread and truffle aioli.”

Bundling is key to pairing meats and cheeses with crackers or drinks for ready-made meals, or promoting custom builds near complementary items, like breads or spreads, adds Dietz & Watson’s Canseco. “Whether sold a la carte or as a bundle, strong visuals, strategic placement, and messaging around quality and convenience help drive sales.”

Looking ahead, Canseco adds, “Demand for grab-and-go foods is expected to continue growing as busy lifestyles and the need for convenience shape how people eat.” **DB**



PHOTO COURTESY POSHI

### 4. DINE IN OR DASH: IT’S ALL IN THE PACKAGING

Packaging makes the difference between a sit-and-stay meal or snack and a grab-and-go one. A good example is the St. Pierre Groupe’s Belgian waffles.

“Our investment in our range of waffles is a testament to the increased demand for the products as a grab-and-go solution,” says Kayleigh Swift, U.S. brand manager for St. Pierre Bakery, of the St. Pierre Groupe, the U.K.-based baker of premium brioche-style bread products and a subsidiary of Mexico’s Grupo Bimbo. “Initially, though each waffle was wrapped in the pack, the products did not have their own bar codes. We have invested in packaging to ensure retailers can sell single units.”

The company recently launched a new merchandising solution, a branded rack, which fits onto St. Pierre’s eye-catching Eiffel Tower displays or existing fixtures throughout the store, and at the point of sale to drive impulse purchases where waffles are sold as individual units.

“Waffles, croissants, and crepes are up 6% in both value and volume, year to date, which demonstrates consumer demand for individually wrapped snacking solutions,” says Swift.

### 5. SEE IT TO SELL IT

Placement matters when it comes to selling more grab-and-go products, says Poshi’s Karakasoglu. “High-traffic spots near the deli counter, store entrance, or close to prepared meals are ideal.”

In-store signage, deli counter displays, and strategic placement near complementary items are effective. At the same time, store circulars, email newsletters, and social media extend the message beyond the shelf, adds Dietz & Watson’s Canseco. “Showcasing easy pairings or usage ideas through short videos or recipe posts also helps consumers see the value and versatility of the products.”

Sandwiches, salads, and prepared meals often receive dedicated display areas in the deli. This isn’t necessarily so with grab-and-go snacks.

“Snack items are more of an after-thought in the deli, compared to center store, and as a result have not been gaining as much traction,” says Taylor Farm’s Davis. The company offers fresh-cut fruit cups, fruit and yogurt parfaits, and snack trays featuring a combination of vegetables, dips, cheeses, hard-cooked eggs, nuts and crackers. “Grouping these items would give a better shelf presence, greater profitability, and less shrink.”

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# Capitalizing on Charcuterie

**Supermarket delis can create cross-merchandising opportunities with a wide range of items.**

BY LISA WHITE

**A**s the charcuterie category continues to evolve, supermarket delis are on the front line as the provider of the board's main components.

"The beauty of this category is its constant innovation — new flavor profiles, textures, and pairings that elevate the Italian tradition of tagliere that most Americans know as charcuterie," says Emilio Mignucci, owner and expert cheesemonger, Di Bruno Brothers, Philadelphia, PA.

Charcuterie is defined as a curated selection of premium, ready-to-eat items designed for easy snacking and entertaining.

"Categories within charcuterie include a variety of cured meats, cheeses, crackers and complementary items, such as nuts, olives, spreads or dried fruits — ingredients that consumers can customize and assemble themselves for a personal snack or for entertaining all in one place," says Claire Donohue, marketing manager, Volpi Foods, St. Louis, MO.

In supermarket delis, charcuterie meats typically include salami, prosciutto, pepperoni and soppressata, as well as sliced deli meats, like turkey, ham and roast beef. It also encompasses an array of cheeses, from sharp cheddars to creamy bries.

"Rooted in the traditional French practice of preserving and utilizing meat to extend its shelf life, charcuterie began as a method of making perishable proteins both edible and flavorful," says Lauren Eni Canseco, chief marketing officer, Dietz & Watson, Philadelphia. "While originally centered on expertly prepared meats, its definition has expanded, especially in American retailers, to include a wide range of artisanal accompaniments."

Charcuterie boards are reflecting consumers' changing preferences, with clean-label and minimally processed products that are free of artificial ingredients, preservatives and nitrates. These boards are also becoming more internationally focused.

Shoppers are seeking out new textures, formats and flavor profiles.

There's also increasing demand for plant-based options that mimic the richness of traditional charcuterie using vegetables, legumes and oils. In addition, there has been an increase in pre-packaged mini charcuterie boards and smaller snack trays that focus on convenience and easy snacking.

Charcuterie, in the traditional sense, refers to any cooked, cured or smoked meat — including whole-muscle hams, sausages, pâtés, terrines and more.

"In the supermarket deli context, the charcuterie term has taken on a narrower meaning," says Jesse Denes, vice president, Schaller & Weber, New York City, NY. "What's often labeled and merchandised as 'charcuterie' tends to focus on sliced cured meats, dry sausages, pâtés and other board-friendly specialties. Meanwhile, classic charcuterie items, like deli hams, bolognas and liverwursts



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are typically found in their own sections — even though they belong to the same culinary lineage.”

### NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Manufacturers offer a wide range of options in the charcuterie space.

In addition to cheese spreads, jams, glazes, white truffle honey, tapenade, roasted and stuffed peppers, artisanal crostini, and oven-baked grissini, Di Bruno Brothers offers a line of five cured salami chubs, ranging from spicy to mild, and is also rolling out pre-sliced, diced, and combo packs of cured meats, including prosciutto, pancetta and soppressata.

“We take a ‘glocal’ approach — global inspiration and local integrity — as we source many of our ingredients from small family businesses and food makers in Italy,” says Mignucci.

Jay Whitney, co-founder and chief marketing officer, FoodStory Brands, Phoenix, AZ, which owns Upper Cut, is also taking a global approach to attract new, younger consumers. “We are introducing a line of multi-compartment, globally inspired snack trays this fall to take consumers on a flavor adventure ... literally. It brings a fresh twist to deli snacking and charcuterie that will broaden the usage occasion and attract Gen Z consumers.”

In 2025, Volpi introduced portioned and protein-packed Snack Trays and a Charcuterie Board.

“Our latest product innovations cater to the portable, ready-to-eat space — Snack Trays that are offered in two flavors — mozzarella and Genoa Salame and prosciutto and provolone — and a Charcuterie Board that comes with Genoa Salame, uncured pepperoni, crackers, provolone cheese, roasted almonds and organic cranberries,” says Donohue.

Dietz & Watson has expanded its offerings to include its Originals line with organic and antibiotic-free meats and cheeses with no artificial preservatives or additives.

“We’ve also introduced new snack packs that pair premium meats, cheeses and crackers in ready-to-eat portions,” says Eni Canseco. “On the flavor front, we’re offering a variety of cheeses and deli meats in exciting new profiles.”

Schaller & Weber continues expanding specialty offerings with items like Iberico pork pâté, foie gras with black truffle and a spreadable nduja.

“For customers looking for plant-based

## AI-POWERED KIOSKS ELEVATE THE DELI EXPERIENCE

To help guide consumers seeking charcuterie board ideas, retailers are turning to AI, like Cicero, an in-store digital kiosk that acts as a virtual charcuterie board expert. Positioned near the deli or specialty cheese case, Cicero guides shoppers through building the perfect board based on their preferences — occasion, budget, dietary needs or wine pairings.

“Using real-time inventory data from the store, Cicero instantly recommends curated selections of cheeses, meats, fruits, crackers and accompaniments — all available on-site,” says Doug Stephen, president of CGS Immersive, New York City, NY. “Customers can print a shopping list or, in some stores, design their board from home via a connected app and pick it up at the store.”

The results are bigger baskets, cross-category sales, labor efficiency, younger shopper appeal and actionable data from kiosk interactions.

“Surveys show that 58% of shoppers struggle with flavor pairings, nearly half feel intimidated arranging boards visually, and 27% need help meeting dietary needs,” Stephen notes. “AI kiosks meet all these challenges head-on — transforming confusion into confident, high-margin purchases.”



Cicero, an in-store digital kiosk that acts as a virtual charcuterie board expert, may be positioned near the deli or specialty cheese case to guide shoppers through building the perfect board.

PHOTO COURTESY CGS IMMERSIVE



## WHAT THEY ARE *Saying*



“While ready-made boards offer convenience, encouraging customers to build their own board makes the experience more engaging and memorable.”



— Emilio Mignucci, Di Bruno Brothers, Philadelphia, PA

options, we’ve developed a line of shelf-stable vegan pâtés made with vegetables and natural oils,” says Denes.

Oceanside, CA-based Olli Salumeria is capitalizing on growth from snack packs with meat, cheese and cracker varieties.

“We have many flavors, including chipotle and habanero, and are looking to bring new flavors to the charcuterie set,” says Enrico Porrino, Olli’s vice president of research and development and a master salumiere. “We’ve added about 10 Latino and South American flavors, in addition to fusion varieties.”

At Fabrique Delices, Hayward, CA, the focus is on French and Basque regional products.

“We are now offering a new precooked ham for delis,” says Sebastien Espinasse, president of the company. “It is made the traditional way and is a very flavorful option for charcuterie boards.”

Fortune Favors, Cottage Grove, WI, offers a half dozen candied pecan flavors as a pairing option for charcuterie boards.

“These are designed to work with meats and cheeses to spice up the board,” says Sam McDaniel, Fortune Favors’ chief executive. “Nuts are typically an afterthought, but really should be an equal partner as they add the crunch and can stand up to other flavors. They also add a visual component.”

The company’s two latest flavors are

Mesquite, a barbecue flavor that pairs well with smoked meats, and Spark, a blend of warming chili spice, smokiness and citrus with a rich, gochugaru-inspired flavor.

### MARKETING & MERCHANDISING

Success in the charcuterie space is dependent on product presentation.

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## WHAT THEY ARE *Saying*



“The biggest and best opportunity is to remove the burden of intimidation for consumers. It’s critical to create a frictionless experience by providing the inspiration, the shoppable recipes/ snack hacks, and the supporting content for ease of prep and execution.”

— Jay Whitney, FoodStory Brands, Phoenix, AZ

for seasonal features or themed promotions — like summer barbecues, holiday entertaining or back-to-school lunchboxes — helps position charcuterie as an easy to prep everyday indulgence, not just a special-occasion splurge,” says Mignucci.

### LOOKING AHEAD

The future of the category lies in flexibility and flavor, with pre-portioned items, globally inspired profiles and better-for-you ingredients made without additives or GMOs, according to Mignucci.

“We are tapping into this momentum by rotating in limited-time items, offering sampling opportunities and using signage and displays to share pairing ideas, turning charcuterie into an engaging, flavorful experience,” he says.

Charcuterie is shifting from a special-occasion indulgence to a mainstream, everyday eating experience.

“As interest grows in creative food experiences and curated presentation, charcuterie is well-positioned to remain a top choice for both casual and elevated occasions,” says Eni Canseco at Dietz & Watson.

Upper Cut’s Whitney says the continued growth and interest in charcuterie serves to reinforce how much consumers crave a curated food experience and how much they love to express themselves through personalized creations. “The canvas, if you will, is quite limitless, and we love the proliferation of new flavors and formats we’ve seen in the category to give consumers more optionality.”

**DB**



PHOTO COURTESY FABRIQUE DELICES

“Supermarket delis can really capitalize on this by making charcuterie feel approachable, convenient and inspiring,” says Volpi Foods’ Donohue. “Grouping complementary items — like cured meats, cheeses, olives and spreads — together makes it easier for shoppers to visualize and get creative when building their own boards. Cross merchandising with wine, nuts and dried fruits, or crackers in adjacent aisles, can also definitely help spark buys.”

In addition, she adds that sampling and signage also go a long way, as well as educational elements, like pairing suggestions or build-your-own board ideas.

“The most effective strategy is to merchandise with intent: bundling complementary products, like meats, cheeses and

condiments, encourages the customer to build a full board in one trip,” says Denes at Schaller & Weber. “Creating a charcuterie destination within the deli — even a small one — makes discovery easier. And don’t underestimate the power of eye-level placement, especially for grab-and-go packs or entertaining bundles.”

Eni Canseco at Dietz & Watson recommends highlighting product attributes like “clean label,” “no nitrates” or “snack-ready” with shelf talkers or QR codes. Also, seasonal themes, rotating bundles and in-store tastings are effective strategies.

Di Bruno Brothers’ website and packaging offers pairing suggestions for charcuterie boards.

“Collaborating with other departments

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# BREAKING BREAD: ARTISAN LOAVES ARE RISING IN THE DELI AISLE

**From sourdough boules to brioche buns, upscale breads are transforming deli departments into destinations.**

BY SARAH LOUISE KLOSE

**S**ourdough loaves. Moroccan breadsticks. Speculoos croissants. Upscale breads draw consumers to the deli aisle. There, culinary-minded shoppers seek artisan bread and rolls baked according to authentic recipes.

“They go there looking for inspiration, ways to impress guests or engage the family with an elevated evening meal,” says Kayleigh Swift, U.S. Brand Manager for St. Pierre in Manchester, England.

St. Pierre makes brioche buns, rolls and loaves from French recipes. The breads are fresh, high quality.

“Deli shoppers are often looking for elevated and indulgent experiences with sandwich builds and sauces, whereas the center store shopper may be using pre-sliced bread for easy at-home meals, such as toast, or school lunches,” says Dave Gonnella, vice

president of sales at Gonnella in Chicago, IL.

Customers who buy breads, like Gonnella’s thaw-and-serve Pretzel Subs and French Rolls, tend to purchase premium meats and cheeses, too, which increases basket size.

## CURRENT TRENDS

Warm fresh bread continues to trend — and customers like to bake it at home.

“Our Bake’Up products are easy for anyone to make,” says Raoul Dexters, country commercial manager, Vandemoortele USA in Pawtucket, RI. “You take them out of the box, put them on a tray, and put them right in the oven. There is no proofing or thawing.”

Bake’Up croissants can be mini, butter, sandwich or pinched. Minis are 60% smaller than traditional ones — a bonus for stores

with limited freezer space. Vandemoortele, based in Ghent, Belgium, exports from Europe and produces in the U.S.

For health-conscious customers, store delis can promote clean-label breads with no GMOs, high-fructose corn syrup or preservatives.

“Whole grain, gluten-free, keto and artisan-style breads are trending as they cater to specific dietary needs and a desire for fresh, flavorful options,” says Karen Toufayan, vice president of marketing and sales at Toufayan Bakeries in Ridgefield, NJ. Its Authentic Lavash, which is hand-stretched, is kosher and vegan.

At the grocery, consumers who prioritize freshness and convenience spend more time in the perimeter than center aisle. “This is especially true for the Millennial cohort and younger,” says Mollie Crudden, senior

## WHAT THEY ARE *Saying*



“Whole grain, gluten-free, keto and artisan-style breads are trending as they cater to specific dietary needs and a desire for fresh, flavorful options.”

— Karen Toufayan, Toufayan Bakeries, Ridgefield, NJ

bake at home. The ingredients are flour, water, salt, and the original sourdough starter from 1989.

### INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENTS

Currently, deli breads are baked, par-baked or frozen. Innovation is key in the industry.

“The bread industry is seeing exciting innovations with the integration of ancient grains and seeds to enhance nutritional

### THE RISE OF SOURDOUGH BREAD

Sourdough bread is nutritional, tasty and artisanal. And it’s a hit. Mordor Intelligence forecasts sourdough market growth of 7% per year through 2030.

“Naturally leavened sourdough is rising in popularity, celebrated for its slow fermentation, minimal ingredients and gentle digestibility,” says Kathleen DiPasquale, associate product manager, value-added bakery, Rich Products in Buffalo, NY. The company makes sourdough baguettes, batards and boules, which are sold frozen.

Bimbo Bakehouse has seen a recent annual 15% growth in its Goldminer Sourdough. “This bread has a great flavor profile and a style that continues to attract people,” says Crudden.

“What sets our breads apart is our unwavering commitment to simple ingredients and time-honored artisan methods, including a 24-hour fermentation process,” says Brie Buening, senior director, marketing, Aspire Bakeries in Los Angeles, CA.

La Brea Bakery (under Aspire Bakeries) makes sourdough bread for stores to bake in-house, and for consumers to take and



PHOTO COURTESY GONNELLA

marketing director, Bakehouse Brands, Bimbo Bakehouse in Horsham, PA.

So, Crudden recommends grocers carry deli breads in snackable sizes, bold/international flavors and traditional open-cell structures.



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value, and use of oils that meet various dietary priorities,” says Toufayan.

Vandemoortele bought Italian baker Laterna, changed the focaccia to a round shape, and now makes it in tomato, rosemary and Mediterranean flavors.

Supermarkets that aim to provide high-quality products recognize that consumers desire freshly baked deli bread.

“These product selection drivers make a case for the continued importance of baking bread fresh in store — there’s both a shopper and retailer appetite for freshly made product,” says Betsy Kelly, consumer insights associate for the bakery channel at General Mills FoodService, Minneapolis, MN.

General Mills rolled out Pillsbury frozen bread dough to meet this need. Stores can bake high-quality hoagies; French and Italian bread; and dinner, steak and bolillo rolls.

Stores want solutions that balance craft with convenience, given operational realities. They want to reduce shrink and extend shelf life.

“Grocers are increasingly favoring smaller pack sizes, typically two to four pieces, tailored for today’s smaller households. These items come ready-to-enjoy or nearly finished, minimizing the need for on-site prep,” says Rich’s DiPasquale.

## MERCHANDISE AND CROSS-MERCHANDISE

Bakery companies work with stores to merchandise products, via digital coupons, digital retail media and bread displays.

“One of the things to focus on is how to always make it easy from the merchant standpoint,” says Crudden of Bimbo Bakehouse. “We have a prefilled shipper that ships frozen. It can be a single consumer-facing case that sits on a tabletop. Since it is modular, the cases can be stacked on top of each other on the floor.” The shipper is filled with Goldminer Original Sourdough Squares.

“Our Eiffel Towers have been proven to increase sales, providing in-store theatre and a customer experience that starts in-store and continues at home,” says Swift of St. Pierre.

Vandemoortele’s culinary team is happy to propose merchandising ideas to in-store delis, for the company’s new and existing bread products. “We launched a pistachio croissant in the U.S. We have a lot of ideas that our chef comes up with,” says Dexters.

Deli breads sell easily when cross-merchandised with cheese, meat, dips/spreads



PHOTO COURTESY ST. PIERRE

and wine. “Bakery bread is an exciting product category in that it acts as a canvas for an abundance of cross-merchandising opportunities,” says Kelly of General Mills.

“Our loaves and rolls pair beautifully with hot bar entrees, soups, or deli proteins,” says Gonnella. He recommends positioning its dinner rolls next to rotisserie chickens to boost visibility and drive incremental sales.

## SANDWICH PROGRAMS AND GRAB-AND-GO

Breads, rolls, biscuits, wraps are terrific for deli sandwiches and grab-and-go. “From whole wheat to sourdough options, there’s a carrier for every sandwich imaginable,” says Kelly.

Bimbo Bakehouse markets Cheesecake Factory’s brown bread. Its Goldminer square loaf sandwich bread — crunchy exterior, soft interior, large fluffy slices — comes in Sourdough Regular, Cracker Wheat, Seeded Rye and Sesame.

“Toufayan’s flatbreads, authentic lavash and wraps are favorites in supermarket sandwich programs because they offer a perfect base for a variety of fillings,” says Toufayan. The breads are pliable, and their flavor complements deli meats and cheeses, making them appeal to a wide audience.

Aspire Bakeries offers a line of artisan sandwich rolls that delis can refrigerate for up to four days. “These breads are sturdy enough to hold large sandwich builds and stand up to rich sauces, dressings, and mayo without breaking down,” says Buening.

Vandemoortele, which makes private-label breads, says Bake’Ups are easy for delis to slice. “A sandwich croissant is something you rarely find in Europe. But in the U.S., they’ll use it as a carrier for sandwiches,” says Dexters.

## PACKAGING TECHNOLOGIES

Retailers and bakeries are working to improve bread packaging. Toufayan has resealable bags and aims for less plastic and more eco-friendly materials.

Aspire Bakeries has packaging that maintains freshness and integrity, especially for take and bake. “Our latest technologies prioritize shelf stability without compromising quality, featuring a window for consumers to see the product,” says Buening.

Gonnella says Modified Atmosphere Packaging (MAP) continues to gain traction as a way to extend shelf life and preserve quality. MAP involves adjusting the levels of oxygen, carbon dioxide and nitrogen inside the package.

## GATHERINGS AND HOLIDAYS

For fall football gatherings and family events, Bimbo Bakehouse makes Cheesecake Factory rolls for sliders. Toufayan markets pitas/flatbreads for snacks and platters. Vandemoortele suggests croissants on catering trays with cheese and chicken salad.

“A personal-sized boule makes the perfect edible vessel for hearty fall soups, while a larger round transforms into a crowd-pleasing centerpiece,” says DiPasquale of Rich Products.

Gonnella offers pretzel rolls for game day, and seasonal Cranberry Orange Irish Soda Bread for a nostalgic brunch. For Halloween, families can get creative with take-and-bake pizza dough.

“Parents are shaping the dough into ghosts, mummies, and jack-o’-lanterns, turning dinner prep into a hands-on seasonal activity with their kids,” says Gonnella.

DB



PHOTO COURTESY FINE RIVER

# Create a Successful Deli Private Label Program

Shoppers turn to store brands for quality and innovation.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

**W**hat was once considered a value-only market is now a space for premium, even artisanal offerings. Private brands, also known as store brands, house brands, or own brands, continue to grow in popularity. Overall sales of store brands increased \$9 billion to a record \$271 billion last year compared to 2023, according to Circana Unify+ data, as shared by the Private Label Manufacturers Association (PLMA), headquartered in New York, NY.

This represents a 3.9% rise in dollar sales in all outlets from Jan. 8 to Dec. 29, 2024, versus the same period in 2023. What's more, for the first six months of 2025, dollar sales of private label products increased 4.4% versus the same period a year ago, compared to only a 1.1% gain for national brands.

"We're seeing this demand fueled by a desire from consumers for fresh, authentic products," says Frank Belfiore, vice president of marketing and retail sales for Caputo Cheese, in Melrose Park, IL, an award-winning cheesemaker under the company's own brand, and private label manufacturer for retail of fresh mozzarella slices and balls, Parmesan, Romano, Asiago, and PEG board zipper pouch cheeses.

"Operators aren't just looking for lower prices; they're seeking standout quality, reliable sourcing, and a brandable story. Private label programs allow supermarket delis to stand out in a crowded landscape."

Several trends are driving innovation in private-label products in multiple supermarket deli categories.

"Take soup, for example," says Peggy

Davies, PLMA president. "Raley's Supermarkets in Sacramento, CA, won a PLMA's 2024 Salute to Excellence Award for its Nob Hill Trading Co. brand 'Sacratomato' Tomato Bisque soup."

On the health and wellness front, Davies adds, "Stop & Shop's Taste of Inspirations Deli line includes Lower Sodium Turkey Breast. As for premium demand, Safeway's Premo Taglio line has specialty offerings like mozzarella cheese roll with prosciutto and basil."

Private label plays an essential role in foodservice offerings in the deli, where shoppers visit for convenient, high-quality, prepared foods for on-the-go or at-home consumption.

A good example is Meal Simple by H-E-B. This prepared foods line includes



PHOTO COURTESY PINE RIVER

restaurant-quality, ready-to-eat or ready-to-cook meals, including single-serving and family-sized options. Among the selections are Italian-inspired dishes, like spaghetti with meatballs, Asian-inspired bowls, such as Butter Chicken and General Tso's Chicken, and other items like salmon with mashed potatoes and green beans.

The rising demand for quick-and-easy meals will be reflected at PLMA's 2025 "Store Brands Marketplace" Private Label Trade Show, Nov. 16-18, at the Donald E. Stephens Convention Center, Chicago, IL.

### THREE-STEP HOW-TO

First, deli operators need to have a firm grasp of their private label brand identity and what they have to offer consumers: Is it premium quality? Health and wellness? Consistency? says Darren Jones, director of private brands for Reser's Fine Foods. This Beaverton, OR-based company manufactures prepared foods for private label, such as salads, side dishes, tortillas and dips. "Once that's clear, private brands can then identify the product mix that best serves their store's shoppers."

Secondly, for the specific items, the key is starting with a clear goal, according to

Caputo's Belfiore. "We work closely with retailers to match their vision, whether it's a specific cut or various shredded options. Our recommendation? Start strong with proven cheeses and plan for growth. For instance, we recommend starting with consumer favorites, like fresh mozzarella, then expanding into specialty formats as the brand grows."

Reser's incorporates its most popular items into its retail deli customers' private brand lineup, including potato salad, macaroni salad and coleslaw, says Jones. "These represent high-volume sellers that cater to a broad demographic. Additionally, we may develop custom recipes or align with specific ingredient requirements."

Five to eight flavor SKUs are usually the average number desired in a high-quality private label soups program, says Bob Sewall, vice president of sales and marketing for Blount Five Foods. The Fall River, MA-headquartered company, makes restaurant-quality soups, entrees, and sides to sell under its own brand, like Blount's Clam Shack, and well-known retail brands, such as Panera Bread, as well as private label.

"Sometimes these are seasonal SKUs. Other times, they are specific to a certain

## WHAT THEY ARE *Saying*



"The most successful private label programs are treated like real brands, with attractive packaging, compelling stories, and a clear point of view."

— Frank Belfiore, Caputo Cheese, Melrose Park, IL

area or region where the retailer is located. For example, from the Carolinas to Florida, seafood, like she-crab soup, is popular. In the Midwest, it's white chicken chili, and in the Southwest, it's traditional Hispanic-flavored soups. These types of private-label soups serve as a differentiator. Something that a shopper can only purchase at that retailer's stores. It brings customers through the doors."

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spreads is an area where Pine River Pre-Pack, in Newton, WI, excels. The company makes cold pack, clean-label, and gourmet shelf-stable snack cheese spreads. A first-place in March for its shelf-stable garlic and herb spread at the U.S. Championship Cheese Contest is one of several awards.

“We have 24 flavors in our Pine River brand, and some 85 variations of cheese spread total, meaning 60 are for private label customers,” says Ian Behn, president. “Some customers prefer a custom formulation based on trending flavors; therefore, we have our own kitchen and R&D process to create new, exclusive products. Maple bacon, raspberry chipotle, and hot honey are recent examples.”

Third, plan and allow time for the innovation and formulation process.

“If we’re creating a new flavor, it can be four to six months, or as fast as we get approvals from the retailer, as we collaborate closely with our customers,” says Blount’s Sewall.

It can take longer for private-label cheeses.

“Many retailers are looking for a legacy cheddar to add to their private label selection,” says Tim Multerer, executive vice president of sales for Meister Cheese, a 1916-founded family-owned and operated cheesemaker in Muscoda, WI, that specializes in artisan-style American cheeses. The company is vertically integrated, meaning it has control of the product from the milk used to the packaged product.

“Some customers will come to us with an idea of what to add as a flavor innovation. What you put in or on the cheese can change it dramatically, and over time, as it ages. For example, cheddar can take several months, several iterations, and several samplings to see how the added flavor works as the cheese ages, and it might take a year for the final result. Specialty cheese is a complex animal.”

### MARKET & MERCHANDISE

Merchandising matters, says Caputo’s Belfiore. “The most successful private label programs are treated like real brands, with attractive packaging, compelling stories, and a clear point of view.”

The biggest misperception about private label products is that they compete with branded products. Not so, according to Alyssa Vescio, senior vice president of center store merchandising, sourcing, and



PHOTO COURTESY MEISTER CHEESE

product development for Whole Foods Market, a 500-plus store natural and organic products-focused retailer headquartered in Austin, TX.

Vescio spoke about the retailer’s private label program at the New York, NY-headquartered Specialty Food Association’s Fancy Food Show in June.

“So often, you see if we launch something in a private label, that a brand might feel threatened or pushed out. From our perspective, both brands are complementary, as they help elevate the category, encompassing both local and emerging brands, as well as larger national ones. We bring them all together to give our customers greater accessibility to high-quality foods, to our standards, and at a reasonable price point. That helps bring people into the category and builds the category.”

Eighty-four percent of consumers trust the quality of store-brand products as much as or more than national brands, according to a study released on June 26, 2025, titled “The Quiet Takeover of Private Label” by First Insights, an AI-enabled global retail platform based in Pittsburgh, PA. At the same time, more than half (52%) say they’ve been influenced to try a store-brand product by in-store promotions, packaging, displays or marketing materials.

“If a private brand offers something distinct and unique, that differentiation should be clearly merchandised. Popular items and top-selling sizes should be displayed adjacent to national brand counterparts to highlight the value and encourage trial. A dual-brand strategy is useful when aiming to make that difference,” says Reser’s Jones.

Retailers have used marketing and

## WHAT THEY ARE Saying

“In general, stores usually look for three to five private label cheese spreads; that’s the sweet spot.”

— Ian Behn, Pine River Pre-Pack, Inc., Newton, WI

advertising to leverage their private-label deli business.

“This includes special promotions, in-store displays, and social media campaigns,” says the PLMA’s Davies. “We encourage industry partners to get involved with our second annual national Store Brands Month in January 2026, a month-long celebration to increase consumer attention to the positive attributes of store brands — including quality, value, consistency, uniqueness and innovation — across all product categories in both brick-and-mortar and online retail formats. The principal goal is to increase shopper trial of and loyalty to store brand foods, beverages and nonfoods.”

The future of private label, especially when it comes to cheese, is premium, purposeful, and differentiated, says Caputo’s Belfiore. “Consumers are more discerning than ever. They want to know where their food comes from and what makes it special. That means operators will keep leaning into private label as a way to deliver signature offerings with real quality.”

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# HAM FOR THE HOLIDAYS AND BEYOND

A popular tradition means  
deli opportunity.

BY BOB JOHNSON

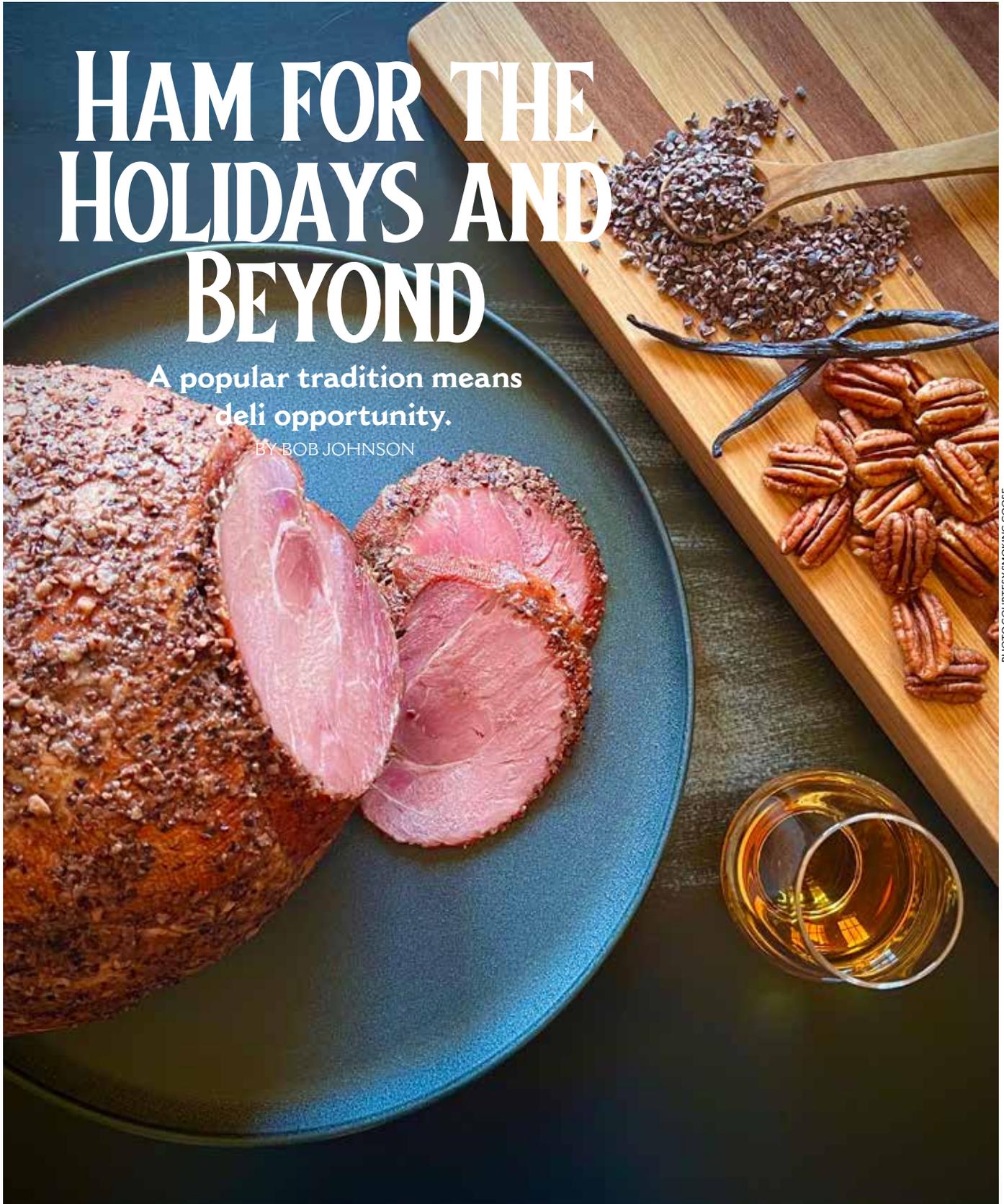


PHOTO COURTESY SMOKING GOOSE

As the season changes toward longer, warmer, and brighter days, the deli is ready for a rebirth of traditional ham at the center of holiday dining tables. While ham products are popular year-round as sandwich meats or on fine charcuterie boards, it occupies a traditional spot as the main course for holiday family dinners.

“There are definitely seasonal hams,” says Chris Eley, owner of Smoking Goose, Indianapolis, IN. “The spring leading up to Easter and starting in October is peak season for the fully cooked brined hams. Those are two seasons for the fully cooked brined hams.”

Pork is more popular than beef, as U.S. farmers produced 2.5 billion pounds of pork and 2.3 billion pounds of beef in 2024. Pork is the most widely consumed meat worldwide.

According to Circana Integrated Fresh Data, published in the International Dairy Deli Bakery Association’s *What’s In Store 2025*, service counter ham had the advantage of costing less per pound than beef, chicken, and turkey in the year ending Dec. 29, 2024.

All of the service counter meats declined in dollar sales, over the year, according to Circana data, as inflation had consumers looking for more economical alternatives.

There are opportunities serving consumers who come to the deli looking for meat to make their sandwiches special, rather than a holiday ham or charcuterie board elegant.

## A STAPLE IN DELI CASE

Premium sandwich ham is a staple in the deli cold case. While the fully cooked brined ham for the holidays is the crown jewel of the category, the deli does well to offer a variety of products that are popular with consumers year-round.

“You need seven or eight ham products throughout the deli,” says Eley. “That includes fully cooked and dry-cured. Fully cooked is more volume year-round.”

Some producers believe you can get by with even fewer ham products, as long as they are quality.

“Three to four would suffice for a well-stocked deli,” says Jeremy Schaller, chief executive, Schaller & Weber, New York, NY. “A boiled ham, which is the most basic; a smoked ham, which I would recommend a Black Forest-style ham for; a specialty style,

which I would recommend a French Bistro style; and of course, a dry-cured ham like a prosciutto.”

The optimum number of ham products in the cold case can vary depending on the size and customer base of the deli. “A specific number of ham products is determined by the size and scope of the retailer; an independent deli will have a different offering than a big-box store,” says Claire Flannery, senior director of marketing and media at Greenridge Naturals, Elk Grove Village, IL.

## PROSCIUTTO

Prosciutto has been the king of dry-cured ham for so long that some connoisseurs may see it as passe.

“When looking at the dry-cured ham category, prosciutto has had such a long period of success, it’s become so oversaturated,” says Schaller. “This led to the trend of the Spanish styles as a new even higher premium and more interesting styles, such as the Serrano and the Iberico. More recently, more producers from France entered the market with the Jambon de Bayonne-style ham. Also, Speck products, which are essentially smoked versions of the prosciutto from northern Italy, have had a moment.”

Schaller & Weber is introducing a new dry-cured ham. “Recently, we have discovered a new product, a Westphalian-style ham, which we will be importing and distributing in the U.S. market, starting in the third quarter this year,” says Schaller. “It’s a delicate dry-cured ham very lightly smoked using Beachwood. We think this will be a distinctly unique product to the American market, and we strongly believe it has tremendous potential to sell well, especially since it’s an ultra-premium product that will come at a very reasonable price point.”

Other suppliers are also finding exciting new options in the dry-cured ham category. “We’ve seen an uptick in guanciale since late last year; that has definitely been trending,” says Eley. Guanciale is cured pork made from the jowl of the pig, which offers rich, flavorful meat.

## CONVENIENCE, NUTRITION

Some producers are catering to this

## WHAT THEY ARE Saying

“Flavor innovation is another big trend, as consumers are looking for fun and interesting flavor cues, like honey chipotle.”

— Claire Flannery, senior director of marketing and media, Greenridge Naturals, Elk Grove Village, IL

important convenience market. “We are currently developing our slicing capabilities to expand our ham offerings to include pre-sliced packs for those looking for convenient on-the-go options for their busy lifestyles,” says Flannery.

She advises serving a cross-section of consumers when selecting the ham offerings. “A well-stocked deli offers a range of options for the customers, including different price points from value to premium, and an array of flavors, like classic and honey hams, to more innovative flavors,” she says.

Today’s consumer is particularly concerned with health and nutrition. “Quality and health-forward trends, including organic, no nitrates or artificial flavors, colors or fillers are big trends right now,” says Flannery. “People are health conscious and looking for top-quality deli meats, different from what their parents used to buy. This includes high-protein, and lower sodium, as well as popular certifications, including gluten-free, Whole30 and non-GMO.”

The National Pork Board promotes ham as a lean protein, saying that a 3.4-ounce serving of roasted extra-lean ham has 145 calories, 5.5 grams of fat, 21 grams of protein, 53 milligrams of cholesterol, and significant amounts of thiamin (vitamin B-1) and vitamin B-12.

“All of your cooked and pumped style hams would typically be displayed together. You may want to separate your dry-cured ham as your premium product,” advises Schaller.

DB

# CHEESE WITH SOUL

Tradition and taste from Mexico to your deli case.

BY HANNAH HOWARD

**W**alk through the deli section of almost any grocery store today, and you're likely to see a growing array of Mexican and Hispanic cheeses: crumbly Queso Fresco, golden Cotija, stretchy Oaxaca and tangy Panela. Once considered niche or ethnic specialties, these cheeses are now commanding attention far beyond the Hispanic market. They're delighting chefs, intriguing consumers, and creating fresh opportunities for specialty food retailers willing to embrace their delicious versatility.

"For deli menus, I gravitate toward cheeses like Oaxaca, Panela and Queso Fresco," says Chef Richard Sandoval, the Mexico City-born chef and restaurateur behind more than 60 restaurants worldwide. "They're mild yet incredibly adaptable — whether you're layering them into a torta, folding into a quesadilla, or balancing a spicy dressing in a composed salad."

The versatility of these cheeses is part of what makes them such a smart addition to deli cases and foodservice menus. Cotija, for example, brings a salty punch — "almost like a Mexican Parmesan," says Sandoval. "I use it to finish roasted vegetables or even in elotes-inspired pastas."

Asadero is indulgently stretchy, while aged Añejo adds umami and complexity to everything, from grilled meats to savory pastries.

Arturo Nava, senior marketing director at Hispanic Cheese Makers — Nuestro Queso, agrees. "If you're a deli operator and these cheeses are a little bit new, start with the staples: Queso Fresco, Cotija and Oaxaca. Queso Fresco is a fresh, crumbling cheese that's incredibly versatile. Cotija adds bold flavor — we call it the Parmesan of Mexico. And Oaxaca is a stringy melting cheese, perfect for snacking or hot applications."

These aren't just flavorful, flexible cheeses — they're fast-growing, too. According to Nava, Cotija is growing at 16% year-over-year, and Panela is up 35%. "The Hispanic cheese category is growing at an average of

10% annually," he says. "Compare that to the overall cheese category, which is basically flat, and you can see the opportunity."

## HOW CONSUMERS ARE CHANGING THE CHEESE CASE

The growth is fueled not just by demographic shifts, but by changing palates. "People are discovering these cheeses at restaurants and buying them at retail," Nava says. "They're realizing that Oaxaca melts beautifully, or that Queso Fresco works just as well, if not better than feta on a salad."

Sandoval sees the same curiosity in his restaurants. "I love introducing diners to cheeses they may not have encountered before — like Requesón or Queso de Bola from Yucatán. People want to discover something new, especially when it's rooted in tradition."

This discovery phase is crossing over from specialty restaurants into mainstream grocery. According to Nava, these cheeses are being used not just in traditional Hispanic cooking, but as flavorful, often healthier alternatives to mainstream cheeses. "People are substituting Cotija for Parmesan, Fresco for feta, and Oaxaca for mozzarella," he says.

"And it's not just Hispanic consumers driving this," Nava continues. "We're seeing strong adoption among general market shoppers. The quality and versatility of these cheeses speak for themselves. Once people understand how to use them, they become pantry staples."

Sandoval emphasizes that educating consumers doesn't have to mean compromising on authenticity. "When we feature Añejo in a compound butter or grate Cotija over roasted squash, it creates a bridge. We don't need to water down the tradition — we just need to offer a context."

He also highlights the importance of telling the story behind the cheese. "Mexican cheese isn't just a product — it's a legacy.

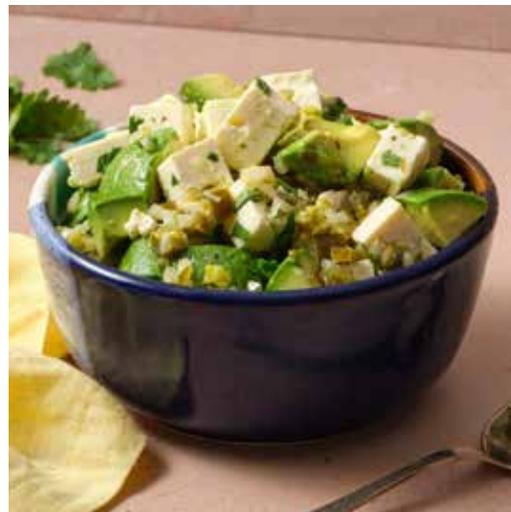


PHOTO COURTESY HISPANIC CHEESE MAKERS

When we use Requesón or Queso Panela, we're continuing a tradition that goes back generations. There's a soul to it."

## TIPS FOR RETAILERS

So how can deli operators and specialty retailers tap into this booming category?

"There are a lot of cross-merchandising opportunities," says Nava. "Bundle Cotija with corn, crema, and Tajín for an elote promotion. Or pair Oaxaca with tortillas and salsa for a taco night kit. When people see how these cheeses fit into meals, they're more likely to try them."

Education is another key. While Hispanic shoppers are already familiar with these cheeses, general market consumers might need some guidance. Use signage, recipe cards, and social media to spotlight dishes, like chilaquiles with Queso Fresco or molletes with Asadero.

Foodservice professionals can benefit, too. "The key is understanding both the mouthfeel and the salt balance these cheeses bring to the plate," says Sandoval.

Aged cheeses like Añejo can add punch to compound butters or breadcrumb crusts, while mild varieties, like Panela, work beautifully in composed salads or cold sandwiches.

Nava adds that retailers and foodservice

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operators should also consider how these cheeses can serve as strategic substitutes. “With inflation affecting commodity cheeses, our customers are looking for value and quality. A cheese like Panela or Quesadilla can be both affordable and flavorful, offering something new and compelling.”

**ARTISAN ROOTS AND MODERN GROWTH**

Cheesemaking in Mexico is a rich and

diverse tradition, from small regional producers to modern facilities like Nuestro Queso’s state-of-the-art plant in Illinois. “We make our cheeses with authentic recipes, no rBST, and the same taste you’d find in Mexico or Puerto Rico,” says Nava. “But we also meet the quality and safety standards our large retail and foodservice customers demand.”

Sandoval emphasizes the importance of sourcing. “The soul of Mexican cuisine

is found in those small-batch, handcrafted varieties that tell a story,” he says. “When I can work with regional cheesemakers who understand the land and the seasonality, the flavor is entirely different.”

At Nuestro Queso, honoring tradition is part of the business model. “We still hand-braid Oaxaca cheese,” says Nava. “There’s artistry involved. But we’ve also invested over \$30 million in automation and sustainability so we can scale without compromising quality.”

**HISPANIC CHEESE PRIMER: KNOW YOUR QUESOS**

**Queso Fresco:** A soft, white, fresh cheese with a mild flavor and crumbly texture.

**Cotija:** A salty, aged cheese with a crumbly texture. Known as the “Parmesan of Mexico,” Cotija is used to finish dishes like elotes, beans, roasted vegetables and pastas.

**Oaxaca:** A stringy, semi-soft cheese that’s perfect for melting. Similar in taste and texture to mozzarella, Oaxaca is wound into balls and easily pulled apart into ribbons.

**Panela:** A smooth, fresh cheese that holds its shape well and is often used in cold dishes or grilled.

**Añejo:** An aged version of Queso Fresco that becomes firmer and saltier as it matures. It’s often grated over dishes.

**Asadero:** A melty, creamy cheese similar to Monterey Jack.

**Requesón:** A fresh, ricotta-like cheese that’s soft, spreadable, and slightly tangy. **DB**

**WHAT’S NEXT: SPICY CHEESE, SNACKABLE FORMATS**

As consumer enthusiasm grows, so do innovations. “Spicy cheeses are trending,” says Nava. “Our jalapeño Panela is really taking off.”

The company is also responding to the snackification trend with Oaxaca snack sticks and bite-sized portions. “It’s a cheese that’s stringy and fun, like mozzarella, so it makes a great portable snack.”

Convenience is another driver. “We’ve launched easy-open packaging that makes it simpler for consumers to access the cheese,” says Nava. “It might sound small, but in a category that’s often clunky, it makes a big difference.”

Sustainability is also key. “We built a lagoon system to treat water used in our plant, and we’re optimizing energy use across the board,” Nava explains. “It’s about honoring the cheese and the planet.”

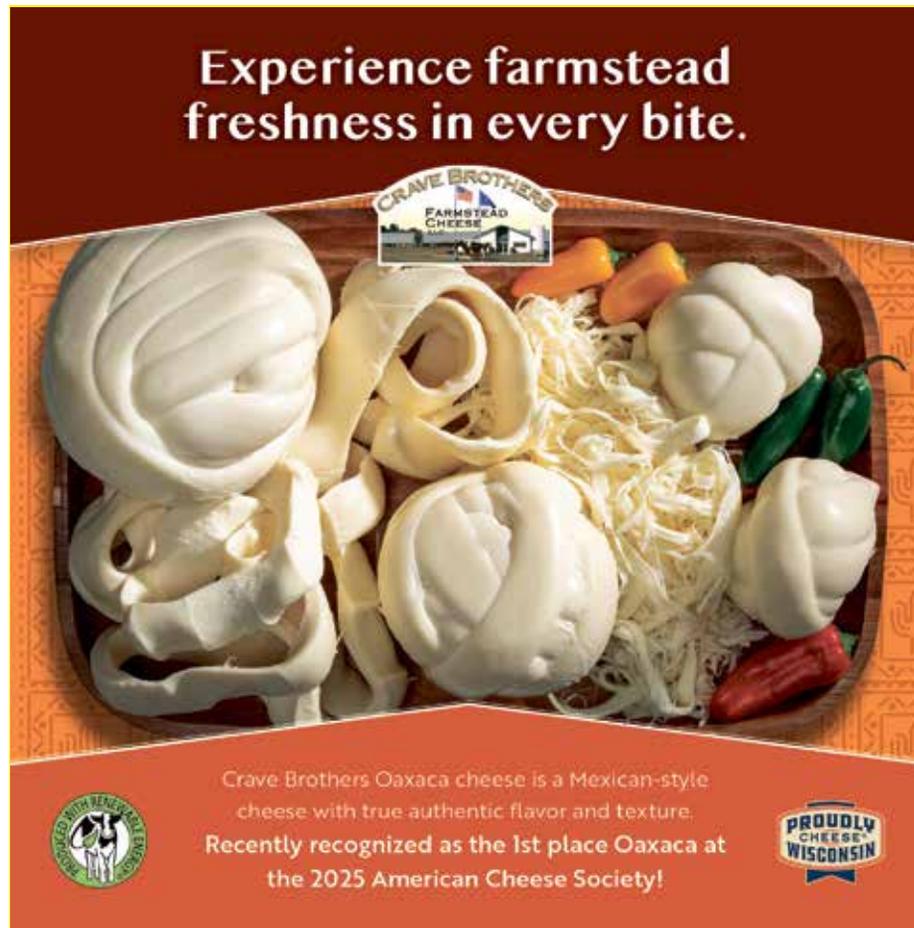
**THE TAKEAWAY: NOW’S THE TIME**

With rapid growth, expanding consumer interest, and a deep cultural story to tell, Mexican and Hispanic cheeses are poised to become staples not just in tacos and tamales, but across menus and retail shelves.

“Mexican cuisine is the only cuisine recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity,” says Sandoval. “That speaks to the importance of its traditions, its ingredients, and the people who keep those alive. Cheese is a huge part of that story.”

For delis and specialty retailers looking to add value, drive discovery, and serve an increasingly curious customer base, embracing this category is both a smart business move and a delicious one.

“Once people try them,” Nava says, “they fall in love.” **DB**



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# RESER'S FINE FOODS CELEBRATING 75 YEARS OF 'GOOD TIMES'

**F**ounded in 1950 in Beaverton, OR, Reser's Fine Foods, Inc. built its business on Grandma Mildred Reser's original potato salad recipe created in her rural farmhouse kitchen. In 1951, Mildred started selling her potato salad to Safeway stores throughout Oregon, and in 1952, the business moved from the farmhouse kitchen to its first plant in Cornelius, OR — a small 20 by 50 building.

In 1960, Mildred named her son, Al Reser, president. Al led the company through over 40 years of growth, and Mrs. Reser's Salads became Reser's Fine Foods.

Today, its foods are sold across the U.S. and Canada, and the company employs more than 5,000 people at 14 major facilities throughout North America.

Despite its growth and success, Reser's remains a family-owned, privately held business — guided by the same goals, values, and innovative spirit that have nurtured its success for 75 years.

"Reser's is synonymous with good food, good people and good times," says Mark Reser, chief executive and son of Al Reser. The family remains at the center of the company's history and success.

In celebration of its 75th anniversary, Reser's Fine Foods, Inc., called on collegiate vocal groups to take part in a national competition to help create the brand's first-ever "Good Times" jingle. The company awarded a combined total of \$75,000 to winning college vocal groups. Winners were announced in June. **DB**



*Pictured are Grandma Mildred, Earl, Al and Ida Reser.*

PHOTOS COURTESY RESER'S FINE FOODS



*In 1961, Al Reser took the company public to raise money for a new production plant, and Reser's expanded to the Allen Avenue Facility in Portland, OR (35,000 square feet).*

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