

# DELI BUSINESS

MARKETING MERCHANDISING MANAGEMENT PROCUREMENT

WINTER 2025-2026 \$14.95



## *Plant-Based* **TAKES ROOT IN THE DELI**

### **ALSO INSIDE**

DELI BARS  
DUTCH CHEESES  
DIPS & SPREADS  
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## ANNOUNCEMENTS



### CHARCUTERIE ARTISANS ACQUIRED BY INDUSTRIAL OPPORTUNITY PARTNERS

Charcuterie Artisans, parent company of Creminelli Fine Meats and Daniele, Mapleville, RI, announced its acquisition by an investment fund managed by Industrial Opportunity Partners. The company will expand capacity, strengthen customer partnerships, and drive innovation across its portfolio of Italian-style meats. To lead the next phase of growth, Jeff "Trip" Tripician has been appointed president and chief executive officer, and John Brock, executive vice president of sales and marketing. Central to this investment is the continued expansion of the production facilities in Rhode Island and Salt Lake City.

[Charcuterie.com](http://Charcuterie.com)



### AUSSIE SELECT LAUNCHES AT WEGMANS

Aussie Select, Marietta, GA, launched at Wegmans Food Markets Oct. 6. Crafted in the U.S. from premium Australian pasture-raised lamb, the all-natural line debuts with two sliced-at-the-deli items: Lamb Prime Rib and Lamb Pastrami. "This launch marks an extraordinary milestone in our journey," says Jaclyn Oyola, chief executive of World Select Cuts, parent company of Aussie Select. "Wegmans has long been known for excellence in their deli and prepared food programs. To now see Aussie Select products behind their deli counter feels full circle for me personally, as Wegmans was my go-to grocery store when I was a student at Cornell University."

[Aussieselect.com](http://Aussieselect.com)



### WCMA LAUNCHES CHEESEEXPO 2026 REGISTRATION, SPONSORSHIPS

CheeseExpo is set for April 14-16, 2026, at the newly renovated Baird Center in Milwaukee, WI. The new website, launched by conference hosts Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association (WCMA) and the Center for Dairy Research (CDR), offers all the early details dairy professionals need to start making their plans for the upcoming event: registration, exhibitor, and sponsorship information; and lodging details. Early-bird registration pricing ends Jan. 27.

[Cheeseexpo.org](http://Cheeseexpo.org)



### VERMONT CREAMERY RECERTIFIES AS B CORP

Vermont Creamery has once again earned B Corporation recertification, achieving its highest score yet: 89 points. The company first became a Certified B Corporation in 2014, joining a global movement of businesses that balance purpose and profit. This year's assessment highlighted Vermont Creamery's steady progress across multiple areas of the business. The company has invested in employee engagement and support programs, including a partnership with Green Mountain United Way's Working Bridges program to strengthen employee wellbeing.

[Vermontcreamery.com](http://Vermontcreamery.com)

## NEW PRODUCTS



### GRILLO'S PICKLES TAKING IT UP A NOTCH WITH DILL THICKLES

Grillo's Pickles is taking snack time up a notch with Dill Thickles, perfect for fall gatherings, Sunday football, kids' lunch boxes, or just a guilt-free treat straight from the jar. Dill Thickles deliver three times the thickness of a classic dill pickle chip, offering the balance of crunch and snackability. With 5 calories per serving, simple garden-fresh ingredients, and no artificial preservatives or colors, they're as wholesome as they are delicious. Certified kosher and made cold, shipped cold, sold cold, these pickles are guaranteed to stay crisp from jar to bite.

[Grillos.com](http://Grillos.com)



### HORMEL PEPPERONI UNVEILS TWO NEW FLAVORS

The makers of Hormel Pepperoni have two new additions to its lineup: Hormel Pepperoni with Jalapeño and Hormel Pepperoni Dill Pickle Flavored. Crafted with high-quality ingredients and designed for flavor seekers, Hormel Pepperoni with Jalapeño delivers a bold, spicy kick, while Hormel Pepperoni Dill Pickle Flavored offers a tangy, craveable twist. The new pepperonis are now available at major grocery retailers nationwide and online.

[Hormel.com](http://Hormel.com)



### BITCHIN' SAUCE HEATS THINGS UP

Bitchin' Sauce, Carlsbad, CA, is turning up the heat with its first-ever brand collaboration, a partnership with Austin, TX-based hot sauce, Yellowbird Foods. The limited-edition Serrano and Habanero Bitchin' Sauces combine Bitchin's signature smooth, savory base with Yellowbird's fiery, fresh pepper blends for a taste experience that is as saucy as it is spicy. Bitchin' Sauce Serrano and/or Habanero will debut in Costco Roadshows across the Northwest and Texas, as well as Albertsons and Vons stores in Southern California.

[Bitchinsauce.com](http://Bitchinsauce.com)



### ROGUE RIVER BLUE CHEESE AVAILABLE

Rogue Creamery, Central Point, OR, is announcing that its 2025 vintage of Rogue River Blue cheese is now available. This cheese is the Southern Oregon artisan cheese-maker's seasonal specialty, with flavors that reflect the unique terroir of its region. After aging for nine to 11 months, the wheels are hand-wrapped in grape leaves from nearby Troon Vineyard that have been soaked in pear liqueur. Nearly a year after their creation, the wheels are released to be savored by connoisseurs across the U.S. and in over a dozen countries.

[Roguecreamery.com](http://Roguecreamery.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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COVER  
STORY

# *Plant-Based* **TAKES ROOT IN THE DELI**

Naturally sourced products can grow deli sales.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

PHOTOS COURTESY UNREAL DELI





**P**lant-based foods have moved from niche to necessity at New Seasons Market, a 22-store Portland, OR-based retailer known for blending innovation with community appeal. Once considered a fringe offering, plant-based options are now a cornerstone of the deli, where products, such as meatless “ham” and “salami” and vegan mac and cheese, share space with traditional favorites.

“The rise of flexitarianism, where customers reduce meat intake without fully eliminating it, is fueling demand for hybrid products and versatile plant-based options,” says Bill Hussey, New Seasons’ research and development chef for prepared foods.

To meet this demand, New Seasons has diversified its deli with a broad lineup of plant-based options that blur the line between indulgence and wellness. The mix includes meat-free deli meats, soy curls and tofu, and house-made comfort foods like plant-based barbecued brisket pizza. Popular cold selections include an Italian Grinder sandwich made with mushroom protein-based meats, a Thai Veggie Wrap, and an array of vibrant salads, from Coastal Kale and Apple Curry Couscous to Beet and Tangerine Salad with Orange Miso Vinaigrette.

“Offering these items is no longer

optional,” says Hussey. “It’s essential for staying relevant and meeting evolving customer expectations around health, sustainability and convenience.”

### PLANT-FORWARD TRENDS

Plant-based foods — made from fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, seeds and legumes — range from whole foods, like beans and tofu, to alternatives, such as plant-based meats and cheeses.

According to the Plant Based Foods Association (PBFA), U.S. retail sales of plant-based foods, which span over 20 segments, held steady at around \$8.1 billion annually from 2022 to 2024. Some areas like deli proteins and tofu are growing, even as sales of plant-based meats have softened due to price gaps and inflation.

“The market is stabilizing after its pandemic boom years, driven more by repeat shoppers and steady product improvements than rapid expansion,” says Hannah Lopez, head of marketplace development for the San Francisco, CA-based PBFA.

A plant-based diet doesn’t mean going vegan; it simply emphasizes plant-forward eating while reducing, not eliminating, animal products. Interestingly, soups and chilis (up 8.1%), appetizers (up 7.9%), and salads (up 6.8%) led all deli prepared categories in dollar growth for the 52 weeks ending

September 2025, according to Circana, Integrated Fresh, Total U.S. data, as shared by the Chicago, IL-based market research and technology company. Notably, these are all traditionally plant-forward segments.

“Flexitarianism has become the norm,” says Jenny Goldfarb, founder and chief executive officer of Unreal Deli, a Los Angeles, CA-based manufacturer of premium, plant-based deli meats, such as Corn’d Beef and Roasted Turk’y, available as sliced packages or in bulk for slice-to-order. “About one in three Americans now identify as flexitarian.”

Health remains the top reason people buy plant-based products, followed closely by taste.

“Consumers want clean-label, nutrient-dense foods that don’t compromise flavor,” says Minh Tsai, founder of Hodo Foods, in Oakland, CA, which sells a variety of organic, plant-based products made from organic, non-GMO soybeans. “Tofu and tempeh fit well for today’s flexitarian diets and even appeal to GLP-1 users looking for balanced protein sources.”

Plant-based deli bowls are among the top sellers at Don’s Prepared Foods, in Schwenksville, PA. “Consumers are choosing options, like our Korean BBQ Chick’n and Unwrapped Burrito Bowls, because they offer complete protein, global flavor and convenience,” says Carl Cappelli, senior vice



president of sales and business development. “With dining out costs up, shoppers want ready-to-eat meals that feel both healthy and satisfying.”

Producers like Prime Roots, which makes its plant-based deli meats primarily from koji, a type of edible fungus (like mushroom roots), see the deli as the next growth area.

“Produce has organics, and snack and beverage categories have already gone through a clean-label shift; now the deli is catching up,” says Kimberlie Le, co-founder and chief executive officer of the Berkeley, CA-based company. “The average age of the deli shopper is around 55. Offering plant-based foods attracts Gen Z and Millennials, thus future-proofing the department.”

### DELI OFFERINGS TAKE ROOT & GROW

Once centered on burgers, the plant-based foods category now spans realistic deli meats, artisanal cheeses, seasoned tofu, and globally inspired salads, each designed to fit modern eating habits and flexitarian lifestyles.

In plant-based meats, the strongest gains come from realistic deli-style forms. PBFA data show shreds, strips, and chunks up 8%, and fillets, steaks, and cutlets up 16%, reflecting a move toward formats that work naturally in sandwiches and wraps.

“The big shift now is toward real deli functionality,” says Unreal Deli’s Goldfarb, whose company’s top sellers include Unreal Bacon, crispy and smoky for BLTs, and Unreal Corn’d Beef, a beet-colored slice perfect for Reubens. “We continue to focus on culinary-driven textures and cooking behavior — thin-sliced stackability, pan crisping, and hot-hold performance.”

Black Forest Ham-Inspired and Italian Turkey-Inspired clean plant proteins are neck-and-neck as Prime Roots’ best sellers, followed by roast beef- and salami-like varieties. Regional flavor lines, including Middle Eastern and Canadian-inspired profiles, are planned for 2026.

“Our pepperoni and bacon are gaining traction in pizza programs,” says Le.

Fish analogs are hot right now, according to Jennifer Gabel, president and owner of Encompasssales.com, which represents BeanStalk Foods, an Oxford, NJ, producer of plant-based meat alternatives and snacks. “Our Seafood Rings taste better than conventional calamari, and the pastrami texture and flavor are on point.”

Plant-based cheeses are experiencing a renaissance, with sales of Mexican blends



up 20% and feta, blue, and Italian styles also climbing. UMYUM, located in Vancouver, British Columbia, is leading this artisanal turn by combining cashews with traditional cheesemaking methods. Its Monroe, a Camembert-style cheese, is most popular.

“Monroe is a semi-soft cheese with a bloomy rind and creamy, velvet-smooth texture,” says Katherine Corden, co-founder and chief executive officer. “Aroma, flavor, and texture are the most important factors for experience, above price or convenience.”

Building on Monroe’s success, UMYUM released soft cheeses in flavors like, Mango Chutney & Saffron, Za’atar & Spices, and Coffee & Black Pepper, showcasing how flavor adventure and craftsmanship are driving sales.

Farmer Foodie is finding its niche with pantry-stable innovation. Its Cashew Parmesan, a sprinkle-on or mix-in, fills what Alison Elliott, founder and chief executive officer of the Boston, MA-based company, calls “a gap for long-shelf-life, clean, dairy-free toppers.” The company’s turmeric Golden Cheddar and Italian Herb varieties come in 3.5-ounce plastic shaker-top containers. More recently, these products are also available in bulk bags for foodservice-type applications.

Tofu, a long-standing deli staple, is enjoying renewed momentum. PBFA reports unseasoned tofu sales up 10%, and seasoned refrigerated tofu skyrocketing 128.5%, reflecting the appeal of both simplicity and convenience.

## WHAT THEY ARE Saying

“Merchandise plant-based within the main deli set, not an isolated ‘special diet’ section.”

— Jenny Goldfarb, Unreal Deli, Los Angeles, CA

“Ask anyone who’s tried our tofu, and they’ll tell you it’s outrageously delicious,” says Hodo Foods’ Tsai. “Tofu belongs at the center of the table.”

The company has helped redefine the category with its handmade, high-protein soymilk products. A 12-ounce package of Organic Extra Firm Tofu, for example, packs in 48 grams of protein. Hodo’s Lightly Fried Tofu line, featuring Chili Crisp, Golden Turmeric, and Gochujang flavors, caters to the growing interest in spicy, fermented global foods among Millennials and Gen Z shoppers, who associate these flavors with health and wellness.

Beyond proteins, deli innovation is thriving in salads, dips and ready meals. Don’s Prepared Foods’ reports growth in three areas: Grain Salads, Clean Dips and Clean



Deli Salads. The company's Artisan Deli Salad Cups, including Roasted Corn, Mango Lime Quinoa, and Seven Grain Salad, have become grab-and-go staples. New offerings, like Mediterranean Quinoa and Edamame with Corn and Sun-Dried Tomato, says Cappelli, "tap into fresh, globally inspired flavor trends."

Overall, PBFA-sourced data shows that prepared plant-based chili and soup rose 9.6% and 7.3% in 2023, and clean-label dips and spreads increased 2.6%, indicating that comfort, nutrition, and convenience are converging.

### PLANT-BASED DOLLARS

Selling more plant-based foods in the supermarket deli depends on visibility, integration, and inspiration. PBFA data shows that 20% of shoppers still cite difficulty finding plant-based options, underscoring the importance of clear signage and placement.

"Ease of findability is critical to capturing shopper attention and driving purchases," says Lopez.

The most effective strategy is integrated merchandising or placing plant-based items directly alongside animal-based counterparts, according to PBFA case-study results. In one instance, when a retailer moved plant-based cheese from the produce section to the conventional cheese set, sales increased nearly sevenfold.

At New Seasons Market, success starts with exposure and inspiration, says Hussey. "We feature plant-based products in both the deli case and grab-and-go sections to capture different shopper missions."

The store also cross-utilizes ingredients, like soy curls and vegan deli slices, across recipes to showcase versatility and inspire meal ideas.

"Strategic pairings, such as vegan cheeses with breads and sauces, encourage shoppers to build full meals," adds Hussey.

UMYUM's Corden agrees that integration is essential. "Plant-based items should be merchandised right alongside traditional proteins and dairy, so shoppers view them as everyday choices, not outliers."

She adds that sampling remains one of the strongest conversion tools. "In-store tastings or winery pairings let customers experience the flavor and build trust in the category."

Interestingly, of the 59% of U.S. households that purchased plant-based foods in 2024, nearly 80% returned for repeat buys, according to the Good Food Institute, a Washington, D.C.-headquartered nonprofit think tank advancing alternative proteins.

"Cross-merchandising, like pairing plant-based cheese with crackers or fruit, positions these products as entertaining-ready and mainstream," adds Corden.

Unreal Deli's Goldfarb recommends a similar approach. "Merchandise plant-based

## WHAT THEY ARE *Saying*

"Produce has organics, and snack and beverage categories have already gone through a clean-label shift; now the deli is catching up."

— Kimberlie Le, Prime Roots, Berkeley, CA

within the main deli set, not an isolated 'special diet' section. Bundling with breads, condiments, and slaws, such as a Reuben kit with rye, kraut, dressing, and our Corn'd Beef has proven effective. Where permitted, quick griddle demos, such as BLT bites and mini Reubens, outperform static displays."

Sixty-three percent of households that increased plant-based purchasing in 2024 say promotions or coupons were the top factor encouraging trial, according to PBFA data, underscoring the importance of promotional pricing.

For traditional plant proteins, Hodo Foods recommends deli-prepared applications. "Tofu is no longer just a niche ingredient; it's a versatile canvas to showcase global cuisine. Deli operators can offer tofu-based salads, wraps, or stir-fries to drive trial," says Tsai.

BeanStalk Foods' Gabel echoes the importance of visibility. "Operators should carve out a defined section for plant-based meats, so they don't get lost in the shuffle. Clear labeling and sampling are the largest ways to drive traffic for this category."

Additionally, Don's Prepared Foods' Cappelli highlights the importance of complete meal merchandising. "Consumers seek meal solutions in the retail deli. They want healthy, flavorful sides more than meat alternatives. Retailers should group all meal components together and leverage digital channels, such as coupons and retail media platforms, to reach shoppers online."

In the end, plant-based is no longer a specialty; it's standard deli business. The main message and outstanding opportunity for deli operators is clear: Plant-based belongs in the main case, not the margins. Done right, it doesn't just complement the deli; it can grow sales.

**DB**





# THE EVOLVING DELI BAR

**A look at how innovation, flavor, and authenticity are redefining the segment.**

BY KEITH LORIA

Once seen as a place to grab quick sides and simple salads, the grocery deli bar has transformed into a showcase of global flavors, ready-to-eat convenience and handcrafted quality. The modern deli bar looks different than it did a decade ago and even more so since the pandemic. Self-serve stations have evolved into curated experiences where quality, presentation, and safety go hand in hand.

When it comes to consumer engagement and sales volume, Giuliana Pozzuto, director of marketing for DeLallo, Mount Pleasant, PA, notes the self-serve olive bar is king.

"It's the centerpiece of the deli department — a sensory, interactive experience that draws shoppers in with vibrant color, variety and aroma," she says. "Beyond being a sales driver, the olive bar gives the deli a stage to cross-merchandise complementary items, like charcuterie meats, specialty cheeses, crackers and spreads."

Grilled artichokes, peppers and asparagus continue to be top performers at deli bars, often merchandised alongside olives as part of antipasti selections.

That focus on freshness and authenticity also drives growth for Valesco Foods, based in Hackensack, NJ, where the company's marinated olive blends, such as the Pitted Gourmet Olive Blend and Festive Blend are connecting with shoppers looking for simple, flavorful and wholesome options.

"People want simple, delicious ingredients that feel special, and olives do exactly that," says Al Sozer, president of the company. "They're flavorful, satisfying and completely plant-forward without trying to be."

Meanwhile, in the hot food segment, chicken continues to rule the roost. Katie Klaus, senior marketing manager at Broaster Company in Beloit, WI, notes traditional bone-in

fried chicken still draws loyal customers, while boneless options like tenders and wings appeal to younger generations.

"Chicken is trending right now," she says. "If you aren't offering it, you should be. There are so many ways delis can tap into that demand."

## GLOBAL FLAVORS MEET LOCAL TASTE

As tastes evolve, shoppers are seeking more adventurous and globally inspired flavors, from Mediterranean marinades to spicy chicken rubs that deliver heat and excitement.

"We've seen a strong shift toward bolder, more adventurous flavor profiles in the deli department," says Pozzuto. "Consumers are embracing Mediterranean-inspired, marinated, and spiced options — from fiery Calabrian-style olives to citrusy herb blends and bold garlic marinades."

Pozzuto notes the company's top seller continues to be the DeLallo Pitted Olive

## WHAT THEY ARE Saying

"Chicken is trending right now. If you aren't offering it, you should be. There are so many ways delis can tap into that demand."

— Katie Klaus, Broaster Company, Beloit, WI

Jubilee, a colorful medley of olives marinated in Mediterranean herbs and spices.

That global spirit extends to the hot bar, too. Klaus notes delis are finding success by offering international twists on familiar comfort foods.



PHOTO COURTESY BROASTER COMPANY



"Global-inspired flavors are hot right now," she says. "Using sriracha, chipotle, or Nashville hot spices right after cooking helps the flavor melt onto the chicken. Or they can expand sauces to include Korean sweet-and-spicy or citrus-based combinations."

Still, authenticity and craftsmanship remain timeless selling points, something Adam La Greca, co-owner of Rachel's Table, Greenville, RI, takes to heart. Based on Old World family recipes, the company's line of marinated seafood, Italian-style salads, and stuffed peppers and olives blend tradition with convenience.

### THE POWER OF PRESENTATION

Once the products are perfected, getting shoppers to notice them is all about presentation, and at the deli bar, visual appeal can make or break a sale.

Sozer says a little creativity goes a long way. "It's all about creating inspiration for shoppers. We always recommend placing olives near items they naturally complement. A little signage can go a long way,

and once people get a taste, they're hooked."

Sampling is also central to Rachel's Table's success. La Greca personally conducts in-store demos, believing that one bite can make a customer for life.

"No one's going to sell my product the way I will," he says. "Until people actually

taste it, they may be hesitant. I'm very liberal with samples because tasting is believing."

On the hot side, Klaus emphasizes the importance of consistency and visibility.

"It's critical to understand your hot-holding equipment and maintain your brand



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BROASTER COMPANY



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standard,” she says. “Proper tagging and timing make all the difference. Customers notice when food looks fresh and cared for.”

When done right, presentation and engagement turn a simple deli bar into an experience that draws shoppers back again and again.

### PRESENTATION AND PACKAGING

Today’s shoppers are looking for products that look good, taste great and fit their lifestyles, with sustainability increasingly part of the equation.

“In olive bars, shoppers can mix and match what they want,” says Sozer. “For grab-and-go, our clear deli cups offer that same convenience; they’re ready to eat, perfectly portioned, and showcase the quality inside.”

For La Greca, convenience doesn’t mean cutting corners. One of Rachel’s Table’s most popular products is a single-serve stuffed cherry pepper, individually pouched for freshness.

“It’s become one of our most successful new products,” he says. “It’s shelf-stable, has a long life, and it’s a great impulse buy.”

Even in the hot bar, presentation and packaging matter. Klaus notes clear communication, rotation standards and safe self-service practices all influence sales.

“Retailers should test their holding equipment and establish clear standards for when to replenish,” she says. “That’s what keeps quality high and customers confident.”

### HEALTH AND WELLNESS

As shoppers prioritize wellness and transparency, deli suppliers are leaning into clean

labels, fresh ingredients, and traditional methods that put quality first.

Sozer notes that plant-based eating has made olives a natural fit for today’s health-conscious shopper.

“They’re simple and real. The kind of food you can feel good about,” he says. “People don’t want overly processed items. They want freshness and authenticity.”

La Greca’s approach is equally rooted in tradition and integrity.

“A lot of our items are handmade, and the products we use are top quality,” he says. “That care mirrors how my family cooked. If it wasn’t good enough for Rachel’s table, it wouldn’t be good enough for our customers.”

On the hot food side, quality and safety go hand in hand, according to Kraus.

“Some consumers are hesitant with self-service,” she says. “Offering sanitizer, maintaining handwashing protocols, and following first-in, first-out standards all help reassure customers and protect product integrity. Training employees to follow consistent procedures is key to keeping food fresh and appealing.”

### THE FUTURE OF DELI BARS

As the lines between grocery and restaurants continue to blur, deli bars are positioned for significant growth. After all, shoppers crave convenience but refuse to compromise on flavor, freshness or authenticity and that combination is opening new doors for innovation.

Klaus sees major potential for hot prepared foods, particularly chicken.

“Smaller grocery stores that don’t offer prepared foods can easily get into the category with high-quality frozen options,” she says. “We’ve noticed a real opportunity for

## WHAT THEY ARE Saying

“It’s all about creating inspiration for shoppers. We always recommend placing olives near items they naturally complement. A little signage can go a long way, and once people get a taste, they’re hooked.”

— Al Sozer, Valesco Foods, Hackensack, NJ

operators to grow without the waste that comes with fresh prep.”

For Sozer, the next phase is all about global flavor and portability.

“As delis evolve into more of a snacking and meal-solution destination, we’re developing new ready-to-eat olive options that are flavorful, healthy, and easy to enjoy anywhere,” he says.

And for La Greca, the future will always be guided by authenticity.

“We keep evolving, but we never lose the handcrafted quality that defines us,” he says. “That’s what keeps people coming back — real food made with real care.”

From olives and antipasti to fried chicken and hot peppers, the grocery deli bar has become a destination for discovery. In the modern marketplace, the deli bar has found its second act, one that celebrates freshness, authenticity, and the joy of sharing good food.

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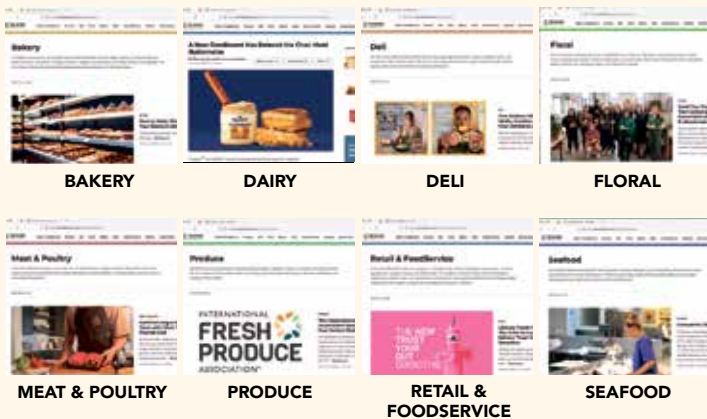




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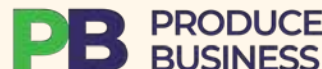
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# GO DUTCH FOR CHEESE

**Culture, craft and category growth opportunities with these cheeses.**

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

PHOTO COURTESY OLD AMSTERDAM



Cheese has been part of Dutch life for more than two millennia, long before windmills and tulips became national symbols. Archaeological findings from 800 BC show that early farmers in the Low Countries were already producing cheese. By the Middle Ages, monks and merchants expanded production and built markets in Haarlem, Leiden, and Alkmaar that still operate today. By the 17th century, cheeses, such as Gouda and Edam, were shipped worldwide.

Today, the Netherlands ranks third among global cheese exporters, with \$5.8 billion in sales in 2024, after Germany (\$6.7 billion) and Italy (\$5.8 billion), according to a recent analysis from [WorldsTopExports.com](https://www.worldstopexports.com).

"Here in the U.S., when people think of Dutch cheese, they almost automatically think of Gouda," says Bryan Bland, specialty cheese category manager for Cincinnati, OH-headquartered The Kroger Co., which includes the over 1,100 Murray's Cheese shops in the retailer's supermarkets. "Over time, Gouda has evolved into a style rather than a strictly Dutch product, which means its connection to the Netherlands has blurred. That's why education is so



PHOTO COURTESY MURRAY'S CHEESE

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PHOTO COURTESY MARIEKE GOUDA

## WHAT THEY ARE *Saying*

“You can do so much with Gouda. We make truffle, smoked cumin, honey clover, fenugreek, stinging nettle and jalapeño. They’re all based on Dutch tradition.”

— Marieke Penterman,  
Marieke Gouda, Thorp, WI

important to help our customers understand what makes true Dutch Gouda, Edam or Maasdam distinct.”

### DUTCH CHEESES DEFINED

Dutch cheeses are traditionally semi-hard to hard cheeses made from cow’s milk, and known for their smooth texture, rich flavor, and craftsmanship, according to Sophie Elverding, international junior brand manager for Old Amsterdam, made by Westland Kaasspecialiteiten B.V., in the Netherlands. “Styles, such as Edam, Maasdam, and Leyden, each bring a unique twist that is mild and salty, nutty with holes, or spiced with cumin.”

Marieke Penterman, who grew up on a dairy farm in the Netherlands, moved to the U.S. and founded Marieke Gouda in Thorp, WI, in 2006, says it’s the process that defines the product.

“Dutch cheeses are traditionally made with cow’s milk and use a washed-curd process, aged on wooden shelves,” says

Penterman, who in 2024 became the fourth woman ever to earn the prestigious Wisconsin Master Cheesemaker certification. “Buttery, balanced, and creamy is the universal image of Gouda and Dutch cheeses in general at a young age. As it matures, the texture and flavor deepen, developing those lovely tyrosine crystals in older wheels. It’s a diverse cheese that fits almost every palate in the family.”

Texture and versatility drive demand, says Kaya Freiman, brand communications manager for Emmi Roth USA, in Stoughton, WI, a domestic specialty cheese maker and importer of Swiss cheeses. “The firm, smooth texture of most Dutch-style cheeses makes them good for cubing, slicing and snacking,” says Freiman. “They’re mild, approachable, and melt well, fitting today’s demand for convenient, high-protein foods.”

Even with freight costs and tariffs, the supply of imported Dutch cheeses has remained steady, notes Josh Rosen, brand manager for FrieslandCampina North

American Consumer Dairy, in Paramus, NJ. “We’ve invested in diversified production and logistics to keep availability consistent.”

With more U.S. companies now making Dutch-style cheeses, supply is stronger and less affected by shipping challenges and duty.

### TRADITION MEETS INNOVATION

Dutch cheese continues to perform strongly in U.S. delis, bridging Old World craftsmanship with New World tastes.

“The most common are Gouda and Edam, but some delis also carry Maasdam,” says Old Amsterdam’s Elverding. “A balanced assortment should include a range of maturities and flavored options, such as smoked, chile, or cumin, along with wedges, slices, and snack-size portions.”

Gouda remains the category’s anchor. “Red Wax and Smoked Goudas are our most popular, with mid-aged options like Parrano offering sweeter, nutty notes,” says Murray’s Cheese’s Bland.



Old Amsterdam leads in the aged segment, combining traditional Dutch methods with “a touch of Italian inspiration,” Elverding says, to create its award-winning aged Gouda with creamy, savory flavor and sweet undertones.

Marieke Gouda’s Penterman continues to build on tradition through flavor innovation. “You can do so much with Gouda,” she says. “We make truffle, smoked cumin, honey clover, fenugreek, stinging nettle and jalapeño. They’re all based on Dutch tradition.”

Innovation keeps the segment dynamic, with FrieslandCampina offering products, such as Parrano Shaved and Shredded for easy cooking; A Dutch Masterpiece, small wedges of Rembrandt (12 month-aged Gouda), Vincent (6-month-aged Gouda Parmesan), Frans Hals (6-month-aged goat) and Vermeer (5-month-aged Gouda) for gifting; and Gayo Azul’s Dutch-Latin crossovers that resonate with Hispanic shoppers.

Hot Honey, Buffalo Ranch, and 3 Chile Pepper Goudas are Emmi Roth’s new flavor-driven offerings that appeal to younger audiences, while Dutch Cheese Makers, an importer in Garden City, NJ, explores global



PHOTO COURTESY MARIEKE GOUDA



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inspiration with Togarashi and Black Garlic Goudas that blend Dutch technique with modern trends.

For first-time buyers, accessibility matters most.

“Younger Goudas and havartis are mild, creamy, and easy to enjoy,” says Emmi Roth’s Freiman. “They’re a reliable entry point for those new to specialty cheese.”

Loyal buyers, by contrast, look for consistency of flavor, precise cuts, and transparent labeling that identifies age and milk-fat content, adds FrieslandCampina’s Rosen. “They value quality, authenticity, and sustainability and appreciate format variety, from exact-weight wedges to sliced and snack-size portions.”

In general, Marieke Gouda’s Penterman explains, “Dutch cheese has always been about craftsmanship and connection. Whether made in the Netherlands or Wisconsin, it brings people together — on a board, in a sandwich, or at the dinner table.”

### DISPLAY: BY COUNTRY OR TYPE?

Retailers differ on whether to group Dutch cheeses or mix them by type. The best strategy depends on store size and shopper familiarity.

“A clear Dutch section with a Dutch Block — a visible section featuring country-of-origin signage, flavor and age ladders, and brand zones for Royal Hollandia, Parrano, A Dutch Masterpiece, and Gayo Azul, helps tell the story and increases visibility,” says Rosen.

Old Amsterdam’s Elverding recommends organizing by type. “U.S. consumers shop by cheese type. Grouping all Goudas together, then segmenting by brand, age, and flavor, makes navigation easy and encourages trial.”

Penterman supports dual placement. “Ideally, Dutch cheeses appear in several spots: alongside other Dutch cheeses, but also among Wisconsin-made cheeses. It’s important to highlight both authenticity and local production.”

Retailers with limited space can integrate Dutch cheeses alongside other cheeses.

“Combining Gouda, Edam, and havarti creates a visually interesting display,” says Emmi Roth’s Freiman. “The red wax of Edam, golden Gouda, and speckled Dill Havarti draw attention.”

Overall, a mix of strategies works best: a small “Dutch destination” for education and branding, along with integrated placement



PHOTO COURTESY OLD AMSTERDAM

for convenience. This helps both core buyers and new shoppers connect with the category.

### DRIVE DELI CHEESE GROWTH THE DUTCH WAY

Driving Dutch cheese sales requires more than shelf space.

“It takes a layered strategy combining trial tactics and education across in-store and digital touchpoints,” says Old Amsterdam’s Elverding.

**Sampling and Storytelling:** Sampling is the most effective trial driver. “Tasting is always the best,” says Murray’s Cheese’s Bland. “We sample all products.”

Penterman agrees and adds, “Sampling is key — taste always wins. Then a short story helps: that it’s farmstead, Wisconsin-made, and that I’m a Master Cheesemaker. People connect to that.”

Sample with a purpose, recommends Emmi Roth’s Freiman. For example, “comparing young versus aged varieties or demos like Parrano shaved over gnocchi.”

Also, tastings with promotions convert trials into repeat purchases.

**Education and Communication:** “Consumers buy what they understand,” says Elverding.

Shelf talkers with flavor cues, pairing icons, and QR codes linking to short videos simplify education.

Bland says Murray’s focuses on practical advice — how to use each cheese and what to pair it with.

“Education builds trust,” says FrieslandCampina’s Rosen. “It helps shoppers make confident choices.”

**Pricing and Promotions:** “Promotions can boost sales,” says Bland, “but strong everyday pricing drives consistency.”

Rosen recommends multi-buy offers. For instance, “Buy Royal Hollandia, save on A

Dutch Masterpiece,” and small tasting cuts near premium wedges.

Elverding adds that coupons and trial discounts “convert interest into repeat purchases.”

**Cross-Merchandising and Meal Ideas:** Cross-merchandising keeps Dutch cheese relevant across meal occasions.

“Cross-merchandising and promotions make the biggest impact,” says Jessica Frey, Dutch Cheese Maker’s marketing director.

Rosen suggests pairing Parrano with pasta, A Dutch Masterpiece with charcuterie, and Gayo Azul with tortillas and salsas.

“Highlighting uses beyond cheese boards, such as on burgers, pizza, or mac and cheese, inspires discovery,” says Emmi Roth’s Freiman.

Marieke Gouda’s Penterman says some stores also use her cheeses in prepared foods, giving shoppers a chance to taste before buying. “It’s versatile — great on charcuterie boards, in soups, lasagna, or shredded over chili. It melts beautifully.”

**Seasonal and Digital Engagement:** FrieslandCampina’s “12 Weeks of Dutch” program rotates seasonal themes, such as Board Night, Pasta Night, and Soup and Sandwich. Displays combine three Dutch cheeses with jam, nuts, and crackers to create “one-stop” board solutions.

**Online:** Old Amsterdam’s Elverding sees continued opportunity to expand awareness. “By layering messaging across retailer websites, social media, and e-commerce, brands can build awareness and drive traffic to the deli case.”

As Dutch Cheese Makers’ Frey sums up, “It’s about keeping Dutch cheese visible — on shelf, online, and in recipes — so shoppers see how it fits into everyday meals. The more often they see it, the more often they’ll buy it.”

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# A Dip Above

**How innovation, global flavors, and clean labels are spreading new energy across the deli case.**

BY KEITH LORIA

**O**nce a category dominated by hummus and cheese spreads, dips and spreads have entered a new golden age in the supermarket deli. Today's shoppers are seeking bold flavor, authenticity and health-conscious convenience, and brands are responding with innovative, globally inspired offerings that invite discovery.

From Lebanese garlic sauces to Wisconsin cheese spreads and plant-forward vegetable dips, the latest products in the deli department reflect an evolution in taste, texture and merchandising.

## CATEGORY IN MOTION

One only has to look at the deli department to see the dips and spreads category is rapidly expanding.

According to Aman Blana, co-founder of

Growee Foods, based in Atlanta, GA, consumer expectations have matured through three distinct waves.

"The first wave was dairy-heavy, full of oils and preservatives," he says. "The second was all about plant-based innovation, mainly chickpea or legume-based. Now we're in the third wave, which fuses global flavor, health and convenience. Shoppers want real vegetables, real spices and a multicultural taste experience they can feel good about."

Growee's lineup, which includes vegetable-forward flavors, like Curry Zucchini, Red Pepper and Garlic Eggplant, has quickly built a following in Whole Foods and other retailers. Each product is soy- and dairy-free and made exclusively with olive oil.

"Consumers are well-traveled and adventurous, but they also want familiarity," says Blana. "Our flavors often remind people of

dishes they've had in restaurants, but now they can enjoy them at home."

This global curiosity is being mirrored across the category. One newer item is toum, the Lebanese garlic spread, traditionally served with chicken shawarma, which is finding a new audience in U.S. grocery delis, where it's merchandised near hummus.

"We didn't create toum, toum created us," says Steve Drapeau, co-founder of Anne's Toum, based in Massachusetts. "People love it because it can do everything. You can cook with it, marinate, or just dip your favorite snacks into it. It's phenomenal on sandwiches, fries or roasted vegetables."

If the past decade was about familiar Mediterranean comfort, the new era is about intensity and versatility. Few products embody that better than Toom Garlic Dips, based in Minneapolis, MN.



"For us, the goal is to introduce shoppers to what we call 'the boldest flavor in the deli,'" says Matt Joyce, chief executive of the company. "Toom is made of fresh garlic, oil, lemon juice and sea salt. It's fluffy, bright, and powerful — people try it once, and they get it."

Toom Garlic Dips' recent rebrand, complete with its cheeky "Wo. Yum. Boom." tagline, reflects that energy.

"It's a flavor explosion, but it's also incredibly versatile," says Joyce. "People use it as a dip, a spread, a marinade or even a cooking ingredient. Because it's so multifunctional, our customers go through it faster and buy it more often."

This fall, the company is expanding into portability with Toom Minis, a four-pack of single-serve cups designed for grab-and-go snacking. Sampling has been critical to the company's strategy to get people to try it.

"Our category is new, so people need to taste it," says Joyce. "We invest heavily in demos. We started as a family business doing demos ourselves in Whole Foods, and now we're doing split demos at Costco nationwide. Once people try it, they buy it again — no question."

For Mezete, the goal is to bring the authentic taste of the Middle East to supermarket delis around the world. Based in Amman, Jordan, the brand has built an international reputation for its premium, ready-to-eat hummus and Mediterranean dips that combine traditional recipes with modern convenience.

According to Mark Pataky, Mezete's general manager of international, dips and spreads are evolving far beyond party platters. "They've escaped the entertaining occasion," he says. "Today, shoppers treat dips, like hummus, guacamole and cheese spreads, as everyday staples — portable, shareable, and part of their regular snacking and meal routines."

While comfort flavors, such as classic chickpea-tahini, garlic, and roasted red pepper remain foundational, Pataky says innovation and global influences are accelerating growth.

"We're seeing strong excitement around our Zesty Za'atar and Red Hot Chili, which tap into the growing consumer appetite for spice and bold, regional ingredients," he says. "Our Baba Ghanouj and Muhammara are also drawing attention, especially since many retailers don't yet carry those authentic Middle Eastern staples."

Fresh Innovations, LLC, in Rhome, TX,

which markets under the ¡Yo Quiero! brand, has carved out a niche with fresh, clean-ingredient guacamole and dips, and is leaning into the newest flavor direction: "swicy" — the blend of sweet and spicy.

"Currently, the top trend in dips is 'swicy,'" says Tara Murray, vice president of marketing. "Consumers are looking to challenge their taste buds with robust flavors that combine heat and sweet."

Fresh Innovations has responded by developing two new dips: a Creamy Candied Jalapeño Dip and Candied Jalapeños. "The creamy dip is a blend of rich sour cream mixed with our candied jalapeños — it hits on all the senses: creamy, slightly sweet, with a great jalapeño spice at the end," says Murray. "And our new candied jalapeño peppers are an amazing topper for burgers, sandwiches, even pizza. They bring a great crunch with just the right amount of swicy."

Fresh Innovations is also tapping into consumers' appetite for authentic, seasonal flavors with its new line of Cantina Salsas, inspired by the flavors of Mexico. "This line is perfect for the football tailgaters, fall partygoers, and those who want to wow their guests with a delicious salsa over the holidays. We

## WHAT THEY ARE *Saying*

"Now we're in the third wave, which fuses global flavor, health and convenience. Shoppers want real vegetables, real spices and a multicultural taste experience they can feel good about."

— Aman Blana, Growee Foods, Atlanta, GA

are really excited about this line, and we know consumers will be too."

Murray says the company's approach to marketing focuses on affordability and accessibility during challenging economic times. "When we launch new items, we work with our retail partners by providing deals so they can introduce our products to consumers at really great prices," she says. "Our

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retail partners also do a great job bundling our dips with store-made chips and similar items, which allow consumers to get more for less.”

Staying competitive in a crowded category requires constant innovation — but never at the expense of quality. “We work hard to keep the ingredient list as clean as possible, while maintaining great texture and taste,” explains Murray.

The company’s use of High Pressure Technology (HPP) allows them to pasteurize products without harsh chemicals or artificial preservatives.

## AUTHENTICITY STILL MATTERS

While global flavors and spice are thriving, traditional favorites like hummus and cheese spreads remain core pillars of the category, especially when brands bring authenticity and freshness to the forefront.

“Hummus is more than just a dip,” says Hannah Awada, founder of Hummus Goodness, based in Birmingham, MI. “You can use it as a sandwich spread, mix it into pasta, turn it into dressing or even add it to chicken sandwiches. It’s one of the most versatile foods in the deli.”

The company’s product line includes seven flavors, from Original Lebanese-style and Red Pepper to Big Dill, a collaboration with McClure’s Pickles. New flavors launching in 2026 will continue blending traditional roots with modern twists.

Awada says the brand’s marketing revolves around education.

“We use shelf talkers with QR codes that link to recipes and serving ideas,” she says. “And we encourage cross-merchandising — our taco hummus near chips for Cinco de Mayo, or pickle hummus featured for tailgating.”

Once mainly a holiday indulgence, cheese spreads are now part of everyday eating, and that’s been reflected at the grocery store deli.

In Wisconsin, the legacy of cheese spreads continues to evolve through innovation and flavor creativity. Pine River Pre-Pack, Inc., based in Newton, WI, has been perfecting its craft for over 60 years, but today’s consumer expectations have changed the playbook.

“We’ve seen a growing interest in softer, more dipable textures,” says Kayla Bohn, sales director of the company. “To meet that trend, we’ve begun incorporating jams and cream cheese into our recipes. It adds creaminess and unique flavor layers.”



PHOTO COURTESY ANNE'S TOUM

Robin Allen, founder/owner/president, Birdie’s Pimento Cheese, South Hill, VA, says pimento cheese is a bit of a hidden gem, and “it’s got a magical charm that keeps people curious.”

She says it’s not just about the flavors — it’s also about the price. “Birdie’s Pimento Cheese knows this and uses its variety of flavors and easy-to-remember names to get people to try it. When people are hesitant to try artisanal hard cheeses, they often turn to cheese spreads, which are always a crowd-pleaser.”

## SELLING FLAVOR

How these dips and spreads are displayed in the deli case is nearly as important as what’s inside them.

For Anne’s Toum, proximity to familiar favorites has proven key.

“We merchandise next to hummus — it’s natural, since they’re cousins,” says Drapeau. “But we also work with retailers on cross-merchandising. We’d love to see our toum used in their sandwiches as it’s incredible on turkey or fried chicken.”

Drapeau also promotes seasonal tie-ins,

such as for the Super Bowl, where it showcases toum with tortilla chips or wings.

Blana says strategic placement has helped Growee’s brand take off.

“We perform best when merchandised near crackers or cheeses, where shoppers are already exploring snacks,” he says. “We also use secondary displays and branded shippers to boost visibility.”

All Mezete products are non-GMO, vegan and halal-certified, with most also gluten- and allergen-free, attributes that resonate with today’s health-focused shoppers. The brand encourages retailers to merchandise its SKUs in a cohesive block to drive visibility and “grab-two” behavior, often pairing with pita chips, crackers or fresh veggies.

At Toom Garlic Dips, in-store promotions and demos remain the foundation.

“We put our trade spend toward price promotions and tasting events,” says Joyce. “It’s all about trial — and once people taste it, they come back at full price.”

OOLIE Foods, a division of HBF Foods, bridges the gap between indulgence and nutrition with its high-protein, dairy-free



creations made from free-range eggs.

"Consumers are looking for dips that go beyond flavor alone," says Faith Ferguson, vice president of sales and marketing for the company. "They want clean-label, protein-rich options that fit modern, often flexitarian lifestyles. Everyone's seeking products that can do more — something you can snack with, cook with, or spread on a sandwich."

That versatility is what makes OOLIE stand out on the deli shelf. Ferguson describes it as sitting "at the intersection of what consumers love about egg salad and cottage cheese — but in a flavorful, ready-to-dip format."

Sampling remains a cornerstone of the company's marketing strategy, supported by strong visual merchandising, recipe content and influencer collaborations.

### PACKAGING INNOVATION

Packaging plays a crucial role in impulse buying and repeat purchases for dips and spreads. Whether it's recyclable containers, grab-and-go cups or sleek new shapes, brands are adapting to meet lifestyle needs while staying sustainable.

Anne's Toom uses an 8-ounce square container designed for easy stacking and strong shelf presence.

"It's convenient and recognizable," says Drapeau. "We want it to stand out among all the round tubs."

At Toom Garlic Dips, the new single-serve Minis provide a fresh way to meet consumer demand for portability, which Joyce notes is perfect for lunchboxes and snack packs.

Growee focuses on sustainable, portion-flexible packaging that protects product integrity.

"We're seeing a shift toward shelf-stable solutions that don't require preservatives but still maintain freshness," says Blana. "That's going to shape the next wave of innovation."

Hummus Goodness recently underwent a brand refresh with bright yellow packaging and playful labels.

"All the hummus cups looked the same before," says Awada. "We wanted something that reflects our energy — authentic, fun and modern."

### WHAT'S NEXT FOR DIPS AND SPREADS

Looking ahead, the dips and spreads category will continue to be all about flavor, function and sustainability.

"The category is a \$5 billion sleeping giant that's waking up," says Blana. "Consumers are looking for excitement, and spicy and sweet flavor combinations are seeing triple-digit growth."

Joyce sees continued momentum for garlic-based products.

"People are finally embracing garlic's boldness," he says. "It's no longer just a condiment — it's a centerpiece flavor."

Awada predicts more education around ingredient quality.

"Clean-label brands are growing faster because consumers trust them," she says. "That transparency will continue to define success."

From cheese spreads to hummus, and to plant-based dips, the deli's most flavorful category has never been more diverse or more dynamic.

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# Profiting from Prepared Food in Deli

Premade salads and sandwiches are driving significant growth in the deli.

BY LISA WHITE



PHOTO COURTESY FRESH CREATIVE CUISINE

**S**upermarket delis that are not capitalizing on premade salads and sandwiches are missing a big opportunity.

According to a recent DELI BUSINESS article, prepared foods and grab-and-go options are driving significant growth in the deli sector, with over half of deli sales attributed to these categories, which increased by 5.6% in dollars.

In the premade salad and sandwiches segment, supermarket delis typically offer a mix of grab-and-go packaged sandwiches, wraps

and salads, as well as bulk-prepared deli case salads and heat-and-eat sandwiches. Some retailers also provide customizable solutions, like sandwich and salad bars, either staffed with store personnel or as self-service.

"The benefit of premade programs is that they make the deli a true destination for shoppers looking for quick, ready-to-eat meals, and they also drive bigger baskets by pairing with sides, drinks or snacks," says Chris Darling, chief commercial officer, Mama's Creations, which is based in East Rutherford, NJ. "Challenges include shelf

life and shrink, along with labor availability."

According to Aaron Eversgerd, director of marketing at Deli Star, headquartered in St. Louis, MO, supermarkets often use three main models for in-store deployment of prepared foods. Each model offers unique benefits in terms of labor, control and margin.

The traditional in-store model involves preparing all items in a back-of-house deli kitchen.

"This promotes the perception of freshness and offers local control, allowing stores to better meet customer demands, such as



ingredient customization,” says Eversgerd. “Stores also offer services like custom cutting and made-to-order cuts to meet specific local preferences.”

The downside to in-store models is limited scalability. In addition, this program type is often less cost-effective due to high labor rates and food waste.

“These programs rely heavily on high-cost, skilled labor, leading to inconsistent product quality and flavor across store locations,” Eversgerd explains. “Because the model depends on daily demand, a short, refrigerated shelf life, and strict adherence to food safety standards, it is vulnerable to product shrinkage due to overproduction and to an increased risk of food safety events.”

The next program type, a retailer-owned commissary, operates a large, centralized facility dedicated to mass-producing prepared components or finished meals for distribution to individual stores. Centralization addresses many of the inconsistencies found in the in-store model.

“The process enables significant quality control improvements by allowing production teams to follow precise, uniform instructions,

ensuring consistency across all market outlets,” says Eversgerd. “The model achieves economies of scale, justifying investment in advanced cooking procedures and equipment to achieve higher yields and minimize food costs.”

However, while centralization improves consistency and efficiency, it requires substantial retailer capital expenditure and a high-volume market presence to offset fixed costs, he adds.

The last model, third-party manufacturing partnerships, is a strategic, outsourcing model that involves partnering with specialized third-party manufacturers that produce standardized, high-volume components or complex, shelf-ready products.

“Retailers can then deploy sophisticated culinary offerings without needing in-house expertise or capital investment in specialized manufacturing equipment,” says Eversgerd. “External partners provide products in ready-to-eat packaging, offering variety while eliminating the need for retailers to manage labor and equipment.”

This model typically provides longer shelf-life options, allowing the retailer to reduce shrinkage.

## WHAT THEY ARE *Saying*

“The demand for protein will continue to grow through 2026. This market shift is driven by increased GLP-1 use, heightened sensitivity to the health impact of ultra-processed foods, and the health-conscious mindset of the Gen Z demographic.”

— Aaron Eversgerd, Deli Star,  
St. Louis, MO

### PRODUCT OFFERINGS

When it comes to items geared for premade salad and sandwich programs, supermarket delis have many options.

Staple sandwiches and salads continue to be classics, such as traditional potato and



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pasta salads, chicken and tuna salads, and turkey or ham sandwiches. However, consumers' changing palates are expanding the category.

Deli Star is a B2B protein partner serving a variety of commissary, sandwich assembly and deli salad programs. The company primarily offers products based on beef, pork, chicken and turkey, along with some specialty items.

"These are traditional, simply crafted deli meats designed for high yield and operational performance," says Eversgerd. "Some of our most popular products include Black Forest Ham, Oven Roasted Turkey Breast, All-Natural Corned Beef and Rotisserie Chicken."

The company's ready-to-use sous vide proteins are whole-muscle, clean-label meats, ready to assemble in prepared foods.

"The commoditization of deli staples necessitates the outsourcing of innovation," Eversgerd notes. "Staples provide necessary volume, but they are often low-margin. Sustainable profit growth requires the deployment of premiumization and ethnic innovation to engage younger consumers seeking taste explosions."

Because manufacturing sophisticated, multi-ingredient meals safely and consistently in-store is operationally prohibitive, the complexity must be transferred to a specialized co-packer, he adds.



PHOTO COURTESY DELI STAR

"A manufacturer's strength, therefore, is defined by its ability to deliver these highly complex, finished culinary components, turning challenging culinary trends into turnkey, safe retail solutions," Eversgerd explains.

Another company that covers the core premade salad and sandwich categories is Mama's Creations. The company offers pasta and grain salads, protein salads, like chicken and seafood, plus sandwiches and wraps.

"We also provide heat-and-eat items, such as our flame-grilled paninis, which perform well in grab-and-go sets, as well as behind the glass," says Darling. "Our paninis have proven very successful as they meet the trends of differentiated high-protein options that can be heated up in minutes."

Because globally inspired recipes are gaining traction, Mama's Creations recently expanded its panini lineup to include flavors, such as Greek Chicken and Nashville Hot.

Rachel's Table, based in Greenville, RI, takes a different approach with its mayonnaise-based seafood salads.

"We offer both snail and octopus salads, along with mayo-based imitation crab surimi salad," says Adam Lagreca, owner. "These are ethnic products that have broad appeal and are growing."

The company's Italian-based marinated salads harken back to family recipes.

## TODAY'S TRENDS

There are several trends driving the pre-made sandwich and salad segment in delis.

"The demand for protein will continue to grow through 2026," says Eversgerd at Deli Star. "This market shift is driven by increased GLP-1 use, heightened sensitivity to the health impact of ultra-processed foods and the health-conscious mindset of the Gen Z demographic, all of which are profoundly shaping supermarket shelves."

Another core and ongoing trend is the elevation of the grocery deli from a simple convenience to a direct competitor to restaurant dining. Delis looking to up the ante should look to area restaurants as direct competitors.

"Consumers are increasingly viewing fresh-prepared foods as a true alternative to restaurant dining, not just a convenient option," Eversgerd notes. "Remarkable market growth substantiates this."

He adds that it's the younger consumer, particularly Gen Z, who is most aggressively embracing new prepared food formats.

"Innovation in the segment is focused on culinary sophistication, global inspiration and flexible formats that suit modern eating occasions [such as snacking, bowls and meal kits]," Eversgerd says.



PHOTO COURTESY FRESH CREATIVE CUISINE



A growing category, grab-and-go meals provide quick, portable and ready-to-eat alternatives, such as sandwiches, salads and wraps.

"New deli items are pushing flavor boundaries," says Eversgerd. "The salad category is seeing lighter, vinaigrette-based innovation, such as our Lemon Capellini and ethnic varieties like our Thai-Style Noodle and Greek Pasta Salad."

He adds that premium and indulgent sandwiches are also on the rise.

"The evolution targets the restaurant replacement trend with complex, high-quality builds utilizing artisan breads and specialty sauces," Eversgerd says.

Darling at Mama's Creations is seeing both global and bolder flavors trending.

"Options like Mediterranean or Asian profiles are capturing attention," Darling says. "At the same time, there's strong interest in better-for-you options, whether that's simpler ingredients, higher protein or portion-controlled formats."

On the retail side, packaging is a big focus, with the desire to extend shelf life without losing the fresh, just-made quality.

"At Mama's Creations, we're leaning into all three of those areas, bringing globally inspired flavors to our paninis, leveraging high protein ingredients like grilled chicken, and investing in packaging innovation to extend shelf life," says Darling.

#### MARKETING & MERCHANDISING

Success in this segment is contingent on creating a prepared food destination, with not only the proper assortment, but also merchandising that prompts impulse purchases.

"Bundling and offering free samples are great marketing tactics for our products," says Lagreca at Rachel's Table. "Our salads have a great mouth feel and pair with red wine vinaigrette. These also are very popular around the holidays as part of the Feast of 7 Fishes."

Darling agrees that bundling these items is an effective tactic.

"Pairing a sandwich with a salad or side, or cross-merchandising deli meals with drinks and chips, creates a complete meal solution and drives bigger baskets," Darling

## WHAT THEY ARE *Saying*

"Options like Mediterranean or Asian profiles are capturing attention."

— Chris Darling, Mama's Creations, East Rutherford, NJ

says. "For example, a Mama Mancini's panini plus a salad cup makes an easy, well-rounded combo."

Looking ahead, Eversgerd sees innovations in the areas of both food safety and extended shelf life in the premade salad and sandwich category.

"Following several high-profile recalls in recent years, the demand for consistently healthy, safe food is only growing," Eversgerd notes.

DB

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# GROWING DELI OPPORTUNITY IN ALL-NATURAL MEATS

Consumers are willing to pay for healthy ingredients.

BY BOB JOHNSON



PHOTO COURTESY HORMEL



Inflation is, ironically, creating consumers willing to pay a little more at the deli for premium meats, including all-natural meats.

When consumers seek refuge from high restaurant prices in the deli, they are not looking for the cheapest food they can find, but instead see the deli as an oasis offering premium ingredients, including all-natural meats, that can be used to prepare restaurant-quality meals at home.

Retail delis have opportunities to sell premium meats. But the deli must convince customers who have grown skeptical of vague sustainability claims that “all-natural” means something. Unlike organic, there is no U.S. Department of Agriculture definition of all-natural meat.

“One of the most consistent trends is the shift toward ‘clean label’ products, with shoppers seeking meats free from artificial preservatives, colors, and flavors while paying closer attention to ingredient panels,” says Lauren Eni Canseco, executive vice president at Dietz & Watson, Philadelphia, PA. “The category is also being shaped by demand for protein-rich foods, driving growth in uncured deli meats, antibiotic-free poultry and premium sausages.”

Dietz & Watson has offered deli ham, turkey, beef, and salami since 1939, with an emphasis on handcrafted quality.

Many producers are finding greater demand for their all-natural meat products.

“Clean label deli meats made with premium ingredients are trending as consumers actively look for healthier options for themselves and their families,” says Claire Flannery, senior director of marketing and media at Greenridge Naturals, Chicago, IL. “Transparency from the brands they love is a top priority, which has resulted in the rise and popularity of organic, sustainable-focused brands, with minimal and clean ingredients.”

Greenridge Naturals processes locally sourced meats using artisanal Polish methods.

Independent meat research firm Midan Marketing of Chicago, IL, found many consumers willing to pay more for premium products. According to Midan’s Meat Consumer Segmentation research, 52% of consumers say they look for meat with no added hormones, 51% say they want no added antibiotics, while 46% say they prefer meat that is all-natural.

## IT’S ABOUT THE ANIMALS

But consumers have become discriminating, even skeptical, and they need to know what all-natural means. Midan’s 2021 study on sustainably raised meat concluded that most meat consumers connected sustainably raised meat primarily to animal welfare and only secondarily to environmental issues.

Most suppliers are ready to offer their definitions of what all-natural means. “Many companies focus on sourcing from animals raised without antibiotics or hormones,” says Canseco.

Volpi Foods has been family-run for four generations since 1902, sourcing all its meat from local, responsibly raised farms in the Midwest, according to Claire Donohue, marketing manager at Volpi Foods, St. Louis, MO. “With its Raised Responsibly standard, every animal is treated with care and raised according to ethical, environmental and quality practices — staying true to Volpi’s promise of natural, simple and delicious foods,” says Donohue.

“The main thing we need to convey is all-natural means no added colors, no artificial ingredients, no binders, minimally processed,” says Cory Dunn, director of retail sales at Lower Family Foods, Richmond, UT. “It’s the best of the best. Some processors use soy or whey protein binders.”

Lower Family Foods has offered premium beef, pork, and poultry for four generations.

Other suppliers agree that all-natural means they use a minimum of artificial ingredients to process meat from animals that are antibiotic and growth hormone-free.

“Our Naturals line of deli meats does not include added nitrates, nitrites, phosphates, artificial flavors or colors,” says Flannery. “Oftentimes, preservatives are added to extend the life of the product, which we avoid in our top-selling deli meats. Our natural deli meats are also free from soy, msg, dairy and gluten, while we hardwood smoke select products (meaning no liquid smoke). We prioritize high-quality, clean-label deli meats as consumers look for healthier alternatives at the deli.”

## SHOW THEM AND THEY WILL BUY

Retailers facing the challenge of telling consumers the sustainability story of their meat find part of the answer in the packaging.

“Packaging has become a crucial part

## WHAT THEY ARE Saying

“Flavor innovation or unique tasting profiles in products across deli are also getting consumers’ attention, whether that is hot honey, dill pickle or umami-forward profiles.”

— Claire Flannery, Greenridge Naturals, Chicago, IL

of communicating the value of natural meats,” says Dietz & Watson’s Canseco. “Resealable packs have improved convenience and extended freshness, which is especially important for families who want to stretch product use over several days. Clear windows and front-of-pack transparency let shoppers see the product itself and easily identify claims like ‘uncured’ or ‘antibiotic-free.’”

Lower Family Foods also produces grab-and-go packages that let consumers know how the meat is sustainable.

The meat category looks to have gained the upper hand, at least temporarily, in the competition with plant-based alternatives.

“From a nutritional standpoint, lunchmeat offers a favorable balance between protein and calories, which appeals to consumers who are mindful of their overall dietary intake,” says Jeff Wallace, brand manager at Hormel Foods, Hormel, MN. “Freshness has always been important, but it’s more relevant now than ever before. It must be communicated both through packaging and a clean nutritional label.”

For many consumers, the easiest entry into paying more for all-natural meats is the charcuterie board. “Charcuterie boards have had a transformative effect,” says Canseco. “They’ve moved natural meats into a lifestyle category, associated with entertaining, gifting, and social media moments, rather than being seen only as sandwich staples.

“Convenience is another driver, with snack packs, single-serve portions, and pre-sliced charcuterie expanding purchase occasions and attracting younger, on-the-go shoppers.”



## WHAT THEY ARE *Saying*

“Natural meats work well in a variety of cross-merchandising setups. Pairing with cheeses, crackers, and specialty breads creates a natural bridge to entertaining and snacking.”

— Lauren Eni Canseco, Dietz & Watson, Philadelphia, PA



### CHARCUTERIE BOARD IS A FIRST STEP

Charcuterie boards offer an opportunity the deli can use to cross-merchandise all-natural meats with other premium items.

“The deli has a unique opportunity to cross-merchandise with complementary items, like specialty condiments, artisan cheese and crackers, or even wine pairings,” says Flannery. “Retailers can also inspire customers by showcasing charcuterie board ideas, bundling products for

easy entertaining, or sharing recipe cards right at the deli counter.”

Charcuterie boards provide many suppliers with opportunities to introduce their newest products.

“Charcuterie continues to evolve beyond the traditional board,” says Jesse Denes, vice president at Schaller and Weber, New York, NY. “We’re seeing strong demand for items that balance authenticity, flavor and convenience. Consumers are looking for premium, recognizable ingredients and are more willing than ever to explore new formats.”

Boards are just one of the opportunities to cross-merchandise all-natural meats. “Natural meats work well in a variety of cross-merchandising setups,” says Canseco. “Pairing with cheeses, crackers, and specialty breads creates a natural bridge to entertaining and snacking. Fresh produce also ties into healthier eating themes and helps consumers imagine balanced meal solutions. Beyond the deli section, natural meats can be featured alongside craft beers or wines for seasonal promotions, picnic and tailgating displays, or even meal-prep kits.” **DB**

### DELI SLICERS CUT LABOR COSTS

New deli slicers save on labor by precisely weighing the meat and cheese as they slice.

“The Hobart HS Series portion scale slicers are a newer addition to the marketplace,” says Carolyn Bilger, marketing director at Hobart Food Prep Equipment, Silverwater, Australia. “They are available in a manual model and an automatic model, and both have an integrated scale that slices meats and cheeses to a specific weight. Because the scale is integrated, it eliminates the need for the deli operator to walk to a separate scale and takes the guesswork out of achieving the correct product weight.”

This labor-saving feature could make a difference as the deli becomes ever more cost-conscious in these inflationary times.

“As labor costs increase across the country, we are witnessing a rise in pre-sliced deli meat,” says Claire Flannery, senior director of marketing at Greenridge Naturals, Chicago, IL. “Integrating slicing technology into manufacturing has allowed companies to minimize labor costs across production.”

In addition to trimming labor, the newest slicers also offer unprecedented accuracy. “Both models accurately weigh product up to 10 pounds in increments of 0.01 pounds or 0.1 ounces,” says Bilger. “The HS7-1PS slicer has a SmartSlice function that allows the slicer to operate until it reaches an



PHOTO COURTESY HOBART

operator-selected product weight. A stack function also stops when the slicer reaches the desired product weight. It resumes slicing to the same weight when the operator places dividing paper and selects the start button.” **DB**



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# GONNELLA'S 140-YEAR COMMITMENT TO CRAFTSMANSHIP AND CUSTOMER SUCCESS

For nearly 140 years, Gonnella Baking Company, Schaumburg, IL, has distinguished itself through an unwavering commitment to superior quality, consistency and customer service. As a family-owned and -operated organization, the Gonnella-Marcucci families have preserved the company's founding values and traditions, ensuring a steadfast dedication to excellence across generations.

From its origins as a small neighborhood bakery, Gonnella has evolved into a modern, technologically advanced enterprise with the capabilities to meet the diverse needs of today's marketplace. By investing in state-of-the-art production facilities and embracing new technologies, Gonnella continues to deliver the highest standards in bakery products, while maintaining the authenticity and craftsmanship.

Gonnella's success has been built on strong partnerships and a customer-centric philosophy. The company remains deeply attuned to the needs of its customers, whether convenience stores, restaurants, or in-store bakeries — and works collaboratively to deliver tailored solutions that enhance their success.

Gonnella believes that growth is measured not just in numbers, but in people,



PHOTO COURTESY GONNELLA

By 1915, Gonnella Bakery needed more space, and a new plant was built on Erie Street in Chicago, IL. Pictured are trucks lined up on Erie Street in 1920.

and invests heavily in continuous learning, skill development, and professional advancement, empowering employees to reach their full potential.

"We measure success not only by market share, but by the development of our team," says Tony Mazukelli, secretary, officer and director, who began working at Gonnella in 1992 as a bakery technician.

"Our industry is filled with hard-working and friendly people who taught me so much about our business," says Mazukelli. "I will

never forget what my vice president used to say, 'Our job is to help make our customers successful. If our customers are successful, we will be successful.' It is still true today and transcends our industry."

Operationally, resilience and efficiency are key themes driving Gonnella forward. To reduce transportation costs and strengthen supply chain stability, the company is expanding its regional manufacturing footprint and building redundant production capabilities across its enterprise.

**DB**

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