



Athenos



Caputo Cheese



Crave Brothers  
Farmstead  
Cheese LLC



Creminelli Fine  
Meats



DeLallo



DePalo Foods



# Innovation



Gonnella  
Baking  
Company



LaClare  
Creamery



Fresh  
Innovations LLC



Oolie



Schaller &  
Weber



Upper Cut

# 12 INNOVATIONS THAT DELIVER

DELI BUSINESS  
MARKETING MERCHANDISING MANAGEMENT PROCUREMENT

THIRD ANNUAL  
INNOVATION  
AWARD  
WINNERS

## ALSO INSIDE

- ITALIAN CHEESES
- CONDIMENTS & PICKLES
- OLIVES
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## COVER STORY 8

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# DELI BUSINESS

MARKETING MERCHANDISING MANAGEMENT PROCUREMENT

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# Distinctly Delicious



## ANNOUNCEMENTS



### GONNELLA BAKING CO. ACQUIRES LINEAGE MANUFACTURING

Gonnella Baking Co., Schaumburg, IL, announced the acquisition of Lineage Manufacturing, LLC, a producer of high-quality frozen dough. Gonnella will continue to operate its state-of-the-art manufacturing space in Lineage's cold-storage facility in Centralia, WA. The Centralia manufacturing space — now operating as part of Gonnella Frozen Products, LLC — increases the company's manufacturing capacity at a time of rising demand across foodservice and retail channels.

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



### CHARCUTERIE ARTISANS ACQUIRES LA QUERCIA CURED MEATS

Charcuterie Artisans — the parent company of Creminelli, Daniele and Del Duca — announced the acquisition of La Quercia Cured Meats, a pioneer of American-made prosciutto. With this addition, Charcuterie Artisans expands its portfolio of premium domestic charcuterie and deepens its commitment to honoring old-world techniques, while increasing production capacity for the U.S. marketplace. The acquisition includes La Quercia's Norwalk, IA, production facility and its full portfolio of products.

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



### COOPER EXPANDS RETAIL FOOTPRINT WITH LAUNCH AT SAM'S CLUB

Cooper Sharp White is now on the shelves of select Sam's Club stores across Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware. This rollout marks the brand's first entry into Sam's Club and represents a significant step in building broader retail availability for Cooper products. The featured item is a 30-ounce block of Cooper Sharp White, packaged in branded Philadelphia Eagles cornerback Cooper DeJean artwork.

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



### OLD AMSTERDAM WINS DIAMOND TASTE AWARD

The International Taste Institute honored Old Amsterdam, Huizen, Netherlands, with the following Superior Taste Awards: two stars for Mild, and the top score of three stars for both Signature and Classic. Classic received further recognition with the exclusive Diamond Taste Award, which is granted to products that have earned three stars at least seven times over a 10-year period. These awards are determined through blind tastings by an international panel of top chefs and sommeliers affiliated with the institute. Old Amsterdam also excelled in the DLG quality assessments, earning gold medals for: Classic and Goat.

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

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

## NEW PRODUCTS



### RICH PRODUCTS BUILDS PIZZA POWERHOUSE

Rich Products, Buffalo, NY, recently acquired Great Kitchens Food Co. from Brynwood Partners VIII L.P. Home to Uno Foods brand, Great Kitchens has expertise and capabilities in fully topped pizzas, bringing deep dish and hand-held products to Rich's portfolio. The addition of Great Kitchens will allow Rich's to create a vertically integrated topped pizza and flatbread platform, expanded capacity, and greater crust innovation. Headquartered in Romeoville, IL, Great Kitchens has three manufacturing facilities.

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



### BELGIOIOSO CHEESE LAUNCHES HISPANIC SELECTION COLLECTION

BelGioioso Cheese, Green Bay, WI, launched its new Hispanic Selection cheese collection, debuting at retail in January 2026. BelGioioso Hispanic Selection celebrates the flavors and versatility of traditional Hispanic-style cheeses. BelGioioso Hispanic Selection includes three of the most versatile Hispanic cheeses: shredded Oaxaca and Quesadilla and grated Cotija. The cheeses are offered in two formats to meet shopper expectations and usage needs: the traditional 8-ounce twist-tie bags and the 5-ounce cups.

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



### WILDBRINE LAUNCHES INDUSTRY-FIRST FERMENTED BEAN SALAD

Sauerkraut and kimchi powerhouse, Wildbrine, Madison, WI, has announced the first-ever packaged fermented bean salad, marking unprecedented and significant innovation in the fermentation space. The bright, savory Mediterranean and Kimchi-Style Fermented Chickpea Salads deliver a rare trifecta of protein, fiber, and live fermentation. The 20-ounce jars will be sold exclusively at Whole Foods Markets nationally beginning April 1.

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



### BOAR'S HEAD LAUNCHES GREEK YOGURT DESSERT DIPS

Boar's Head Brand, Sarasota, FL, is reimagining sweet snacking with the debut of its new Greek Yogurt Dessert Dip Collection. The launch introduces three dessert-inspired flavors that bring a modern twist to mindful indulgence: Key Lime, Cinnamon Churro and Chocolate Espresso. This launch expands Boar's Head's growing dessert portfolio, joining fan-favorites like Pumpkin Pie and Dark Chocolate Dessert Hummus. The new Greek Yogurt Dessert Dips are available in the deli area at select retailers nationwide.

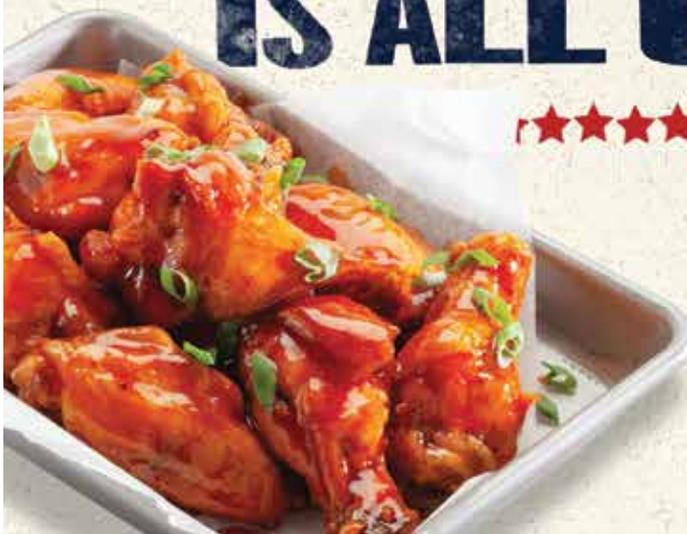
[Boarshead.com](http://Boarshead.com)

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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# Innovation



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Weber



Upper Cut

# 12 INNOVATIONS THAT DELIVER

## CAST YOUR VOTE FOR THIS YEAR'S DELI INNOVATION AWARD

**T**he entrants of the third annual DELI BUSINESS Innovation Award showcased their top innovations that are sold in the retail deli department.

With a focus on Product, Packaging and Process, DELI BUSINESS presents the 12 top-scoring entrants and leaves it up to the industry to decide which item merits the DELI BUSINESS Innovation Award.

This year's submissions highlight key trends, with the deli industry focused on delivering greater convenience and creating

innovations that drive sales growth. This crop of winners highlights innovations that are shaping the future of the deli.

The judging, which took place in the Boca Raton, FL, offices of DELI BUSINESS, was conducted by editors and staff who are well-versed in the industry.

Only DELI BUSINESS readers will evaluate the top-scoring products selected from numerous entries. Please read the descriptions below and go online to [delibusiness.com](http://delibusiness.com) to cast your vote by June 1.

**CAST YOUR  
VOTE**  

---

**CHOOSE A  
WINNER**

1. GO TO [DELIBUSINESS.COM](http://DELIBUSINESS.COM).
2. CLICK ON THE INNOVATION 2026 BUTTON.
3. FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS TO SELECT YOUR TOP THREE CHOICES.
4. POLLING ENDS AT 5 P.M., PST ON JUNE 1.

## Athenos

CRUMBLÉD TAJÍN FETA CHEESE  
STOUGHTON, WI

Athenos collaborated with flavor powerhouse, Tajín, to bring Crumbled Tajín Feta Cheese to market. This new product meets consumer needs by bringing together two flavors — creamy, tangy feta and the bold, chile and lime seasoning consumers already know and love. This innovative fusion delivers a craveable balance of fresh, creamy feta with a zesty kick, making it a standout addition to the crumbled cheese set. Designed for versatility, it elevates everyday dishes, like tacos, salads, grain bowls and avocado toast, tapping directly into consumers' appetite for globally inspired, flavor-forward foods. Marketing and activation efforts focused on discovery through recipe inspiration, social content, and retail merchandising that highlighted the product's versatility and bold flavor. From a category standpoint, Athenos Crumbled Tajín Feta Cheese brings meaningful differentiation to the feta set by introducing a ready-to-use option that goes beyond traditional applications. This innovation expands usage occasions, encourages incremental purchases, and helps modernize the category.



## Crave Brothers Farmstead Cheese LLC

HEART-SHAPED FRESH MOZZARELLA  
WATERLOO, WI

Crave Brothers Heart-Shaped Fresh Mozzarella is crafted with fresh milk from the Crave Brothers Farm in Waterloo, WI, using renewable energy. This one-of-a-kind product is the only heart-shaped fresh mozzarella available in the U.S. market and is offered in both retail and foodservice. While Crave Brothers' award-winning Fresh Mozzarella line is available in a variety of traditional sizes, the Heart-Shaped Mozzarella was created with one thing in mind: love. Its playful shape is designed to draw attention on shelves and deli bars alike, making it an instant standout. Consumers love taking it home to create beautiful charcuterie boards, elevate pastas and salads, and assemble strawberry, fresh mozzarella, and mint skewers — just to name a few uses. And while it's a natural fit for Valentine's Day, this product goes far beyond a single holiday. From anniversaries and weddings to birthdays and date nights, there's always a reason to celebrate with heart-shaped mozzarella.



## Caputo Cheese

ORECCHIETTE DI MOZZARELLA  
MELROSE PARK, IL

Inspired by the classic pasta shape known as "little ears," these button-sized little scoops are perfect for catching dressings and sauces in salads and pastas. They are ideal for quick-cooking pizzas in brick ovens, conveyor ovens and par-baked crusts. Caputo is the exclusive domestic producer of mozzarella in this shape.



## Creminelli Fine Meats

CREMINELLI 7-OUNCE ENTERTAINING TRAY  
SALT LAKE CITY, UT

Creminelli identified a critical gap in the modern snacking landscape: While household sizes shrink and solo/couple consumption rises, the market remained polarized between children's lunchbox portions and family entertaining trays. Today's consumers — particularly younger demographics — seek premium, right-sized indulgences that match their lifestyle, yet no product served this growing segment. Creminelli's 7-ounce Entertaining Tray represents true category innovation — the first-to-market solution purpose-built for the modern two-person household. This isn't simply a new SKU — it's a strategic response to fundamental shifts in consumer behavior, creating an entirely new occasion and consumption model. The tray format comes in three flavor combinations: Prosciutto, Genoa, Mozzarella and Dried Cherries; Prosciutto, Calabrese, White Cheddar and Chocolate Almonds; and Coppa, Pepperoni, Provolone, Olives.





### DeLallo

OLIVE & PICKLE DIP  
MOUNT PLEASANT, PA

This innovation starts with trend-forward flavor. Pickles and fermented foods continue to grow in popularity, driven by consumers craving bold, tangy profiles. Instead of offering a single-note pickle dip, DeLallo built dimension by incorporating both dill and bread-and-butter pickles. The combination delivers brightness, acidity, and subtle sweetness — creating a naturally complex “relish-style” flavor without overwhelming the palate. DeLallo paired that profile with Castelvetrano olives — chosen for their mild, buttery character and strong U.S. consumer popularity. Their approachable flavor ensures pickle remains dominant, while adding richness and visual appeal. This thoughtful ingredient selection broadens the target consumer: pickle lovers, olive buyers and charcuterie enthusiasts alike.

### Fresh Innovations LLC

YO QUIERO! CANDIED JALAPENO PEPPERS  
RHOME, TX

Yo Quiero! has created an innovative product that is delicious and on trend — Candied Jalapeno Peppers. With the “swicy” craze hitting an all-time high, these candied jalapeno peppers are perfect for topping pizzas, burgers, chicken, wraps — anything that requires a delicious sweet heat with amazing crunch. This product takes the popularity of hot honey to a new level. The Candied Jalapenos bring the sweet heat, but they also have an amazing crunch.



### DePalo Foods

CHICKEN BACON RANCH CALZONE  
BELMONT, NC

DePalo Foods’ new Chicken Bacon Ranch Calzone is made with savory chicken breast tossed in a blend of spices, paired with perfectly crisp bacon and ranch dressing. The calzone is crafted with a five-cheese blend and hand-folded in its signature aged dough recipe.



### Gonnella Baking Company

PRETZEL ROUND BUN  
SCHAUMBURG, IL

The Gonnella 3.25-inch Pretzel Sliced Bun brings authentic Bavarian flavor to modern deli merchandising. Crafted using a traditional artisan process, it features a deep brown, chewy crust, signature sheen and true German soft pretzel character — with flavor baked in, no added salt required. Sized for today’s appetite for smaller portions and snackable meals, this slider-style bun taps into strong consumer demand for premium specialty breads, while supporting mix-and-match builds and multi-daypart menus. Designed specifically for deli performance, it maintains quality for up to four hours in warmers and three days in coolers, making it ideal for hot hold, cold grab-and-go, breakfast sandwiches and premium slider programs.



## LaClare Creamery

CREAMERY LEMON  
BAR GOAT CHEESE  
MALONE, WI

Drawing inspiration from the nostalgia of lemon bar desserts, LaClare Creamery's Lemon Bar Goat Cheese reimagines this classic flavor profile in an unexpected format. The award-winning, gluten-free fresh goat cheese is crafted from LaClare's Original Goat Cheese and blended with real lemon and a touch of vanilla to create a sweet, citrus-forward experience with a luxuriously creamy finish. The versatility and cross-category appeal of this Lemon Bar Goat Cheese deliver the familiarity of a beloved dessert flavor while functioning as a fresh, spreadable chèvre — offering a renewed source of inspiration for how goat cheese can be used and enjoyed. The tangy goat cheese base naturally balances the lemon and vanilla flavors, resulting in a bright, modern flavor profile that aligns with demands for fresh flavors. Beyond the cheese board, this tasty chèvre opens new possibilities for prepared foods and recipe applications. The creamy texture and integrated citrus notes allow it to stand in for both dairy and lemon juice in a variety of dishes.



## Schaller & Weber

PLANT-BASED PÂTÉ  
NEW YORK, NY

Schaller & Weber's plant-based pâtés stand out in the charcuterie category by bringing the same old-world sensibility and restraint that defines its meat products to a fully vegan format. Crafted in Germany and shelf-stable, these organic, clean-label pâtés offer a rare retail advantage: A true pâté that requires no refrigeration, making it easy for retailers to merchandise and for consumers to enjoy anywhere. Designed both for those looking to step away from meat and for anyone building a more inclusive charcuterie board, they complement traditional meats and cheeses, rather than trying to imitate them.



## Oolie

DIPS AND YOGURTS  
JOHNSON CITY, TN

Oolie is the world's first egg-based protein-rich brand of dips and yogurts made from upcycled free-range farm-fresh eggs. With 16 grams of high-quality protein per 8-ounce container of dip and 11 grams per serving of yogurts, Oolie meets today's consumer demand for more protein. The creamy texture and rich flavor created by the eggs are the center of its appeal. Combined with clean ingredients, Oolie offers unique, craveable flavors including Yellow Curry, Mediterranean Tomato, Garlic & Herb, Red Beet Bliss and Spicy Pepper. The current yogurt line includes four flavors: Vanilla, Key Lime, Berry Blend and Banana Cream.

## Upper Cut

TAPAS SNACK TRAYS  
PHOENIX, AZ

Upper Cut Tapas Snack Trays bring globally inspired flavors together in a convenient, multi-use format designed for today's on-the-go consumer. Each tray features four curated compartments filled with premium Upper Cut meats, artisan-style cheeses, and accompaniments that are inspired by culinary traditions from around the world. Crafted for versatility, Upper Cut Tapas Snack Trays can be enjoyed as a satisfying snack, a balanced meal replacement, or an effortless addition to a globally inspired snacking board or charcuterie spread. Every combination is intentionally designed to deliver bold flavor exploration with no prep required.

DB



# Beyond Mustard: Deli is a Condiment Destination

**Sweet-heat combinations, smoky profiles, and crunchy, cold-case pickles are expanding what a ‘side’ can do for a sandwich.**

BY KEITH LORIA

**S**upermarket delis have quietly become condiment destinations. Beyond the expected yellow mustard, mayonnaise and half-sour pickles, today’s cases feature everything from refrigerated krauts and kimchi to spicy brown and stone-ground mustards, hot honey, specialty aiolis, fermented vegetables, and chef-inspired sandwich spreads.

Lauren Eni Canseco, chief marketing officer of Philadelphia, PA-based Dietz & Watson, notes deli complements are a strategic extension of the company’s core deli meats and cheeses, designed to help retailers turn a simple counter stop into a complete meal solution.

“Condiments and accompaniments make it easy for shoppers to envision and build a delicious sandwich or charcuterie plate right in the deli, driving incremental sales and reinforcing the deli as a curated destination, not just a place to buy meat and cheese,” she says. “Our complements portfolio, from mustard varieties to pickles and sandwich spreads, offer quality pairings that naturally enhance the taste experience of our artisan proteins and cheeses, creating a compelling reason to purchase more at every visit.”

While the staples still anchor the offerings with items like classic dill pickles, coleslaw, horseradish sauce, Dijon and traditional mayo, today’s shoppers are increasingly looking for bolder heat levels, global flavors and products that promise freshness or clean labels.

For example, Dietz & Watson Deli Classic Ballpark Style Yellow Mustard and Dietz & Watson Deli Spicy Brown Mustard provide richer and bolder profiles that are gaining traction. Sweet-tangy blends, such as Dietz & Watson Cranberry Honey Mustard and honey-forward options like Dietz & Watson Zesty Honey Mustard, appeal to shoppers looking for something beyond basic yellow.

“Shoppers increasingly want condiments that taste crafted and purposeful, with bold flavor curves (heat, acidity, sweetness) that can stand up to high-quality proteins and cheeses,” says Canseco. “There’s also rising interest in cleaner ingredient decks and recognizable sourcing that aligns with broader wellness trends. While mustard and pickle categories have historically been simple, consumers today are receptive to nuanced profiles that pair well with artisanal meats and cheeses without overpowering them.”

## IN VOGUE

At Don’s Prepared Foods, Schwenksville, PA, condiments go beyond the basics, with a portfolio centered on dips and cheese spreads designed for deli versatility.

“Don’s excels with the many dips and cheese spreads we offer,” says Carl H. Cappelli, senior vice president of sales and business development. “The retail delis are increasingly using them on wraps, sandwiches and build-your-own concepts, as well as pairing them



PHOTO COURTESY DIETZ & WATSON

with in-store pizza through a range of distinctive dip flavors.”

Peter Steinkrauss, vice president of Sauer Brands, Inc., Richmond, VA, makers of Duke’s Mayo and condiments, has seen continued demand for bold, spicy and savory flavor profiles that add depth to traditional deli offerings.

“Variations featuring chipotle, sriracha-style heat, and even elevated flavors, like truffle, are resonating with consumers who want familiar comfort foods with a more adventurous twist, and these preferences will continue to influence future product innovation for deli use,” he says.

The company has also seen Duke’s Spicy Brown Mustard, Duke’s Southern Sauces, Honey Mustard, and Ranch resonating strongly as complementary dressings, giving delis versatile options to dress everything from classic subs to prepared salads and grab-and-go meals.

## IN A PICKLE

Deli operators utilize pickles at the counter the same way chefs use a finishing ingredient. It’s an easy way to add crunch, brightness, and that punch of acidity that makes prepared foods taste fresher.

Ryan M. Downs, president of Oh Snap!, Appleton, WI, notes recent research shows that on average, consumers consume nine pounds of pickles per year.

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The research also showed that texture is critical. A strong majority of consumers say the perfect pickle must crunch (86%) and be served cold (85%), underscoring the value of fresh-packed, high-quality pickles in the deli case.

“We see our brand as a great transaction builder for operators,” he says. “It is a natural fit for delis, as operators commonly feature Oh Snap! as a side option for sandwiches. Consumers often use us as an addition to sandwiches and then eating the remaining bites right out of the convenient pouch as a side.”

Across the deli, two formats seem to perform strongest, according to the experts. Grab-and-go jars for shoppers seeking premium pickles to take home, and there’s also growing interest in portion packs, especially for lunch combos and prepared meal programs.

Eric Girard, vice president of sales and marketing for Van Holten’s Pickles, Waterloo, WI, notes pickles can add crunch and brightness to turkey clubs, Italian-style sandwiches and chicken cutlets, while chopped pickles enhance deli staples like potato, tuna and chicken salads with a clean, briny lift.

“Individual portions also fit seamlessly into grab-and-go meal kits and lunch boxes, giving both retailers and at-home consumers a convenient way to balance richer foods with sharp, chef-level flavor,” he says.

Rick’s Picks has been on a pickle journey since winning Best in Show at the Rosendale International Pickle Festival in 2004. In 2019, the company’s Cumin-Lime Dill and Garlic-Dill pickles even made it to space, joining the NASA Expedition 61 crew as part of their mission supplies.

“Today, Rick’s Picks is known for savory, hand-packed, all-natural, non-GMO pickles, made in season with produce from trusted local farmers, crafted for serious crunch and standout flavor,” says Luis Acosta, sales account manager for the New York, NY-based company. “Our best-sellers in supermarket deli cases are our Classic Sours, Sweet Spears and Hotties Pickle Chips. They do really well because they deliver what deli shoppers want most: big flavor, clean ingredients and something that feels a little more ‘chef-made’ than a standard pickle.”

Several recent pickle flavor trends include heat with nuance, meaning layered heat from chiles like habanero, Calabrian peppers and smoked paprika; brighter, cleaner brines; and global flavor mashups, such as “swicy” (sweet + spicy) pickles, with Korean, Mediterranean, or Mexican-inspired notes, which are emerging as a strong trend and resonating with younger shoppers.

## MERCHANDISING MATTERS

Merchandising condiments and pickles next to sliced meats, cheeses and prepared foods encourages attachment sales and impulse purchases, especially as shoppers build custom sandwiches or grab-and-go meals.

Dietz & Watson’s Canseco notes in the deli case, condiments

should be presented as pairing partners — placed near meats and cheeses with clear suggestion cues. This positioning underscores usage at the decision-making moment and creates a more flavorful, complete solution.

“Sampling remains one of the most effective ways to drive trial, especially when condiments are paired directly with sliced meats, cheeses, or prepared sandwiches so shoppers can immediately taste how the flavors work together,” says Canseco. “Cross-merchandising in the deli case helps reinforce usage ideas at the point of decision, while clear, simple signage can spotlight suggested pairings or sandwich builds.”

A savvy cross-merchandising strategy, Acosta notes, should be focused on three touchpoints.

“Sandwich stations and cut tables, where you place pouches or jars near where shoppers choose their meats and cheeses to trigger impulse add-ons,” he says. “Then meal solution sets, where you place them next to premium breads, sliced deli meats, and grab-and-go salads for easy lunch-at-home messaging. A third area is with signature sandwich programs on in-store menu boards or POS (point-of-sale). When shoppers taste the product in a sandwich, it naturally drives jar sales.”

## PACKAGING EVOLUTION

Packaging for condiments is evolving as well, with resealable tubs, squeeze bottles and portion formats designed for convenience and minimal mess.

Steinkrauss, of Sauer Brands, believes a mix of formats works best for deli operations.

“Gallons and large tubs are ideal for high-volume back-of-house prep, while squeeze bottles support speed and consistency during sandwich assembly,” he says. “Portion-control pouches and cups are especially effective for grab-and-go meals and deli-case sales, offering convenience for both operators and shoppers.”

Retailers are also succeeding with deli-case-ready, grab-and-go formats that invite trial and impulse attachment.

“Smaller jars, squeezable bottles and portion pack formats make it easy for shoppers to add condiments at point-of-sale, increasing average basket size,” says Canseco.

Unlike traditional jarred pickles, Oh Snap! does not add brine to its pickle pouches, providing a less-mess option that makes snacking more portable and convenient, which is particularly appealing in delis and other grab-and-go retail environments.

“Our brand also recently refreshed its packaging to improve both the consumer experience and shelf impact,” says Downs. “The updated design features a flying pickle icon for stronger brand recognition, updated product imagery that enhances appetite appeal and a brighter, cleaner layout that makes flavors easier to see and read at a glance.”

DB

# Italian Cheeses Elevate the Deli

Promoting the enduring appeal of Italian cheeses in the department.

BY VANESSA SALVIA

**W**hether it's a wheel of aged Italian Parmigiano-Reggiano ready to be cracked open or a creamy ball of fresh Wisconsin mozzarella, Italian and Italian-style cheeses have long had a place of honor in the deli department. While authenticity is always respected, the category continues to evolve, making Italian and Italian-style cheeses among the most interesting and profitable items a deli can keep in stock.

## A CATEGORY ON THE RISE

According to Cheese Merchants, a producer of Italian-style cheeses, Parmesan is the third best-selling cheese type in the U.S., with more than a billion dollars in annual sales — it's also the top growth driver, up nearly \$50 million. Only cheddar and mozzarella outsell it.



PHOTO COURTESY CAPUTO



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Jim Wittig, vice president of retail for Cheese Merchants, Bartlett, IL, knows why: Consumers prefer artisanal and minimally processed foods, and inflation has kept more people cooking at home. Social media buzz has also discovered Parmesan; posts are circulating noting that a serving of Parmesan can contain more protein than the equivalent portion of chicken.

The four primary domestic Italian cheeses — Parmesan, Asiago, Romano and fontina — have long been category anchors. But Natale Caputo, chief executive of Caputo Cheese, a Chicago, IL-based cheese manufacturer, sees the American palate expanding beyond those classics.

“In every restaurant, every grocery store, burrata is readily available. Stracciatella is becoming very popular,” says Caputo. “People are recognizing that the Italians have a lot more to offer than just Parmigiano-Reggiano or Pecorino Romano.” Soft cheeses, like ricotta, taleggio and mascarpone, are finally becoming household names after years of mostly being seen on restaurant menus, he adds.

“Consumers are cooking at home more and replicating trending and restaurant-style recipes,” says John C. Dammacco, vice president

of sales and marketing at Ambriola, importers of Italian cheese since 1921, based in West Caldwell, NJ. “Consumers are expanding their usage of Italian cheese from a cooking ingredient to charcuterie boards and snacking.”

Today’s shoppers are also looking for transparency, authenticity and sustainability, Dammacco says, which means the origin story and quality ingredients are selling points. He recommends stocking convenient pre-shredded, grated and sliced formats for grab-and-go shoppers, and merchandising with seasonal snacking and charcuterie accompaniments to promote usage beyond cooking. Think outside the recipe box, too.

### FRESH FORMATS

Roseanne Crave, sales and marketing manager and co-owner of Crave Brothers Farmstead Cheese in Waterloo, WI, has watched fresh mozzarella transform from specialty novelty to mainstream staple over the past 20 years. Today, Crave Brothers produces fresh mozzarella in sizes from a 2-gram pearl to a 1-pound log, along with medallion shapes ideal for caprese salads and fruit pairings, and a heart shape that draws consumers around Valentine’s Day.

## WHAT THEY ARE Saying

“People are recognizing that the Italians have a lot more to offer than just Parmigiano-Reggiano or Pecorino Romano.”

Natale Caputo, Caputo Cheese, Chicago, IL

Crave Brothers controls the process from cow to finished cheese, and Roseanne Crave says that level of transparency resonates strongly with today’s buyers and consumers. She recommends delis know their cheeses well enough to share the stories behind them with the customers.

The same philosophy runs through Caputo’s operation. “The delis need to do a good job of promoting the family behind that product,” says Caputo. “Let the family describe the product, the way that they love it, maybe the way that they eat it, the recipes they make at home on their table with their own product.”

### MERCHANDISING AS A DESTINATION

For adventurous consumers, the deli can be a “treasure hunt” destination, says Wittig. Shoppers enjoy asking questions and discovering new flavors and products for entertaining, experimenting, or elevating their home dining experience.

Caputo recommends a dedicated Italian section anchored visually by the colors of the Italian flag, with the story of the cheesemaker or family driving the narrative. “Americans are used to commodity-type cheeses,” he says. “The Italians really set themselves apart as being the specialty, passion, recipe-driven food — bringing family together, bringing friends together at the table.”

The Parmigiano Reggiano Consortium recommends creating in-store destinations that make the cheese easy to find in a variety of forms, protected by refrigeration and wrapped in premium-looking packaging. Displaying whole wheels and breaking them “a roccia” — using special knives to split rather than cut — creates a visually striking, theatrical presentation.



As Giovanni Guffanti Fiori, owner and cheese specialist of Luigi Guffanti, cheesemakers in Milan since 1876, notes, that method “not only preserves the cheese’s natural structure, but also creates a much more visually striking and appealing presentation.”

The consortium also provides geotargeted digital campaigns, in-store signage to retail partners, and in 2025, launched the training program Parmigiano Reggiano Academy.

Cross-merchandising and general messaging is something that many delis already do, but could do better. Reisa Maddex, manager of Capella Market in Eugene, OR, places charcuterie and fruit spreads in the cheese case. Capella Market encourages conversations between staff and shoppers to build familiarity and provide personalized recommendations for cheese and wine pairings or other specialty foods.

Signage that calls out specific cheeses and their uses is a gap she acknowledges: “Fontina is an amazing melter; we should be signing it that way, and we don’t consistently.”

She also points out that when shoppers see a pasta dish in the hot case made with a specific cheese, it plants a seed — but only as long as the customers know the cheese



PHOTO COURTESY CAPUTO

is part of the recipe: “You eat something and think, I could make this at home,” she says.

Education and sampling are the highest-return tactics for building Italian cheese sales. Wittig of Cheese Merchants goes further, recommending deli staff share memorable facts that help consumers build confidence and enthusiasm for the cheeses.

Crave encourages deli staff to stay current

with social media trends, so they can connect with customers who arrive already curious. She also suggests grouping cheeses around Italian heritage themes or holiday moments and using personal recommendations, such as telling customers, “This is my favorite cheese,” to create authentic moments of engagement. Quality should lead the conversation over price, she adds, especially through demos. **DB**

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# Olives on the Rise

Tap into trends to drive olive and antipasti sales in the deli.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

**S**hoppers in the deli department at many Publix Super Markets stores will find olives featured either in a self-serve olive bar or in convenient pre-packed containers merchandised alongside specialty cheeses. The assortment spans marinated and pitted favorites, such as Kalamata, Castelvetrano, and grilled green olives, plus seasoned medleys of green, black, and Kalamata varieties with red peppers and herbs.

Stuffed options range from blue cheese-filled queen olives to feta-stuffed Mediterranean styles and jalapeño-stuffed colossal olives. Antipasti, like peppadew peppers, stuffed grape leaves, and provolini, round out sets designed to encourage cross-merchandising and incremental sales.

“Our customers are increasingly exploring the olive category for its flavor and versatility,” says Nicole Maristany Krauss, media relations manager for the 1,400-plus-store chain headquartered in Lakeland, FL, operating across eight Southeastern states.

## PAST TO PRESENT

Olives have graced human tables for over 7,000 years, dating back to the Neolithic era in the Eastern Mediterranean. At first, they grew wild.

By 4000-3000 BC, olives were cultivated and pressed for oil on the Greek island of Crete. The Romans expanded cultivation throughout Europe, while Spanish missionaries brought trees to the Americas, establishing them in California by 1769.

Today, California is the primary domestic olive producer, albeit the fruit is almost exclusively sold processed, i.e., canned and jarred. When it comes to brined table olives, the U.S. is a net importer, with over a third (39%) sourced from Spain, and other countries, such as Greece, Morocco and Italy, according to the International Olive Council (ICC), headquartered in Madrid, Spain.

Americans’ per capita consumption of table olives is approximately 2.4 pounds annually, according to ICC data, relatively low compared to other global regions. However, the North American Olive



PHOTO COURTESY DELALLO

Market is expected to reach \$9.64 billion by 2030, a CAGR of 5.74%, according to the *North America Olive Market Size & Share Analysis — Growth Trends & Forecasts (2025-2030)*, by Mordor Intelligence.

Several trends are poised to drive demand growth.

“Olives have been around for thousands of years, but for us it’s one of the fastest-growing categories. More people are receptive to eating olives, eating more olives, and eating them in a variety of ways. I think the popularity of the Mediterranean diet has a lot to do with it,” says Adam Lagreca, in sales at family-owned Rachel’s Table, a Greenville, RI-based manufacturer of its Troino’s Gourmet brand and private label stuffed olives, including its more popular Spanish queen olives stuffed with blue cheese.

The Mediterranean Diet was named the Best Overall Diet by *U.S. News & World Report* for the ninth consecutive year as of 2026. This diet recommends one to two servings of olives daily, with one serving

equaling five to 10 small olives.

“Today’s consumers prioritize sustainability, freshness, and traceability as key indicators of a product’s quality, health benefits, and nutritional value,” says Melissa Pepe, export assistant at the Ficacci Olive Co., based in Castel Madama, Roma, Italy, which uses a brineless packaging method to preserve olives without liquid or preservatives. “Clean label is another big driver and a major trend in the USA due to shifting consumer priorities toward health, transparency and trust. This especially attracts Millennials and Gen Z, who favor minimally processed foods over ultra-processed options linked to health risks.”

Convenience and versatility, and premiumization plus discovery, are also two clear themes driving consumer demand for olives and antipasto, according to Harold Weiss, executive vice president and chief sales officer for Kayco, the Bayonne, NJ-headquartered distributor of Tuscanini Olives & Antipasto, which offers premium kosher-certified Italian olives. “Consumers

## WHAT THEY ARE Saying

“Throughout the year, and especially during entertaining seasons and holiday spikes, the performance of a well-executed olive bar is unmatched.”

— Giuliana Pozzuto, DeLallo, Mount Pleasant, PA

Valesco Foods has also introduced Kosher Dill Olives. Also, the company has introduced red-colored olives that get their color from natural sources rather than Red Dye No. 2 (E127), which will be banned in food products in the U.S. as of January 2027. Both products will be available this spring.

“We’ve started making prosciutto-stuffed olives, using an imported prosciutto from Italy,” says Rachel’s Table’s Legreca.

The Ficacci Olive Co.’s latest launch, for 2026, is a sustainable, four-compartment paper Party Platter. “This lets consumers sample four distinct olives and/or antipasti in one convenient, shareable tray. Perfect for table companions,” says Pepe.

Ficacci is also developing new olive indulgences, such as chocolate-coated pitted olives, poised to captivate buyers at the U.S. summer trade shows.

### SELF-SERVE & GRAB-&-GO

To meet shoppers’ needs, Publix Super Markets offers both olive bars and prepackaged specialty olives, says Krauss. “Olive bars allow shoppers to customize their selections, while our packages include options, such as Kalamata olives and blue cheese stuffed olives, perfect for charcuterie boards and cooking.”

Olive bars are making a comeback since many were closed or repurposed during the COVID pandemic.

“The retailers who have kept or reinvested in them (olive bars) are using them as a clear point of differentiation,” says DeLallo’s Pozzuto. “An olive bar immediately sets a full-service deli apart from club and discount formats, where shoppers are limited to a small, prepackaged assortment. The bar consistently outsells packaged olive



PHOTO COURTESY PUBLIX

are building charcuterie boards, snack plates, salads, grain bowls, and easy weeknight meals, and olives and antipasto fit perfectly, while naturally elevating meals with minimal preparation. Plus, shoppers are also willing to trade up for products that feel authentic, imported-inspired, and special.”

### BEST SELLERS & WHAT’S NEW

Pitted Jubilee, a spiced marinated medley of Kalamata, classic Niçoise-style, Picholine and plump green olives; Greek Feta Salad, a combination of pitted Kalamata, black, and green olives paired with feta cheese cubes; and Provoloni Antipasti, an Italian-inspired mix of provolone cheese cubes, mushrooms, sweet red peppers, and both pitted green and black Manzanilla olives in an herb-oil based marinade, are the three best-selling products at Publix Super Markets.

“Inspired by European flavors, these assortments, along with traditional and stuffed varieties, have gained popularity due to their unique and flavorful profiles,” says Krauss.

Overall, in the U.S., the most popular olives are pitted Kalamata and pitted Castelvetrano, according to Al Sozer, president of Valesco Foods, in South Hackensack, NJ. The company carries 79 different types of olives, giving it a deep inventory that enables it to work with retail deli operators to create private-label, customized olive medleys tailored to their shoppers. “Kalamata was the

king for a long time, but in some regions the pitted Castelvetrano is No. 1. It all depends on the region. For example, Castelvetrano is the top seller in the Northeast, such as around New York City and its suburbs, where there is a large Italian, Greek, and Spanish population, and in the Boston area.”

Manufacturers are innovating around several themes, says Weiss. These include chef-driven flavor profiles, such as herb, citrus, and garlic, convenient packaging and portion control, curated assortments for entertaining, and formats designed for both snacking and cooking.

“We’re leaning into the growing pickle trend with inventive olive-and-pickle combinations, including a Spicy Sweet Bread & Butter Pickle and Green Olive Salad with crushed Calabrian chile peppers, and a Tangy Dill Pickle and Castelvetrano Green Olive blend,” says Giuliana Pozzuto, director of marketing and product innovation for DeLallo, the Mount Pleasant, PA-headquartered, family-owned Italian food brand and the largest olive importer in the U.S.



PHOTO COURTESY FICACCI

PHOTO COURTESY DELALLO



## WHAT THEY ARE *Saying*



“The use of signage like ‘preservative-free,’ ‘no artificial colors,’ ‘brineless’ can attract health-conscious shoppers.”

— Melissa Pepe, Ficacci Olive Co., Castel Madama, Roma, Italy

programs because it delivers what today’s consumer wants: variety, discovery, and the ability to mix and match. It creates impulse purchases and invites shoppers to explore new flavors.”

Post-COVID changes in retail deli bars Kayco’s Weiss has witnessed include more structured programs with tighter selection, integration into Mediterranean or prepared-food bars, and stronger labeling and rotation discipline.

While olive bars excel at product showcasing, pairing them with grab-and-go packaged products can streamline the consumer purchasing process and boost sales, says Ficacci’s Pepe. The company’s FreshPack line features premium Italian and Greek olives packed brineless in modified-atmosphere 4- to 7-ounce refrigerated tubs. The unpasteurized, preservative-free olives deliver clean-label appeal, firm texture, and authentic flavor across more than 20 varieties with a six- to eight-month shelf life.

Tuscanini has introduced a 1-ounce single-serve, shelf-stable, liquid-free, pitted green olive pack in three flavors: Original, Spicy and Garlic.

“These are an ideal choice for on the go, and appeal to diet-conscious, keto, vegan, and gluten-free consumers seeking high-protein, low-calorie alternatives to processed snacks,” says Weiss. “For retailers, there is ease of merchandising. The slim, vertical stand-up pouches are in

a ready-to-merchandise tray, designed for ‘anywhere, anytime’ shelf placement.”

### MERCHANDISING & PROMOTION

The most successful olive and antipasto programs rely on usage-driven merchandising rather than price-driven promotions, according to Kayco’s Weiss. “Use signage to guide usage — mild vs. bold, ideal for salads, boards or cooking.

“Merchandise olives and antipasto as part of meal solutions such as ‘Build-a-Board,’ ‘Mediterranean Night,’ or ‘Salad Toppers.’ Feature olives in deli-prepared recipes, and cross-merchandise with cheese, hummus, bakery items and prepared salads.”

Publix Super Markets’ extensive olive selection, both from the olive bar and packaged, is found next to specialty cheeses in

the deli. “We promote these pairings through our weekly ads and our website, suggesting delicious combinations with jams, crackers, wine, and more,” says Krauss.

Companies, such as DeLallo, have continued to expand beyond traditional olives and antipasto to support the entire charcuterie occasion, helping retailers build a full solution in the deli. “For example, we’ve introduced a new cheese glaze from Italy that elevates specialty cheeses and boards with a premium, imported touch, as well as our organic focaccia thin, flaky baked crackers that help bring everything on the deli case together,” says Pozzuto.

For promotion, Pozzuto adds DeLallo is leveraging seasonal limited-time items to create excitement and incremental sales. “Our Summer Pitted Olive Party Mix features a patriotic design celebrating America’s 250th anniversary, perfect for picnics and summer entertaining. With the World Cup coming to the U.S., we’re also introducing a limited-time ‘Kick Off Salad,’ a soccer-themed antipasto designed for game-day gatherings. These packaged items are easy to cross-merchandise and help retailers build themed displays that drive seasonal lift.” **DB**



PHOTO COURTESY FICACCI

# Chicken Rules the Roost in the Deli

Consumption of the deli's biggest bird continues to rise.

BY BOB JOHNSON

**O**ver the past several decades, chicken has steadily risen in popularity to become, by a wide margin, the most popular meat in the country.

When John F. Kennedy was elected the first Catholic president in 1960, Americans ate an average of 63.5 pounds of beef per year, compared to just 28 pounds of chicken, according to statistics compiled by the Washington, D.C.-based National Chicken Council. The National Chicken Council is a trade organization representing companies that raise, process, or transport chickens for human consumption.

Chicken consumption eclipsed beef for the first time, by an average of 66.5 pounds to 65.9, when Bill Clinton first won the White House in 1992.

More recently, chicken has continued to increase market share as the most affordable and healthiest animal protein.

"We've seen the surge in chicken," says Kurt Richards, director of marketing for Anchor Packaging, St. Louis, MO. "In part, it's driven by the perceived health benefits of chicken."

Anchor Packaging is a global firm manufacturing packaging for consumer and healthcare products, including packages that enhance the shelf life of fried chicken when displayed in the deli under heat lamps.

As Donald Trump won his second term in 2024, chicken consumption dwarfed beef by an impressive margin of 102.7 pounds to just 49.9 pounds. And the Chicken Council forecasts chicken consumption to rise to 104.9 pounds this year, while beef remains a distant second at 58.6 pounds.

## ROTISSERIE IS STAR

In the deli, the star of the category is rotisserie chicken, which makes for a popular and convenient center-of-the-plate option.

"The deli is seeing growth in convenient,



PHOTO COURTESY PUBLIX

protein-rich options, such as meat snacks and rotisserie chicken," says Sherry Frey, vice president for total wellness at Nielsen IQ in the International Deli Dairy Bakery Association's (IDDBA) recently released *What's in Store 2026*.

The rotisserie meat market reached \$3.5 billion in 2024, according to Emergen Research, and was forecast to reach \$6.2 billion in 2034. Emergen is a market research and consulting firm based in British Columbia.

Chickens capture a significant majority of the rotisserie market, and rotisserie chicken sales are increasing briskly.

"The global demand for rotisserie chicken has seen a significant uptick," according to an Emergen report, "with sales increasing by approximately 10% in recent years. This trend is expected to continue as more consumers prioritize quality and flavor in their meal choices."

While Costco sells more than 150 million rotisserie chickens a year, and Walmart

more than 50 million, that still leaves a large enough flock of these tasty birds for the deli to consider paying attention to current flavor trends.

"For many consumers today, Latin and Mexican flavors are a regular part of their meal rotation," says Maeve Webster and Mike Kostyo, president and vice president, respectively, of Menu Matters. "If you're looking for your next rotisserie flavor, make it chile lime."

Menu Matters is a consulting firm specializing in trends in the restaurant sector.

Rotisserie chickens have the added benefit of also boosting sales of complementary sides and salads.

## FRIED CHICKEN COMES ON STRONG

Many chicken items benefit from strong consumer demand for convenient protein options. "Much of the growth in the deli is generated by deli-prepared and entertaining spaces," says Bailey Furtado, senior fresh

PHOTO COURTESY PUBLICX



## WHAT THEY ARE *Saying*

“We see a lot of demand in both rotisserie and fried chicken. Reliance on prepared food is increasing. It increased during COVID, and it’s still up there.”

— Kurt Richars, Anchor Packaging,  
St. Louis, MO

foods industry analyst at Circana. “Deli prepared — including entrees, side dishes, appetizers, prepared meats such as rotisserie chicken and more — saw growth of +4.0% in dollars and units up +1.4% for year-to-date ending Nov. 30, 2025.”

Fried chicken packages, both behind the counter and in convenient grab-and-go options, are also earning a healthy share of the deli protein market. While rotisserie chicken leads the category, the IDDBA’s current list of top 10 trends in deli meat flavors had fried chicken at No. 5.

“We see a lot of demand in both rotisserie and fried chicken,” says Richars. “Reliance on prepared food is increasing. It increased during COVID, and it’s still up there.”

New technologies aim to improve efficiency in the handling of fried chicken cooking oil, and in the display of the product.

Anchor has developed packaging that reduces labor and shrink and increases repeat sales of fried chicken pieces displayed in the deli under heat lamps. “We have packages with vent holes on the sides and the top,” says Richars. “If fried chicken is in a hot case, it will hold for a couple of hours. We have to deliver quality, which means it has to taste like fresh meat. We also have to create more efficiency for the retailer so they can do more with less labor.”

Another essential part of the program for various fried chicken products is efficiency in handling the oil.

One new technology improves the safety and efficiency in moving cooking oil from the fryer to storage tanks. Frontline International’s Used Cooking Oil Pump Station can be mounted on a wall, floor, or



even in the ceiling near the FOG-generating equipment. It safely moves fats, oils, and grease to a remote containment tank via a trunk line running from the top of the pump station to a valve on the tank.

“Their equipment is created to save labor and improve safety,” says Christina Campbell, account executive at Cunningham Baron, which is Frontline’s public relations firm.

Another time-saver is to fry the chicken under pressure in a broaster. “When you cook under pressure, it takes a lot less time,” says Katie Klaus, senior marketing manager at Broaster Company, Beloit, WI. “It takes about half the time.”

Broaster manufactures a variety of pressure fryers that cook under pressure to reduce cooking time and gas energy and extend the useful life of the oil. “The chicken is also more tender and juicy,” says Klaus.

### **DON’T FORGET THE WINGS AND BITES**

Several products other than rotisserie and fried are also enjoying shares of the robust market for chicken in the deli.

“Grab-and-go bone-in chicken wings and boneless bites, both sold in the cold case, as well as in the hot cases, are common formats,” says Dante Todaro, operations intern

at La Nova Wings, Buffalo, NY. “Grab-and-go containers of four to six pieces of wings or boneless bites with a side of sauce are a good way to merchandise. Typically, pricing is the greatest challenge, but we are seeing these style foods really start to take good traction for convenience and quick meals.”

Wings have become so popular that it is worth offering choices in sauces. “You need a barbecue sauce as a substitute for the traditional buffalo sauce,” says Todaro. “Our barbecue chicken wings are successful in the two high-volume pizzerias we operate in Buffalo.”

Todaro believes cost trumps health in driving chicken sales. “People buy what’s good for their pockets, compared with what’s good for their health,” he says. “Intentions are always good, but the pocketbook often dictates the decision.”

Over the decades, chicken has increased its advantage as the most economical animal protein. When Kennedy was elected, the average retail price for beef was 82.1 cents per pound, according to Chicken Council statistics, while chicken cost 42.7 cents per pound. By 2024, the price of beef had risen to \$8.23 per pound, while chicken retail prices had increased more modestly to \$2.43 a pound.

While the market for deli chicken is strong, retailers would do well to keep an eye on new competition down the street for this robust market.

“Convenience stores are utilizing delis to increase revenue,” says Todaro. “Delis are growing largely due to their implementation in c-stores looking to diversify their sales. Items that are easy to eat while driving or for a quick lunch seem to be the trend.” **DB**

# Maximizing Pizza Sales

How supermarket delis are turning pizza into a profitable destination.

BY VANESSA SALVIA

In recent years, supermarket delis have evolved far beyond the traditional cold cuts counter. Many in-store deli counters have commercial electric or gas ovens now, rivaling stand-alone pizzerias in quality and convenience. As consumer demand for ready-to-eat and premium food options continues to grow, delis are uniquely positioned to capture a larger share of the pizza market.

Pizza remains one of the most frequently consumed foods in America, with about 40% of Americans eating it at least weekly.

“For delis, the opportunity is to bridge that gap,” says Dan Lucchesi, sales manager for Gonnella Baking Co., which produces dough from their headquarters in Aurora, IL. “Consumers want restaurant-quality experiences at home without restaurant pricing. A fresh dough program allows retailers to compete in high-growth segments like Detroit-style and Grandma-style pizzas, while driving incremental sales across toppings, sauces and prepared foods. It shifts pizza from a single item to a full merchandising platform.”



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## INVESTING IN EQUIPMENT

One key lesson from successful deli pizza programs is the importance of proper equipment. Mike Kurtz is founder of Brooklyn, NY-based Mike's Hot Honey. His product, a sweet-hot combo of honey infused with spicy chiles, has become a staple in both pizzerias and retail locations across the country.

Kurtz points to Whole Foods' successful pizza program as an example. "They installed top-of-the-line ovens in all of their new stores and retrofitted existing locations with professional-grade equipment similar to what you might see in a pizzeria," he explains.

This investment in quality equipment serves two purposes. First, it ensures the functional ability to produce superior pizza. Second, it acts as a visual signal to customers that they can expect pizzeria-quality products. When customers see professional equipment in their local deli, it builds confidence that they'll receive a product on par with dedicated pizzerias.

"Consumers are increasingly seeking healthier pizza options, including gluten-free crusts, plant-based toppings, low-calorie and high-protein choices," says Heather Stammler, product manager, pizza at Rich Products, a family-owned global food company, headquartered in Buffalo, NY. "They also value authenticity and quality, gravitating toward products made with '00' flour and fermented doughs that deliver a premium dining experience — an upgrade Millennials are willing to invest in."

## BUILDING EXPERT TEAMS

A key factor in developing a successful deli pizza program is having personnel who understand how to handle dough and how to cook pizzas properly.

However, managing staff education and turnover remains a challenge, which means delis need to develop efficient systems and documentation that allow new staff to quickly learn and maintain quality standards. "You need to be able to execute with a limited amount of training," notes Kurtz. "You can't have people in there training for weeks."

## 'SOLUTION CENTERS'

One of the deli's strongest advantages in the pizza market is convenience. Shoppers are already at the grocery store, so they don't have to make another trip to go somewhere else to get a slice or a whole pizza to take home for dinner. This natural advantage can be leveraged by ensuring consistent quality and availability during peak shopping hours.

"The demand for quick and convenient meal solutions in the deli is on the rise, with pizza leading the way as a top choice for busy families," says Stammler.

One innovative approach to boosting pizza sales is the creation of dedicated "solution centers" within the deli area. These centers bring together all the components customers need for a quality pizza experience, whether they're buying ready-made slices or preparing pizza at home.

"The most successful programs place pizza dough with sauce, cheese, and toppings, making it a one-stop shop for everything you need on a pizza night," says Joseph Piraino, director of sales for Belmont, NC-based DePalo Foods Inc., which sells pizza dough to grocery delis.

Customization is key. Lucchesi says most consumers who assemble pizza at home want to make it their own favorite way.

"Retailers should merchandise dough as part of a complete solution," says Lucchesi. "Pizza is typically an entrée and often paired with other items, making it ideal for meal kits and cross-department promotions. Operationally, extended cooler life and format versatility reduce shrink and allow retailers to scale programs confidently while minimizing waste — a top operator concern."

Gonnella's dough is marketed as being versatile enough for Detroit-, Sicilian-, and Grandma-style pan pizzas that is also stretchable for thin-style formats.

And whatever format of pizza you offer, provide instructions for success at home.

"I think a lot of times, delis make assumptions that people know what they're picking up and know what to do with it," points out Jill Falgiano, national sales director for Hackensack, NJ-based Losurdo Foods, which manufactures dough, mozzarella and ricotta cheeses. "People don't always know what they're doing with pizza."

One size of pizza does not fit all, for either cheese or dough. The cheese you offer will vary based on the type of pizza you're offering. "Detroit-style pizzas use their own type of blend of cheeses where fresh mozzarella isn't as much a part of it," Falgiano explains. But, she says, "In your very Italian, affluent type of backgrounds and demographics, they're going to demand more of a Margarita style or a Neapolitan style."

Test out your market by offering featured pizzas, even if you think you are confident about what your audience wants. For instance, do you need to create a Philly cheesesteak pizza? Is there another flavor

## WHAT THEY ARE *Saying*



"Consumers want restaurant-quality experiences at home without restaurant pricing. A fresh dough program allows retailers to compete in high-growth segments like Detroit-style and Grandma-style pizzas, while driving incremental sales across toppings, sauces and prepared foods. It shifts pizza from a single item to a full merchandising platform."



Dan Lucchesi, Gonnella Baking Co.,  
Aurora, IL

or combination that could become a really good local favorite?

Falgiano shared a personal example: "When I opened a little local empanada shop, I thought for sure the authentic empanada would be the key. I wound up having my pizza empanada and my Philly cheesesteak empanada fill the door in what was predominantly a Latin American neighborhood."

"Consumers are looking for high-quality, authentic pizza options that include better-for-you and regional options — like Detroit style and Roman style, all having a variety of toppings," says Stammler.

## PREMIUM INGREDIENTS

Pizza is viewed as both an indulgent food and one that can be healthy. Delis have access to both fresh and premium toppings, such as premium meats and cheese and fresh vegetables, which gives delis a marketing advantage.

Emphasizing pizza doughs with simple and clean, plant-based ingredient lists and premium ingredients, such as extra virgin olive oil or flours sourced from Italy, can strengthen the view of pizza as a healthy choice.

DePalo Foods sells a premium ready-made dough designed for high-heat, wood-fired ovens. The dough bakes into a thin crust with a puffy, charred edge.

"Neapolitan pizza is an old-world style pizza originating from Naples, Italy," says Piraino. "Crafted with simple, high-quality



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ingredients, including finely milled type '00' wheat flour, this dough is characterized by a thin, soft and chewy crust for the ideal Italian style pizza."

### INNOVATION AND CROSS-UTILIZATION

Successful delis are finding innovative ways to maximize their pizza ingredients. "Everybody needs to hire multiple products to do multiple things in their establishments to make ends meet these days," advises Losurdo Foods' Falgiano.

She suggests considering how ingredients can be cross-utilized: "Can your dough translate to a Detroit-style? Can it translate to a New York-style pizza? Can it translate to artisan?"

If you're only buying one product as a deli owner, use it for garlic bread, garlic knots, calzones, or other products where that type of dough could be successful. The same with your fresh mozzarella and your pizza cheeses — can you use those ingredients in a lasagna dish or a chicken parm dish?

"The latest trends in pizza dough profiles garlic and herb pizza dough, and Neapolitan-style pizza dough which is specifically made for ovens with high heat, such as Ooni ovens, as well as traditional pizza dough," says Piraino. "These flavors are ideal for family entertaining. Also, these doughs can be used for garlic knots, calzones, stromboli, and even flatbreads."

### MERCHANDISING MATTERS

Offering plant-based cauliflower crust, parbaked crusts, and dough balls provides consumers with more variety and options, says Rich Products' Stammler. And, these are all usable with the same toppings and cheese you already have.

"Merchandising matters and so does pizza crust," says Stammler. "In addition to fresh dough, grocers can offer a variety of crust options to entice consumers to buy more, more often. Grocers that offer more premium options can differentiate themselves from competitors."

Delis offering pizza by the slice could keep a display of premium topping options on the counter, and upcharge customers to add a premium topping of their choice to their slice.

"While consumers value the ability to customize their pizzas — choosing from a variety of crusts, sauces and toppings — manufacturers like Rich's are bridging the gap between fresh and pre-made options," says Stammler. "Offering high-quality products helps labor-strapped grocers deliver exceptional pizzas without the intensive preparation, meeting the demand for authentic, on-trend dining experiences."

Nearly half of pizza consumers are enrolled in a loyalty program, and consumers are increasingly using coupons and rewards. "Retailers can leverage

that behavior with 'Pizza Night' bundles, cross-merchandised fresh pizza sections and loyalty tie-ins," says Lucchesi. "Taste remains the primary driver of repeat purchase, so marketing should emphasize premium quality, freshness, and signature flavor profiles — not just price."

Create a platform, not a product, Lucchesi says. "By offering a bundled deal on a specific day, retailers can drive traffic and sales with programs built around America's favorite food. Just as some delis offer Cheap Chicken Mondays, by anchoring pizza kits to a weekly deal day, retailers can form shopper habits, traffic and cross-merchandising opportunities."

### SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Mike's Hot Honey founder Kurtz says stores can promote their offerings by advertising around key pizza consumption timeframes, such as football games and holidays — data shows that Halloween is a top day for pizza sales in the U.S.

Consider implementing a loyalty program that rewards repeat customers with discounts or free items to drive repeat business and strengthen customer loyalty.

"Additionally, special deals and promotions, such as limited-time offers (LTOs), combo packages, and discounts, not only attract new customers but also encourage existing ones to explore and try new products," says Stammler.

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PHOTO COURTESY FIORUCCI

# THE NEW AGE OF SALAMI

These top five trends are driving sales in the deli.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

**W**hat's old is new again, and few foods prove it better than salami. This cured, fermented, and air-dried sausage traces back to Roman times, when salting pork was a practical way to preserve meat. The word itself comes from the Italian *salare*, meaning "to salt."

Today, the centuries-old craft is enjoying a modern revival, with salami boards, sandwiches, and recipe hacks racking up hundreds of thousands of virtual views on TikTok, Pinterest and Instagram.

"Traditional salami is being adapted for modern usage occasions such as on-the-go snacking, charcuterie boards, and entertaining, as well as deli-prepared foods and sandwiches," says Bella Tumini, marketing director and consultant at Olli Salumeria, a premium producer of Italian-style cured meats based in Oceanside, CA.

At the same time, consumer demand for salami is shifting toward health-conscious and premium offerings. Thus, the global market, pegged in 2025 at \$9.41 billion, is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 5.5% through 2033, with North America expected to be the fastest-growing region, according to the January

13, 2026-released report, *Salami 2025-2033 Analysis: Trends, Competitor Dynamics, and Growth Opportunities*, by Market Report Analytics, with U.S. offices in Washington.

Here are the top five trends driving the salami category and how deli operators can tap into to grow sales.

## 1. ON-THE-GO SNACKING DRIVES INNOVATION

In today's salami category, says Emanuela Bigi, marketing manager for Veroni USA, in Swedesboro, NJ, a leading importer of authentic Italian charcuterie, "innovation is less about reinventing the product and more about reimagining how and when consumers enjoy it."

Snacking, sharing, and casual entertaining are all suited to Veroni's Sliced Salami Chub line. This delivers Italian salami in a ready-to-eat, pre-sliced format that eliminates the need for knives or prep.

Snacking occasions are a major driver: 74% of consumers reportedly snack daily, and 56% replace meals with snacks, according to IDDBA's *What's in Store 2026*, creating new opportunities for salami as a flavorful, protein-rich option.

"Our 5-ounce salamis are easy to open, pack great flavor, and are shelf-stable. I throw

one in my backpack when traveling," says Debra Moser, president of Meat Crafters, Inc., a producer of chef-crafted sausages, bacon, and charcuterie, in Landover, MD.

Fiorucci Foods launched its Crafted Paninos, ready-to-eat Italian meat snacks wrapped around cheeses, last summer. The five-item line includes Uncured Genoa Salami & Garlic and Basil Cheese, and Uncured Salami & Smoked Gouda Cheese.

Conceived as a "date night" offering, the 7-ounce, five-chamber tray launched by Charcuterie Artisans under the Creminelli brand, sits between a traditional 2-3 ounce snack pack and a 10- to 15-ounce entertaining tray and is perfect for two people, according to Michael Burgess, director of marketing for the Mapleville, RI-located Charcuterie Artisans, parent company to premium brands, such as Creminelli Fine Meats, Daniele and Del Duca. "Speaking from experience, it is also perfect for those days when you find yourself behind a desk at lunchtime."

## 2. SALAMI CASHES IN ON THE CHARC CARD

Charcuterie culture has significantly expanded salami's role beyond sandwiches into entertaining, social gatherings, and

everyday grazing, according to Lauren Eni Canseco, chief marketing officer at Dietz & Watson, a Philadelphia, PA-based, family-owned purveyor of premium deli meats, artisan cheeses, and condiments.

“Salami has become a centerpiece protein for boards because it offers bold flavor, visual appeal, and versatility,” she says. “Delis can capitalize by creating curated charcuterie displays, offering pre-built board kits, and educating shoppers on pairings with cheeses, spreads and crackers. Highlighting salami as both a special-occasion and everyday item helps drive incremental sales.”

Convenience and ease are key factors driving demand for products designed for entertaining, says Evan Inada, director of charcuterie for Columbus Craft Meats, a San Francisco, CA-headquartered maker of Italian-style deli meats, and a subsidiary of the Hormel Foods Corporation. “Gen Z and Millennials are gathering more frequently and want easy options when hosting, especially for casual get-togethers. Products like our new Entertaining Tray and our popular Tasting Boards require zero prep, leave no mess, and bring delicious flavor.”

Larger charcuterie offerings are in demand for holiday and seasonal entertaining.

“Our Party Tray line offers a generous selection of Italian cured meats, ideal for celebrations or gatherings. Featuring Salame Milano and Toscano, paired with prosciutto, coppa, and provolone cheese, each tray is charcuterie-ready and served on a paper-bottom tray that reduces plastic by 85%,” says Veroni’s Bigi.

While some shoppers enjoy the convenience of pre-made kits, others appreciate the inspiration to mix and match different salami types with other ingredients, says Charcuterie Artisans’ Burgess. “Charcuterie popularity continues to grow, but in-store, it’s not always easy to find everything in one spot. It’s very important that items be merchandised together and very visible.”

Columbus Craft Meats help create charcuterie destinations in its retail customers’ marketplaces. “Our Perfect Charcuterie Bites help the stores engage with flavor profiles through showcases and demos. We love working with teams, like Hy-Vee and others, to educate their behind-the-glass employees so they can become experts in their craft, much like cheese mongers,” says Inada. “When an educated deli employee guides customers on what to purchase and how many slices they can get at a reasonable price point, it drives repeat sales and builds confidence in the charcuterie experience.”



PHOTO COURTESY FOODSTORY BRANDS

### 3. BETTER-FOR-YOU, BETTER-FOR-SALES

There’s great interest in better-for-you versions of salami as consumers continue to reach for healthier options, says Caitlyn Hufford, vice president of marketing for FoodStory Brands in Phoenix, AZ, which owns the Upper Cut deli snack brand, including cubed cheeses, meats, and curated charcuterie trays.

“This includes, for example, the popular claim for ‘No Nitrates, No Nitrites’ or ‘free from BHT/BHA,’ signaling a less processed or preserved variety. And as many shoppers increasingly scrutinize ingredients, with 25% actively avoiding artificial ingredients, they are seeking better-for-you options, meaning cleaner label or organic salami options.”

Last year, Olli Salumeria introduced a preservative-free salami, now available nationwide in its snack packs, pre-sliced options and chubs. The company replaced celery juice powder with an antioxidant blend made from spray-dried citrus fruit pulp and spices to maintain shelf life, color, and texture while delivering a cleaner label.

“We were the first brand to launch a truly preservative-free salami, with no nitrates or nitrites,” says Enrico Porrino, vice president of research and development and Master Salumiere, noting this is clearly highlighted on front-of-pack packaging.

### 4. PREMIUMIZATION IS UP IN A DOWN ECONOMY

In terms of premiumization and gourmet varieties, “we know traditional artisan flavor, slower and longer aging resonates with consumers,” says Columbus Craft Meat’s Inada. “Shoppers are looking to recreate

those experiences and want artisan producers to deliver a true salami experience with the flavor profiles they’d typically find at restaurants. We are bringing those flavors to lunchboxes, backyard picnics, and gatherings, rather than only being able to enjoy them at a restaurant or bar.”

Sampling continues to be a powerful merchandising tool, adds Veroni’s Bigi. “In-store demos with qualified promoters who can explain the product’s origin, flavor profile, and usage occasions consistently generate higher engagement and conversion. When consumers taste authentic Italian salami and hear the story behind it, the value becomes immediately clear.”

The retail value messaging should be “premium products positioned as affordable indulgence,” says Meat Crafters Moser. “You might not be able to go out and buy that Cadillac, but you can buy the Cadillac of salami.”

### 5. TRADITION MEETS TRENDY FLAVORS

Looking ahead, innovation in salami will continue to focus on flavor exploration, cleaner ingredients, and formats that fit modern eating habits, says Dietz & Watson’s Canseco.

“Manufacturers are leaning into bold spice profiles, regional inspirations, and products that align with snacking and entertaining occasions. The most successful introductions are supported by in-deli education. Sampling, clear signage explaining flavor and usage, and cross-merchandising with cheeses and accompaniments help amplify new products. Slicing fresh at the counter and offering suggested pairings also encourages trial and repeat purchase.”

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# BOTTLING A 'BURGH' ORIGINAL: 40 YEARS OF BEANO'S

In 1991, *The Pittsburgh Press* ran the headline, "Their hoagie sauce has Pittsburgh flavor." At the time, Jim Conroy was trying to convince local retailers that a bottled submarine dressing belonged in the deli section.

The idea started five years earlier inside Beano's Pizza & Suds in Pittsburgh, PA. Conroy and his brother Bill were serving subs when a customer told them the dressing was so good they should bottle it. There wasn't really a category for it then. No blueprint. Just a recipe people kept asking about.

They called it Submarine Dressing on purpose. As Jim Conroy explained in an early interview, "Submarine is more universal." It was a small decision, but it showed how seriously they were thinking about growth even in the early days.

Getting there took work. The brothers invested \$30,000 in a bottling machine, which felt like a big leap at the time, and started producing around 80 cases a week. Jim Conroy pitched buyers himself. They delivered product. They built it store by store. Getting into the deli departments at Giant Eagle became a real turning point because the bottle was finally sitting next to the deli meats and cheeses, right where people were building sandwiches.

As demand grew, Conroy Foods, Inc. was formed. The company is still owned by Jim Conroy (known to many as "Sauce"), his wife Leslee, and brother Bill Conroy. It has remained family-owned



*In 1991, The Pittsburgh Press ran this photo with a story titled, "Their hoagie sauce has Pittsburgh flavor." At the time, Jim Conroy was trying to convince local retailers that a bottled submarine dressing belonged in the deli section.*

from the start, and the ownership has never changed hands.

What set Conroy Foods apart then is still what carries it now. The recipe has not been reinvented. The quality has stayed consistent. Retail partnerships have been built for the long haul.

Over the years, the portfolio expanded beyond the original 8-ounce bottle. Pizza sauces and new flavors created more ways for people to use the brand. But the core idea never shifted. A sandwich should not be dry. It should feel finished.

The company still operates out of Pittsburgh, just in a slightly larger 60,000 square foot facility, and it still feels personal. Their daughter Hannah grew up tagging along to trade shows where she earned the nickname "Little Sauce" and eventually joined the business herself. On any given day, you can walk in and find Jim, Leslee, and



*Pictured (L-R): Bill, Leslee and Jim Conroy in 1990.*

PHOTOS COURTESY CONROY FOODS

Bill talking through production, customers, or the next flavor idea.

After 40 years, Beano's is still doing what it set out to do. Take something that worked in a neighborhood pizza and hoagie shop and make sure people can recreate it at home. Sometimes the best growth story is simply sticking with what works. **DB**

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