

DELI BUSINESS

MARKETING MERCHANDISING MANAGEMENT PROCUREMENT

COVER STORY



Scott Bridi
Brooklyn Cured

Alexandra Groezinger
Alexian

Shawna Haley
Cowgirl Creamery

Megan Levin
Refrigerated Foods Assoc.

Bob Sewall
Blount Foods

Mirit Shalvi
Kayco Kosher Food Brands

Karri Zwirlein
Northeast Shared Services

22ND ANNUAL DELI CHANGEMAKERS

Honoring the visionaries who are driving change and leading industry ideation.

SOUP

Retailers rethink formats, flavors and merchandising to drive sales

SWISS CHEESE

La Gruyere AOP continues to set standard for quality, authenticity and taste

BLAST FROM THE PAST

Don's Prepared Foods

SALADS & SIDES

How to expand customer base by leaning into convenience, prepared items

MEATS

Capitalizing on ham's history, versatility



Josh Windsor
Murray's Cheese



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DELI BUSINESS

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We honor those who have made a significant contribution to the industry, their company and their community.

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TRANSITIONS



IDDBA WELCOMES ABBY DESPINA

The International Dairy Deli Bakery Association (IDDBA) announced that Abby Despina has joined the organization as vice president of education and industry relations. Despina brings nearly two decades of experience in the food industry, with a career spanning several companies that make up IDDBA's membership. Most recently, she led marketing and communications at Emmi Roth. In her new role, Despina will lead the development and expansion of IDDBA's education programs and strengthen connections across the dairy, deli and bakery sectors. She began her role with IDDBA March 30.

IDDBA.org

ANNOUNCEMENTS



CAPUTO CHEESE WINS AT WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP CHEESE CONTEST

Caputo Cheese, Melrose Park, IL, was awarded at The World Championship Cheese Contest, placing first, "Best Of Class," with its Boconcini and third place with its Ovolini in the Fresh Mozzarella category. The 2026 World Championship Cheese Contest was hosted by The Wisconsin Cheese Makers Association March 3-5 in Madison, WI. This has been the premier cheese contest in the world since 1957, and Caputo Cheese has medaled in every competition since 2016, including gold in 2020, 2018 and 2024 (Burrata and Fresh Mozzarella).

CaputoCheese.com



BELTON FARM AWARDED AT THE LOS ANGELES INTERNATIONAL AWARDS

Coombe Castle International announces that partner brand, Belton Farm, Shropshire, U.K., won three awards at the Los Angeles International Dairy Awards. Belton Farm's award-winning cheeses were: Silver Fox — Best of Class Gold (Cheddar); Port Wine Derby — Silver Award (flavored territorial); and Sage Derby — Silver Award (flavored territorial). Coombe Castle exports Belton Farm cheeses to the U.S., where they are distributed nationally by Tree of Life USA. The Los Angeles International Dairy Awards are among the most respected dairy competitions in the U.S.

CoombeCastle.com

NEW PRODUCTS



CREMINELLI EXPANDS 2-OUNCE SLICED SALAMI LINE WITH FIVE NEW FLAVORS

Creminelli Fine Meats, Salt Lake City, UT, has launched a five-item expansion of its 2-ounce sliced salami line. The new additions span a range of flavor profiles. Each product is made with humanely raised pork without antibiotics and added hormones, and clean ingredients with no added nitrates or nitrites. The five new 2-ounce sliced salami flavors are: Espelette Salami, Black Truffle Salami, Genoa Salami, Barolo Salami, Wild Boar Salami. All five SKUs include 2 ounces of thin, ready-to-eat slices and come in a case of 12 trays.

Creminelli.com

NEW PRODUCTS



GEMMA SALUMI LAUNCHES SALAME LINE

Gemma Salumi, Milford, CT, announced the national rollout of its 4-ounce pre-sliced salame packages. Gemma's pre-sliced line brings true Italian-style salumi to the grab-and-go set without compromising on quality, technique or ingredients. Each SKU is made from Heritage Duroc pork, slow-fermented and aged using traditional methods, and crafted with a short, transparent ingredient list. All products are all-natural, gluten-free, dairy-free, and free from fillers, synthetic additives, and added nitrates or nitrites.

GemmaSalumi.com



HUSSMANN ADDS A2L REFRIGERATION SYSTEMS

Hussmann, Bridgeton, MO, a Panasonic company, now offers a line of A2L solutions for commercial refrigeration applications. A2Ls are the latest addition to its Evolve Technologies portfolio of Low Global Warming (GWP) solutions. Hussmann is first to market in North America for outdoor distributed A2L refrigeration systems, as well as the first refrigeration company to offer a complete store solution from compressorized systems, condensing units, evaporators, and condensers to a broad range of merchandising case options.

Hussmann.com



BOAR'S HEAD LAUNCHES DEEP-FRIED TURKEY BREAST

Boar's Head Brand, Sarasota, FL, announced the launch of its newest deli offering, The Fryer's Deep-Fried Turkey Breast. This addition to the Boar's Head portfolio brings the flavor of a traditional deep-fried turkey to the deli counter year-round. The turkey breast is crafted from extra-lean meat that is cold-brined for moisture, slowly oven-roasted, and then fried. This new offering is low-fat and lower-sodium, providing 13 grams of protein per 2-ounce serving. The turkey breast is gluten-free, contains no artificial colors or flavors, no MSG added and no fillers.

BoarsHead.com



DI BRUNO BROS. EXPANDS ITALIAN PRODUCT LINE

Di Bruno Bros., Edison, NJ, is expanding its Italian-inspired collection with an all-new lineup of products designed for spring and summer entertaining, celebrating and gathering together. The brand is introducing new items that are rolling out in ShopRite stores and other supermarket retailers. Shoppers can discover an expanded Di Bruno Bros. collection featuring: New Artisanal Crostini Flavors, Authentic Italian Taralli, Italian Mini Chunky Breadsticks, and Specialty Cheese Additions.

DiBruno.com

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

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COVER STORY



**Scott
Bridi**
Brooklyn
Cured



**Alexandra
Groezinger**
Alexian



**Shawna
Haley**
Cowgirl
Creamery



**Megan
Levin**
Refrigerated
Foods Assoc.



**Bob
Sewall**
Blount
Foods



**Mirit
Shalvi**
Kayco Kasher
Food Brands



**Karri
Zwirlein**
Northeast
Shared Services

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Deli Business honors those who have made a significant contribution to the industry, their company and their community. These changemakers are the visionaries, the innovators and the passionate advocates who are committed to driving change in deli.

**Josh
Windsor**
Murray's
Cheese





Scott Bridi

Founder/Chief Executive Brooklyn Cured Brooklyn, NY

Q. Can you tell us a bit about your upbringing and how it has shaped you?

I was raised in an Italian-American family where just about everyone loved food and loved to cook. My mother had an open-door policy around mealtime. Friends and neighbors would come through and have lunch, dinner or dessert with us. At a young age, I learned the importance of connecting with others and building community through food. This is why I got into the food business and started Brooklyn Cured.

Q. What were some of the pivotal moments that led you to where you are today?

When I was making charcuterie at a butcher shop in Brooklyn years ago, there were many small artisanal food vendors that would sell their products to the shop at wholesale — everything from ice pops to cocktail syrups to granola. Seeing these small business owners hand-deliver their goods to the shop inspired me to start a brand of packaged goods.

Q. How has your career evolved over the years?

Prior to getting into the food business, I worked in publishing as a writer and editor. I changed careers and began working as a chef in wine bars and fine-dining restaurants for many years. Eventually, I discovered the magic of making charcuterie, and developed recipes for restaurants and butcher shops. It was quite the learning curve to go from working in restaurant kitchens to running a nationally distributed CPG charcuterie brand!

Q. What is the best advice you ever received and why?

I've received so many good pieces of advice over the years that it's tough to choose one. When I was first starting out, my business mentor encouraged me to learn to trust others and to delegate because I really was trying to do it all, which was not sustainable. It's a good reminder that having a great team is the real key to a successful business and a balanced life.

In 2026, where you do your grocery shopping or what charcuterie brand you snack on, speaks to who you are and what you believe in.

Q. What deli retail trends have impacted the industry most over the last year?

More than ever, consumers shop with their own identity in mind, seeking out brands that they can feel connected to — ones that are transparent, value-driven and independently owned. In 2026, where you do your grocery shopping or what charcuterie brand you snack on, speaks to who you are and what you believe in.

As an independent company, Brooklyn Cured has leaned into this shift by focusing on thoughtful innovation and responsible sourcing. While consumer demand for high-protein, snackable options continues to grow, we've responded in a way that reflects our brand ethos — expanding our Snack Pack line from four to six SKUs, each pairing premium beef charcuterie with high-quality cheese. This allows us to meet evolving snacking habits while staying true to our commitment to quality, sustainability and craftsmanship.

Q. What hobbies do you enjoy outside of work?

I love to shop at the farmers market and cook with seasonal produce. Making fresh pasta is meditative and fun when I get the chance to do it. I also love to travel, play tennis, watch football and baseball, and walk around the beautiful borough of Brooklyn!



Alexandra Groezinger

President and Chief Executive Alexian Neptune, NJ

Q. Can you tell us a bit about your upbringing and how it has shaped you?

My upbringing had everything to do with my passion for what we do, and the woman I have become. My father had immigrated from Germany long before I was born, in a quest to share his craft of butchering and sausage-making with America. Together, he and my mom founded Groezinger Provisions about five years before I was born. When I say I grew up in the business, I really did!

My dad carted me everywhere, even to a slaughterhouse once (I question his decision-making at the time, but he was so proud to share it with me and raise me up just as his father did with him).

I was surrounded by European influence within my family, the company's employees, and friends who became family. I was fortunate enough to visit that part of the world as I grew up and was exposed to so much culture and food at a young age. While the kids in school ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for lunch, I ate pate on crackers or liverwurst sandwiches, and then beef tartare, tripe, and hearts for dinner.

Unfortunately, my dad passed away unexpectedly just before my seventh birthday, which changed everything for our family and our business. It was then that I truly saw my mom's resilience and strength, the inspiration that powers me through every day.

Q. What were some of the pivotal moments that led you to where you are today?

My dad's passing had a huge impact on my life. I always knew I wanted to honor him and our legacy, and I am grateful to my mom for having the same mission after he passed so that I could continue it after her.

The second pivotal moment was during college when I traveled with mom to Chicago for a show to help run our booth. That show lit the fire in me to follow in my parents' footsteps.

The third pivotal moment was when the world shut down because of COVID-19. There was so much unknown at the time, and I wanted to protect my mom and her health, so I stepped up and told her to stay home. We didn't know how long that would go on, but it turned out to be the catalyst that fast-forwarded our company's succession plan, and catapulted me into functioning as the primary leader and the president and chief executive of our company.

Q. How has your career evolved over the years?

Food is in my DNA. We are a food-centric family. We come from generations of butchers and sausage-makers, so I was always naturally drawn to it. I worked in foodservice immediately upon

turning working age, and helped Alexian at the Fancy Food shows as soon as I reached the age when the association would permit it.

As any college kid should do, I explored many interests and career paths in college, but chose the food business. Once that was decided, I got an internship with Cabot Cheese, which developed into a full-time role after I graduated. After a little under six years with the company, I left in favor of joining the family business.

After a long and rewarding career, I knew my mom was looking to retire, so I thought it imperative to maximize my time learning from her. With her mentorship, and the mentorship of many long-time employees, I learned the ropes of each department.

When COVID-19 came, I became the company's primary leader overnight. I was ready to step into the role, but navigating a manufacturing plant through a pandemic was certainly not in the plan, nor was it something anyone was trained for.

Being a business owner requires being nimble, resourceful and resilient, and COVID certainly tested me personally as a leader and also tested our business. I am proud to share that we weathered that challenging time with flying colors, and never once had to close our doors. That time shaped me as a leader and is arguably my most proud accomplishment.

Q. What is the best advice you ever received and why?

Not all business is good business, or the right business for you or your company. Sales opportunities are exciting, but they are not always the right fit based on your values, logistics and operations. Stay true to your mission and your values, and don't sacrifice that for anybody or anything.

Q. What deli retail trends have impacted the industry most over the last year?

Clean labels and transparency continue to trend. Online ordering and grocery delivery saw a surge during COVID, and we continue to love this convenience. Consumers are also shopping prices more heavily and often forgoing brand loyalty for lower-cost alternatives.

Q. What hobbies do you enjoy outside of work?

I love being outdoors in the sun and fresh air, hiking, mountain biking, swimming, snowboarding, and spending time with family and friends, especially my two Vizslas, Greta and Isla.

I am also a non-stop traveler. "Travel breaks the illusion that your current life is the only possible one." I read this somewhere, and it sticks with me and reminds me that life is fabulous, and I can't wait to keep experiencing all that it has to offer.



Shawna Haley

Production Team Lead Cowgirl Creamery Petaluma, CA

Q. Can you tell us a bit about your upbringing and how it has shaped you?

My parents owned a small business for more than 30 years in Cotati, CA, which is a small town in Sonoma County. This helped shape my sense of community, hard work, and love for the place I grew up. The fresh local fare in the area drove my passion for anything to do with food. I'm grateful that the opportunities to fuel my passion for food are abundant in my community, and in my work at Cowgirl Creamery.

Q. What were some of the pivotal moments that led you to where you are today?

Some of the most pivotal moments in my life are closely tied to where I come from and the people around me. Growing up, I learned the value of hard work and resilience by working in the family business through economic ups and downs and the struggles that come with it. That upbringing taught me responsibility, ingenuity and service. It has helped me understand that success isn't just individual — it's connected to the people and community that shape you. At work and at home, I'm grateful to have surrounded myself with people who have the same sense of support through community.

Q. How has your career evolved over the years?

I have always worked in a leadership role in some capacity, as I find it rewarding to lead positive and effective change. When I started my career at Cowgirl Creamery, I just wanted to "peek behind the curtain" of how such beloved cheese was made. I started as an assistant cheesemaker, and over the last seven years, I have grown and evolved into being a cheesemaker, pasteurizer, packaging and affinage lead, and now production manager.

I love being a part of the cheesemaking process, from the moment the milk arrives to us, to the time our cheese is sent to our customers, and everything in between.

Q. What is the best advice you ever received and why?

"Cheesemaking is the cousin to insanity. You do the same thing over and over again, and expect the same results."

Cheese is a wild beast. Despite every control you may introduce, it has a life of its own. Learning to embrace the unique expression

of the milk and the products you make with it through seasonal changes, and other unknowns, is the most challenging and rewarding part of cheesemaking.

Q. What deli retail trends have impacted the industry most over the last year?

One of the most influential trends shaping the category is the evolution of freestyle meals and "Girl Dinner 2.0," where consumers assemble small plates from high-quality items, rather than preparing traditional meals. For Cowgirl Creamery, this trend aligns perfectly with the role artisan cheeses play as the centerpiece of curated snack plates and premium, yet approachable, eating experiences. It positions artisan cheese as a star ingredient in expressive, creative snack meals.

Consumers are also prioritizing high-quality protein across both meals and snacks, and cheese delivers as a nutrient-dense option that appears across everyday dishes. From pasta and sandwiches to salads and pizza, cheese frequently anchors the plate.

Cowgirl Creamery's triple creams and superior-melting cheeses, including Wagon Wheel, are designed with culinary performance in mind. Our culinary roots run deep — many of our cheeses were originally created for chefs, by chefs.

Demand for global flavors, spice, and heat also remains strong, particularly within snacking and specialty products. Limited-time and seasonal releases provide an opportunity to tap into these trends while creating excitement at the cheese counter.

Cowgirl Creamery's Howdy, Partner triple cream collaboration with Rustic Bakery exemplified this approach, celebrating the shared craftsmanship and brand equity of two beloved Sonoma County producers. LTOs like this offer retailers distinctive, premium products that stand out on the shelf and invite discovery.

Q. What hobbies do you enjoy outside of work?

My hobbies include cooking, fermenting, and going to the beach with my wife and dog. I love walking to the farmers market and making something fresh from what is seasonally available.

Some of the best restaurants in the world are right in my backyard, and I love going out to eat with friends and family. Local coffee shops and bakeries are a must on the weekend, and I love to order too much, so I can share!

Cheese is a wild beast. Despite every control you may introduce, it has a life of its own.



Megan Levin

Executive Director Refrigerated Foods Association Marietta, GA

Q. Can you tell us a bit about your upbringing and how it has shaped you?

I was raised by amazingly supportive parents, who repeatedly told my siblings and me that “you can do anything you put your mind to.” They taught us through example the value and satisfaction gained from working hard and putting others first. Mom and Dad invested in our education, gave us the confidence to aim high, and instilled in us the faith that God will take what we have to offer and create something wonderful.

Q. What were some of the pivotal moments that led you to where you are today?

I’m showing my age here, but I began working for the Refrigerated Foods Association (RFA) when I answered a help-wanted ad in the printed newspaper! I was just out of college and anxious to make my mark on the world. I started with RFA as communications director, a position I held for about 10 years.

During that time, I married my college sweetheart, and after our second child was born, I took a few years off to focus on being a mom. Later, the board invited me to return part time as membership director. Life then took an unexpected turn, and in 2014, I became executive director for the RFA.

Q. How has your career evolved over the years?

I’ve learned so much over the years, and have met some of my favorite people in this world through this job. When I started with RFA, a different generation of leaders was running the organization. Today, because RFA is heavily composed of family businesses, the children of those leaders are now running the association. I feel like I grew up alongside the current leaders, which brings a unique level of respect, confidence and camaraderie.

It has been an incredible joy and privilege to see RFA grow and evolve into the leading organization for refrigerated foods manufacturers and suppliers. The relationships fostered through this unique group, along with the strong technical, regulatory and industry support provided for members, have established the RFA as an essential

tool for success in the refrigerated foods industry, and for that I am so proud and grateful.

Q. What is the best advice you ever received and why?

When I took over as executive director for RFA and started my own association management business, I was going through one of the most challenging periods of my life. Family crises, uncertainty, and chaos on all sides made me question my ability to serve the association the way it deserved.

My dear friend and mentor, Wendie DiMatteo Holsinger of ASK Foods, inspired and encouraged me during that time. She reminded me that life isn’t always fair, but what truly matters is how we respond to the curveballs it throws our way. Her words gave me the courage and confidence to move forward despite the challenges and insecurities I was facing. And that decision is one of the best ones I have ever made.

Q. What deli retail trends have impacted the industry most over the last year?

It’s been fun to see so many international foods and flavors making their way into the deli. Asian and Mediterranean influences, in particular, are

becoming increasingly popular as consumers seek bold flavors and new culinary experiences.

RFA members stay ahead of these trends with the help of expert presentations and newsletters focused specifically on changes and advances in the deli sector.

Q. What hobbies do you enjoy outside of work?

Now that my kids are grown and flown, I’m finally getting back into hobbies! I’m a bit of a gym rat and love reading anything I can get my hands on. Travel is really important to me, seeing the world and learning from other cultures and experiences. I am also involved in several ministries at my church, from cooking meals for parishioners to leading the Stephen Ministry and serving as a Stephen Minister.

And I take an adult tap-dancing class! We might laugh and share more stories than we actually dance, but it brings such a smile to my face and extra pep to my step.

Life isn’t always fair, but what truly matters is how we respond to the curveballs it throws our way.



Bob Sewall

Chief Customer Officer/ EVP Sales & Marketing Blount Fine Foods Warren, RI

Q. Can you tell us a bit about your upbringing and how it has shaped you?

I grew up in a very loving family whose lives revolved around family dinners and athletics. My father cooked every Sunday for 10 family members and sometimes up to 20 people. Everything about the meals was fresh, healthy, and homemade. All of my friends and siblings' friends vied for a seat at the table.

My wife and I have carried on the tradition, and we cook every weekend for our family and friends.

Q. What were some of the pivotal moments that led you to where you are today?

Hard work and honesty was instilled in us by our parents. They also preached humility and the need to help those less fortunate. My parents are the reason I started my personal charity, Bob's Big Give. We have been helping the less fortunate for the last 25 years in so many ways. Please check out our web page, www.bobsbiggive.com.

Q. How has your career evolved over the years?

I have been extremely fortunate to work at Blount Fine Foods for 32 years. And it has been an amazing run! I have had the pleasure to work with so many great and motivated people in this family business, with whom we have all grown together.

It has been so personally gratifying to see so many of my Blount teammates grow, both professionally and personally. In fact, they are the reason my career has evolved.

Q. What is the best advice you ever received and why?

I have gotten so much great advice both professionally and personally. My parents, friends, and my four children have been a tremendous source of support and guidance.

My customers, too, have been extremely involved in making sure I didn't screw things up! These professional relationships have been invaluable, and I am pleased to call so many of our customers friends!

I have been extremely fortunate to work at Blount Fine Foods for 32 years. And it has been an amazing run! I have had the pleasure to work with so many great and motivated people in this family business.

Q. What deli retail trends have impacted the industry most over the last year?

Obviously, the trend for fresh food, especially soup, has helped Blount Seafood to become Blount Fine Foods! We have been fortunate to be able to play a major role in developing the fresh soup category in both retail and foodservice. We are now working to develop our burgeoning fresh meal business.

Q. What hobbies do you enjoy outside of work?

Outside of work, I spend time finding ways to help those in need via my charity, Bob's Big Give!

My hobbies revolve around my wife, children and grandchildren. I am lucky that my children are great athletes and drag me around to participate in many athletic endeavors. This keeps me extremely active.



Mirit Shalvi

Senior Vice President Marketing & Strategic Partnerships Kayco Kosher Food Brands/ Manischewitz Food Brands Bayonne, NJ

Q. Can you tell us a bit about your upbringing and how it has shaped you?

I grew up in Israel in a culture where food is deeply connected to family, tradition and community. Meals were never just about eating — they were moments where people gathered, shared stories and celebrated together.

That experience shaped how I see food brands today. For many people, food products represent memories, traditions and identity. That perspective has guided how I approach brand building throughout my career, especially when working with heritage brands that carry cultural meaning for generations of consumers.

That philosophy has been particularly meaningful in my current work with Manischewitz. For many families, the brand is woven into holiday traditions and everyday meals. Our role has been to honor that legacy, while finding ways to bring it forward for a new generation of consumers.

Q. What were some of the pivotal moments that led you to where you are today?

A major part of my professional development came from working with global consumer brands at Unilever. That experience provided valuable insight into how large international organizations build long-term brand equity, while adapting to changing consumer needs.

Earlier in life, serving as an officer in the Israeli Navy also had a lasting impact on my leadership style. It taught me discipline, teamwork, and the importance of strategic thinking under pressure.

All of these experiences came together in my current role at Kayco. I am proud of the transformation of iconic brands like Manischewitz, including its recent brand refresh and new product innovation — making this a defining chapter of my career.

Q. How has your career evolved over the years?

Over time, my career has evolved from focusing primarily on marketing execution to leading broader strategic initiatives involving brand growth, partnerships and innovation.

Today, my role combines marketing strategy, business development, and collaboration with international food companies. At Kayco, I have the opportunity to work with heritage brands that have deep cultural roots, while helping expand their reach.

We've also focused on experiential marketing initiatives, like the Manischewitz Deli on Wheels, which brings the spirit of the classic Jewish deli directly to communities and events. It's a fun and engaging way to introduce the brand to younger audiences, while reconnecting longtime fans with the foods they grew up with.

We also launched an art exhibit called *SOUP* in the lower east side of Manhattan to launch the new ready-to-enjoy Manischewitz Soup line.

For me, it's incredibly rewarding to help evolve a brand that holds such an important place in culinary and cultural history.

Q. What is the best advice you ever received and why?

One piece of advice that has stayed with me is: Respect the heritage of a brand, but never let it stand still.

Many food brands have decades — sometimes centuries — of history. That heritage creates strong emotional connections with consumers, but it also requires continuous evolution.

That mindset has guided much of our work with Manischewitz.

The goal is always the same: Preserve what people love, while making the brand relevant for the future.

Q. What deli retail trends have impacted the industry most over the last year?

One of the most significant trends in the deli and specialty food space is the growing interest in authentic, heritage-driven brands. Consumers increasingly want products with a story, cultural connection and real culinary roots.

At the same time, convenience and innovation are reshaping traditional categories. We've seen this firsthand with the strong response to Manischewitz's new soup line and expanded prepared foods. Consumers appreciate the combination of nostalgic flavors and modern convenience.

Another important trend is the power of experiential marketing.

Together, these trends show that even the most traditional food categories can evolve in exciting ways when brands stay connected to both their heritage and their consumers.

Q. What hobbies do you enjoy outside of work?

Outside of work, I enjoy spending time with my family, traveling, and exploring different cuisines and food cultures. I've always been fascinated by how food connects people across cultures and traditions.

I also enjoy staying active through workouts and skiing, which has become a favorite activity for our family when we travel together.

These experiences constantly remind me how powerful food can be in bringing people together — something that continues to inspire both my personal life and my professional work.



Josh Windsor

Associate Director, Caves Murray's Cheese New York, NY

Q. Can you tell us a bit about your upbringing and how it has shaped you?

I grew up in a family where meals were extremely important. We ate together at a specific time every day, where we often discussed what we would eat at our next meal. Talking about food, especially fresh tomatoes and corn, was where we found common ground.

Food has always been an intricate part of my identity. It didn't hurt that my father was an analytical chemist who worked in food products, among other things. This is where the science-y part of my culinary thinking comes from.

Q. What were some of the pivotal moments that led you to where you are today?

Majoring in philosophy has unexpectedly served me well on my circuitous path to artisan cheese. Carving out a few years to hone my critical thinking skills has been a benefit in every career I have undertaken. It has been the base that keeps me curious and asking as many questions as possible.

More recently, like within-the-last-decade recently, taking a risk and starting over at an internship in the Murray's Cheese Caves was one of the best decisions I ever made. Working and producing artisan cheese has been fulfilling in ways I never expected, and it took a long time for me to find that niche.

Q. How has your career evolved over the years?

I'd borrow the term, punctuated equilibrium, from evolutionary biology to describe my career. I've been a systems integrator, apprentice locksmith, performing arts administrator, forklift driver, bagel baker, construction worker, and now, affineur. It is a complicated narrative to pull them all together. I have learned something from each of those jobs that I still use today.

Q. What is the best advice you ever received and why?

I have been fortunate to have had many leaders mentor me. I once worked for a contemporary dance company in Seattle, led by the choreographer, Donald Byrd. In the middle of a long argument, he stopped me and said, "If you are going to spend all this time saying something, you should have something to say." He meant that I should be developing my own voice and not simply repeating what I've heard from others. This dogged approach to personal authenticity has definitely shaped how I approach specialty cheese.

I've been a systems integrator, apprentice locksmith, performing arts administrator, forklift driver, bagel baker, construction worker, and now, affineur. It is a complicated narrative to pull them all together. I have learned something from each of those jobs that I still use today.

Q. What deli retail trends have impacted the industry most over the last year?

I think the conversations we are having about food and many people's personal relationship to the things they are eating are rapidly changing. People want to know more about their food — where it comes from, how it is made, what its health impacts are, how it is priced, etc.

What isn't clear is how to get the answers. Being able to center that expertise at the counter and provide not only delicious food, but sound information and guidance, is becoming a necessary skill set these days.

Q. What hobbies do you enjoy outside of work?

I love working in a cave all day, so it shouldn't surprise anyone that my personal time is mostly spent in dark interiors. I could easily while away every evening in a theater watching plays, films, opera, and dance performances. I'm a pushover for a good story. I'd like to think a little of that theatricality shows up in the cheeses I have worked on at Murray's over the years.



Karri Zwirlein

**Director of Bakery, Deli, Prepared Foods
Northeast Shared Services
Lancaster, NY**

Q. Can you tell us a bit about your upbringing and how it has shaped you?

I was a typical '80s latch-key kid from the suburbs. My parents divorced early on, and my sister and I decided to live with our father. The three of us worked hard to support each other. My dad was a teacher and coached three sports a year, so my sister and I took on many of the household responsibilities. I credit that part of my childhood for developing my strong work ethic and sense of responsibility.

As a teenager, I also did three sports a year, and that really helped me to stay out of trouble and develop good time management, along with being a good teammate.

Q. What were some of the pivotal moments that led you to where you are today?

I was 19 years old when the new Tops Markets was being built in my area, so I applied to be a cashier, and they hired me on the spot. I was attending college, and waitressing hours were not conducive to me getting to class on time the next morning.

I was fortunate to have strong leaders who saw my potential and invested time in me. Thirty-four years later, I am still with Tops Markets, part of Northeast Shared Services, as the director of bakery, deli and prepared foods.

Q. How has your career evolved over the years?

I never expected to make a career out of my part-time college job, but being supported and developed by great mentors has provided me with a path that has taken me on many adventures.

With 12 years of store experience, I took a position as a field specialist, which opened my eyes to a whole new side of the business. From there, I transitioned into a category business manager position, and then director, for the past 10 years. During that time, I became involved with IDDBA, and in 2019, I was appointed to its board of directors. It is one of the great honors of my career to serve the industry and IDDBA.

Q. What is the best advice you ever received and why?

Way back in the beginning, I had a district manager tell me, "Not making a decision is making a decision." That hit me hard, and I have never let indecisiveness paralyze me since then. It's OK to make mistakes, as long as you own them and learn from them. We will

I never expected to make a career out of my part-time college job, but being supported and developed by great mentors has provided me with a path that has taken me on many adventures.

fail at times, but we fail fast. If we aren't failing, then we aren't trying new things or thinking outside the box.

Q. What deli retail trends have impacted the industry most over the last year?

The past year has really been a re-growth for deli, especially in slicing. We've worked hard to regain consumer trust in deli slicing and food safety after the issues we had a couple of years ago. Prepared foods continue to grow as consumers are time-crunched and search for those high-quality meal solutions that make their lives easier.

Social media does a lot to give consumers creative ideas where they can lean on delis for help. Specialty cheese is an area that has become so mainstream because of social media and people's exposure to different flavors.

Q. What hobbies do you enjoy outside of work?

I enjoy baking and crafting. I need to have a creative outlet for my energy. I am also a huge football fan (go Bills!), so I spend my Sundays during the season watching all the games I can.

Of course, my biggest passion in life is watching my kids chase their dreams and become amazing humans! My daughter is a talented writer, and my son is a fearless go-kart racer, so I enjoy spending time with them and their passions.

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Bread Can Build Bigger Deli Baskets

Premium programs turn staples into higher-value meals.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

At Publix Super Markets, bread is doing more than holding a sandwich together. It's driving a premium experience for shoppers served from the prepared foods deli. The Lakeland, FL-headquartered retailer's April launch of its Stacked Brisket and Brioche Sandwich spotlights this strategy, pairing a half-pound of smoked brisket and Sweet & Spicy BBQ sauce with an in-store baked brioche roll.

With nearly 1,500 locations across eight Southeastern states, Publix is leveraging the soft, buttery, yet sturdy, roll as one of the ways to build on the success of its Chicken Tender Sub, while signaling a broader shift

toward elevated, flavor-forward deli offerings where bread plays a central role in value and differentiation.

"The opportunity for deli is to move beyond selling bread as a standalone item and use it to support fresh baked sandwich programs, combo meals, and cross-merchandised meal solutions," says Dave Gonnella, vice president of sales for the Schaumburg, IL-based Gonnella Baking Company, whose newest products, such as a brioche slider bun, everything and onion flavored ciabatta, and a round telera roll, all bring something unique to the category.

"That is where bread can help drive both differentiation and basket size."

KNOW WHAT CUSTOMERS WANT

Shoppers are approaching the deli bread category with a mix of needs that span quality, versatility, and inspiration, rather than focusing on a single format or use, according to Kayleigh Swift, U.S. brand manager for the St. Pierre Group Limited, in Manchester, U.K., a subsidiary of Mexico-based Grupo Bimbo, and maker of premium brioche products, including buns and rolls.

This summer, the baker launches its first-ever limited-edition product in Spicy Brioche Buns. The authentic brioche maintains a light sweetness, with a kick of chile, catering perfectly to the trend for "swicy" products.

WHAT THEY ARE *Saying*



“There is clear momentum behind premiumization, with consumers increasingly trading up from standard sandwich bread to more indulgent options, such as brioche and European-style baked goods.”

Kayleigh Swift, St. Pierre Group Limited, Manchester, U.K.

deli needs. The Goldsboro, NC-based supplier’s top sellers include Fiesta Fit Low Carb and High Protein wraps, with a clean-label option made with avocado oil, rather than seed oils, set to launch soon.

“Tortillas and wraps offer a flexible foundation for creating signature items, from classic lunch wraps to globally inspired offerings,” says Brianna Palmer, director

“There is clear momentum behind premiumization, with consumers increasingly trading up from standard sandwich bread to more indulgent options, such as brioche and European-style baked goods,” she says. “This reflects a broader shift across the store, where shoppers are seeking small, affordable upgrades that enhance the overall eating experience, rather than compromising on staple items.”

Freshness is the ultimate premium, says Christine Hoguet, marketing manager for Vandemoortele USA, in New York, NY. “The aroma of bread being baked in-store conveys a sense of quality that justifies the purchase.”

General Mills Foodservice offers an extensive line of Pillsbury-brand frozen bread dough and par-baked solutions to help tackle the most labor-intensive steps of in-store baking, according to Elena Joseph, consumer insights associate manager for the Minneapolis, MN-located baker. “From versatile products, which include 6-inch and 12-inch hoagies, Italian, wheat, and sourdough breads and kaiser rolls, and straightforward preparation to helpful tools,

like online baking tips, troubleshooting support, and merchandising guidance, we strive to make it easier than ever to create the fresh-baked experience customers crave.”

ELEVATE SANDWICH PROGRAMS

Deli operators should consider employing bread as a differentiator in sandwich programs, says Tasos Katsaounis, founder and chief executive officer of the Bread Man Baking Co., in Houston, TX, known for its best-selling ciabatta, focaccia, and artisan sandwich rolls, as well as newest products which are focused on differentiation and functionality, and include olive oil enriched rolls, seeded multigrain sandwich carriers, and softer artisan style buns that still have structure.

“A signature sandwich starts with a distinctive bread that customers cannot easily replicate at home. When paired with high-quality ingredients and consistent execution, it becomes a reason for customers to choose that deli over any other option.”

Alta Foods works closely with retailers to tailor sandwich wrap programs to specific



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of marketing. “Because they work across multiple dayparts and formats — hot or cold — they allow operators to streamline ingredients while still offering variety. These programs help delis differentiate their assortment, improve efficiency, and deliver convenient, high-quality meal solutions to shoppers.”

Similarly, operators can create “Build Your Own Slider” deli stations with sliced pre-packed meats, cheeses, spreads and pickles, recommends Mitch Rotenberg, director of omnichannel marketing and e-commerce for the Irresistible Foods Group, in Gardena, CA, whose brands include King’s Hawaiian, known for its iconic sweet rolls, bread and bakery products.

“For a Signature Slider Program, start with King’s Hawaiian Slider Buns and Pretzel Slider Buns. The menu hook is ‘Slider of the Week’ as a weekly feature with rotating flavor builds. Or, for grab-and-go, offer three-pack slider clamshells with a mix of classic, spicy and barbecue flavors. Or, create a ‘Game Day Sampler’ platter tray of sliders for the weekends.”

CREATE SNACK & MEAL SOLUTIONS

While sandwiches remain the top use (71%) among consumers when preparing things with bread at home, their dominance is gradually declining as consumers diversify usage, according to the *Bakery Playbook: Bread 2026*, published by the American Bakers Association (ABA), in Washington, DC, with 2026 consumer research conducted by 210 Analytics.

“Growth is coming from more elevated and diverse applications, such as bruschetta, bread pudding, and breakfast strata, items where Gen Z and Millennials over-index,” says Christina Donnelly, the ABA’s vice president of strategic communications and initiatives.

Plus, “bread is increasingly used in morning and afternoon snack occasions, especially among younger consumers, creating new formats for deli programs, such as snack-sized sandwiches, toast concepts, and small plates. There’s also a strong opportunity to pair bread with meal solutions. Consumers are increasingly assembling meals, for example, pairing proteins with fresh bread, and deli-prepared foods can anchor those solutions with premium bread options,” she says.

Secondary placements of bread in the deli can unlock cross-selling opportunities.

“Schiacciata can be featured in the aperitivo or snacking section, alongside dips and



PHOTO COURTESY GONNELLA

spreads, to encourage more spontaneous, shareable consumption, and it pairs naturally with Italian deli ingredients, such as mozzarella, pesto, mortadella, or antipasti, making it ideal for meal solutions,” says Sean McGrath, general manager, vice president of North America for La Lorraine Bakery USA LLC, based in Frederick, MD, with company headquarters in Belgium.

The company makes its Schiacciata, a Tuscan flatbread that will soon be introduced to U.S. delis, with traditional Italian biga dough, extra-virgin olive oil, and Italian sea salt. Short baking at a high temperature in a real-flame stone oven gives it a golden, crispy crust with distinctive, dark, blistered patches. It’s sold as a thaw-and-sell product, which minimizes shrink.

Consumer research across four European markets showed 88% overall liking, 92% for appearance, and up to 80% purchase intention, according to the baker. One of its key strengths is its versatility. In the deli, Schiacciata can be positioned as a premium sandwich carrier, a complement to soups and salads, a shareable tear-and-dip bread, or even a pizza-style base for toppings.

“Cross-merchandising is most effective when it’s built around clear usage occasions,” says Sara Kafadar, chief commercial officer of Izzio Artisan Bakery, in Louisville, CO, whose October 2025-launched six item line of certified Organic Artisan Sandwich Breads, which are free from seed oils, preservatives, artificial flavors, and vital wheat gluten, includes Sourdough, Classic White, Whole Wheat, Ancient Grains, Sprouted Seeds and Lucky 7 Multigrain.

Kafadar offers two selling concept ideas for the deli. One is a “Build-a-Charcuterie Night” kit display built on a specialty cheese, deli, or seasonal endcap that features the company’s heat-and-serve breads, such as focaccia, batards, and baguettes, alongside

cured meats, specialty cheeses, olives, spreads, tapenades and honey. Secondly, an “Easy Meal Nights” theme at the soup or hot bar area, with baguettes displayed alongside soup, chili, pasta, or hot bar offerings to help complete a restaurant-quality experience at home with minimal effort.

The latter example, says Kafadar, “is a strong everyday traffic driver that capitalizes on the opportunity of shoppers already assembling a meal.”

Successful cross-merchandising can also span cross-departmental.

“We’ve recently seen great success with a couple of customers who offered an in-store cross-promotion between their deli and fresh bakery departments. They offered four of our sandwich croissants for free with the purchase of 1 pound of their in-store-made chicken salad from rotisserie chicken. The first promotion was such a success that they ran it again within a few months and rolled it out to more of their banners,” says Vandemoortele USA’s Hoguet.

Over the past several months, the company has added several sandwich croissants to its lineup, including its French-made Bake’Up, which comes in a flattened shape to offer space savings, and from its recent acquisition of Swedesboro, NJ-based Banneton Bakeries, pre-proofed, freezer-to-oven sandwich croissants in classic butter, everything seasoned, pretzel and multigrain.

A second strong tactic is putting fresh-baked bread where the shopper is already making a food decision, recommends Gonnella. “A self-service bolillo or telera bin near the deli counter, rotisserie chicken case, or front end near the registers can create impulse and add units quickly. Clear ‘Fresh Baked’ signage, multiple refreshes through the day, and a sharp value message help keep the display productive and support stronger turns.”

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PHOTO COURTESY INTERPROFESSION DU GRUYÈRE

Le Gruyère AOP: Timeless Alpine Icon

Rooted in Swiss tradition, this cheese continues to set the standard for quality, authenticity and taste.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Le Gruyère AOP is Switzerland's most-produced and most-consumed cheese, and a cornerstone of the country's dairy heritage and rural economy. It's also one of the world's most recognized Alpine cheeses, having protected Appellation d'Origine Protégée (AOP) status since 2001. Last year marked the sixth time a Le Gruyère AOP was named World Champion, making it a cheese worthy of a seat at any table.

"Gruyère is completely ingrained in the culture and the people that make it," says Denis Kaser, international marketing manager of the Interprofession du Gruyère (IPG), the Swiss organization responsible for the management, protection, and promotion of Le Gruyère AOP cheese.

"Since the 1100s, it's been a big part of life. Aside from the unique terroir of the Gruyères region's air, flora, and soil, it is a defining piece of life in the region. There's truly nothing else like it in the world, and it's a celebration of the history and the hands that

keep the tradition alive. The process, beginning during the medieval times, continues today when local creameries turn cows' milk into the full-fat cheese that we know today."

To remind shoppers of this cheese's long history of tradition and quality from Switzerland, Emmi Roth USA, a Stoughton, WI-headquartered subsidiary of the Switzerland-based Emmi Group and the nation's leading importer of Le Gruyère AOP, incorporates Swiss folk art on its packaging, according to Daniel Schnyder, director of imports and key accounts. "We incorporate scherenschnitte-style designs that highlight icons like the Castle of Gruyères and the Brown Swiss cow."

DEFINED & DESCRIBED

In the U.S., Gruyère-style cheese, often produced in Wisconsin, can legally be labeled "gruyère." This follows a 2023 federal appeals court ruling that deemed the term generic, even as authentic Le Gruyère Switzerland AOP remains protected in Europe by strict origin standards.

"Le Gruyère AOP is the only true Gruyère," says Kaser. "It's the original, and it is defined by its place, much like Champagne in France. It can't be recreated because it relies on the region's natural resources to provide its unique taste."

This firm, cooked, pressed Alpine cheese made from raw cow's milk is known for its dense yet supple texture, complex nutty character, and long, savory finish. Unlike the generic "Swiss cheese," Le Gruyère AOP doesn't have holes. It has small, white, crunchy crystals that create a surprising and pleasant "pop" in the mouth. These are tyrosine crystals, a natural byproduct of the aging process in which proteins break down, releasing the amino acid tyrosine, which then crystallizes. These crystals are a signature of a well-aged, high-quality gruyère.

Le Gruyère AOP must adhere to specific criteria in its production. One is that it's produced in a specific region of Switzerland. While the cheese originates from the town of Gruyères in Fribourg, its protected designation of origin covers the wider geographical

CHEDDAR GRUYERE: A WISCONSIN ORIGINAL

Cheddar Gruyere is a Wisconsin-made hybrid that tastes familiar, yet distinctly different: the nutty, Swiss-style notes of Gruyere meet the bold finish of cheddar in a single aged cheese. The result balances cheddar's strength with Gruyere's subtlety, delivering a sweet, nutty flavor and smooth, creamy texture. Master Cheesemaker, Bruce Willis, crafted Cheddar Gruyere over three years at the Burnett Dairy Cooperative in Grantsburg, WI, where he's worked for over four decades.

Willis sat down for a video interview with Justin Warner, chef, television personality, and Food Network Star, to tell the story of this amazing cheese. "It came together after making mozzarella, provolone, and cheddar for 30 years," says Willis. "I just wanted to make something unique."

Asked to define it, he boils the process down to a line that has stuck: "It's Cheddar that's been Gruyered." The result, Willis says, is not a novelty but an inten-

tional, aged cheese built for flavor and everyday use.

The recipe dates to 2008, when it was sold locally in northwest Wisconsin. About seven or eight years ago, as Burnett assembled a sales and marketing push, the company renamed it Cheddar Gruyere and began expanding distribution. The plainspoken name was deliberate.

"Everybody knows cheddar," says Tony Meredith, Burnett's vice president for retail. "Not everybody knows Gruyere. The name makes it more approachable."

Now sold under the Wood River Creamery label, the line has expanded beyond the Original to include flavored varieties. Most notably, there's Black Truffle, which earned second place in the Hard Cheeses, Flavored category at the 2026 World Championship Cheese Contest, held in March in Madison. The line is often stocked as a mini "destination within a destination" in the specialty cheese case.



PHOTO COURTESY BURNETT DAIRY

Burnett aims to keep its Cheddar Gruyere accessible at retail, too. "Our price point is always under \$10," says Meredith. Once shoppers taste it, the team believes the hook is simple. "People are loving it," Willis adds. "They're liking cheese with lots of flavor."



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INFUSED MILK:

- 2.54 cup full-fat milk
- 0.05 oz green curry powder
- 0.11 oz Italian spice mix
- Le Gruyère AOP Mac & Cheese
- 8.82 oz macaroni, cooked al dente
- 7.05 oz grated Le Gruyère AOP
- 1.76 oz cubed Gruyère AOP
- 1.06 oz butter
- 0.71 oz flour
- 1.06 oz breadcrumbs
- 0.18 oz chopped fresh marjoram
- 1 pinch nutmeg
- 1 pinch of pepper

PREPARATION

Infuse milk: Pour the milk into a saucepan, bring to a simmer, then remove from the heat. Add the green

curry powder and Italian spices, cover with cling film, and leave to infuse for 10 minutes. Strain through a fine sieve and press well. Set aside.

Le Gruyère AOP Mac & Cheese: Melt the butter in a saucepan, add the flour and mix well. Cook for 2 minutes, then gradually pour in the milk, stirring continuously to form a smooth sauce. Sprinkle in 5 ounces of the grated Gruyère AOP and season with freshly ground pepper and grated nutmeg. Mix well. Add the marjoram, cooked macaroni, and cubed Gruyère AOP. Mix well and pour into a baking dish. Sprinkle the remaining grated Gruyère AOP over the top and finish with the breadcrumbs. Bake in a preheated oven at 350F for about 30 minutes.

area of the cantons of Fribourg, Vaud, Neuchâtel, Jura, and Bern, in Western Switzerland.

There are three major types of Le Gruyère AOP, according to Kaser: The classic (aged 6-9 months), reserve (aged at least 10 months), and Alpine varieties. The latter are made only from May through October, and the flavor strongly reflects the flora of the mountain pastures.

The taste changes with age, air, grazing grasses, and more. Coming down from the mountain season marks a celebration called désalpe, an annual autumn festival when cows, decorated with flowers and bells, return from the high pastures to valley farms for winter, accompanied by parades, music, local foods and village markets.

Emmi's Gruyère portfolio really shows how aging transforms the cheese, says Schnyder. "The classic profile is nutty, slightly sweet, smooth, and incredibly versatile. It is great for melting into quiche or French onion soup, or for serving on a cheeseboard. Reserve is a mature, more expressive version perfect for cheese boards, fondue blends, and dishes where you want Le Gruyère to shine."

Emmi's Kaltbach Le Gruyère AOP is cave-aged for 12-plus months, which gives this cheese a deeper, more complex flavor. "It's the choice for people who want a layered flavor experience," says Schnyder. It is great with toasted nuts, mostarda, jam, or rustic bread."

EAT & ENJOY

Murray's Cheese, New York, NY, is the exclusive U.S. retailer for Le Gruyère AOP Vorderfultigen Spezial (18+ months). The cheese beat over 5,200 entries from 46 countries to earn the 2025 World Champion Cheese title at the 37th World Cheese Awards in Bern, Switzerland, in November.

When shopping for Gruyere, Nick Tranchina, president of Murray's, with 1,000-plus kiosk locations in Kroger, with Kroger-owned stores nationwide, recommends considering how shoppers plan to use it.

"Le Gruyère AOP is great almost anywhere that you can use melted cheese, such as grilled cheese or mac and cheese. The best fondue is made from at least 50% Le Gruyère AOP. Personally, my favorite way to eat Le Gruyère AOP is straight up in large amounts. The texture and rich flavor of Gruyere are enough to make it a very satisfying protein-rich snack on its own." **DB**

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Soup's On: Seasonal Staple to Deli Driver

Retailers rethink formats, flavors, and merchandising to drive soup sales year-round.

BY KEITH LORIA

Soup has long been a staple of the deli, but today's operators are reimagining the category as a true traffic driver, rather than a seasonal add-on. With consumers seeking convenient, affordable, and comforting meal solutions, retailers are leaning into soup's versatility, and manufacturers say the opportunity is bigger than ever.

"The category has grown extensively over the last 10 years; it's now about a \$1.2 billion business in the deli," says Bob Sewall, Blount Fine Foods, Fall River, MA. "And it's still growing. From hot bars to shelf-stable jars and instant kits, soup is evolving into a multi-format, multi-occasion solution that can anchor deli performance throughout the year."

To drive repeat traffic, retailers must change the way they've thought in the past.

"To transform soup from an impulse purchase into a destination, retailers need to think of it as a meal solution," says Mirit Shalvi, senior vice president of marketing and strategic partnerships for Kayco Kosher, Bayonne, NJ. "Clear signage, rotating seasonal features, and storytelling help build anticipation and repeat visits."

Jennifer Fessler, vice president of sales for New York, NY-based Hale & Hearty, notes a soup destination should be built on unique, chef crafted varieties that shoppers can't find anywhere else.

"Customers won't make a special trip for a basic chicken noodle, but they will for flavors that feel homemade, exciting and memorable," she says.

With that in mind, Hale & Hearty offers distinctive, small batch soups, like Broken Lasagna, Mulligatawny, Portuguese Kale with Chorizo, Baja Shrimp, and many more chef crafted recipes that elevate the entire hot bar.

"We also introduce seasonal varieties



PHOTO COURTESY HALE & HEARTY



BLOUNT'S
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WHAT THEY ARE *Saying*

“Customers won’t make a special trip for a basic chicken noodle, but they will for flavors that feel homemade, exciting and memorable.”

Jennifer Fessler, Hale & Hearty,
New York, NY

throughout the year to keep menus fresh, drive repeat traffic, and give shoppers a reason to return week after week,” says Fessler.

While the hot bar remains the category’s traffic driver, many retailers are seeing significant growth in refrigerated cups and quarts as more customers are on the go.

“Dual income households and kids’ busy extracurricular schedules have accelerated demand for quick, portable meal solutions, making grab-and-go a major growth engine,” says Fessler.

For some retailers, success comes down to elevating the experience.

“Deli departments today need to compete with restaurant fare,” says Mary Shepard, director of sales/partner at Stockpot Soups, Portland, OR.

Sewall says assortment plays a critical role in creating a place shoppers want to return to time and time again.

“It’s that wall of soup,” he says. “When you have 25 or 30 varieties, that creates a destination because there’s something there for every customer.”

He adds that retailers who treat soup strategically, with the right mix of brands, flavors and promotions, are seeing strong results.

“You’re bringing people to the category every week,” says Sewall. “Rotating

promotions across brands keeps traffic steady.”

FORMATS EXPAND THE OPPORTUNITY

One of the biggest shifts in deli soup has been the expansion of formats, allowing retailers to meet multiple shopper needs. Today’s most effective deli soup programs balance three key formats: a strong hot bar, a robust grab-and-go refrigerated set, and convenient family size options.

“The hot bar remains the category’s traffic driver, but retailers are seeing significant growth in refrigerated cups and quarts as more customers are on the go,” says Hale & Hearty’s Fessler. “Dual income households and kids’ busy extracurricular schedules have accelerated demand for quick, portable meal solutions, making grab-and-go a major growth engine.”

Each format serves a different role, and together they create a more complete offering.

“Retailers should combine immediate-consumption convenience with take-home flexibility,” says Nadine Halaseh, marketing and brand manager for Mezete in Amman, Jordan.

Sewall points to strong growth in ready-to-eat formats, something that has evolved in recent years.

“Hot-to-go soup is growing at an even

faster rate than the overall category,” he says. “Consumers are looking for that meal solution, especially at dinner.”

Meanwhile, newer formats are pushing the boundaries of the category.

For instance, the Matzo Project offers artisanal matzo, and that segment is seeing lots of interest among consumers.

“It’s very similar to a cup of noodles, but with matzo ball soup,” says Ashley Albert, one of the founders of The Matzo Project, Brooklyn, NY. “All you do is add water, and you have a really delicious bowl in minutes. It can live in the deli, the soup aisle or the kosher section.”

Convenience is also driving innovation across the category.

“We’re seeing a big shift toward convenience and pantry-friendly formats,” says Sarah Nathan of Nooish, Chicago, IL.

Still, fresh remains essential for deli differentiation.

“Keep the fresh in the deli,” says Shepard. “That’s what gives you that restaurant-quality experience.”

KEEPING THINGS FRESH

One of the biggest challenges in deli soup is balancing shelf life with freshness and food safety, especially as retailers work to manage labor, shrink and unpredictable traffic patterns. Operators need soups that stay safe and stable through distribution, while still delivering a fresh, homemade taste.

“Hale & Hearty addresses this by offering a 65-75-day shelf life from the date of manufacture, achieved through our hot fill process, rapid cold bath cooling, and the use of an all natural nisin preparation,” says Fessler. “This combination ensures food safety without compromising flavor or ingredient integrity.”

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For retailers, the key to optimizing production and turnover is tight rotation, accurate forecasting, and aligning deliveries with actual demand so the soup bar stays fresh, full, and appealing throughout the day. When operators pair strong food safety practices with reliable, extended shelf life products, they can maintain quality while reducing waste and improving overall deli performance.

Shelf-stable options are also expanding the category's reach, and more companies are paying stricter attention to this.

"At Manischewitz, we've invested in ready-to-serve glass jar soups that bring deli-quality flavor into a convenient format," says Shalvi.

Health and wellness trends are also reshaping the category, as consumers increasingly look for nutrient-dense, satisfying options that align with their lifestyles.

"In today's health-conscious world, soup has great appeal — fresh vegetables, protein and fiber," says Blount's Sewall. "GLP-1 users are buying more soup because it fits their lifestyle."

At the same time, clean label expectations continue to influence purchasing decisions.

FLAVOR INNOVATION MEETS COMFORT

While formats are expanding, flavor continues to drive consumer interest, especially when it blends familiarity with discovery.

"We still see the 80/20 rule — classic and comfort soups are always the best sellers," says Shepard.

At the same time, global flavors are gaining traction.

"We're seeing strong momentum behind soups that combine comfort with discovery," says Mezete's Halaseh.

Hale & Hearty is seeing strong momentum behind globally inspired flavors, premium ingredients and bolder spice profiles in the deli soup category, driven by consumers' growing desire for variety.

"Shoppers are gravitating toward Mediterranean, Latin and Southeast Asian influences, along with elevated comfort foods that feel both familiar and new," says Fessler. "Ingredients like harissa, coconut milk, turmeric, roasted chiles and fresh herbs are gaining traction, as are premium proteins and vegetable forward blends."

Consumers are also looking for soups with depth — layered broths, slow cooked

WHAT THEY ARE Saying



"It's that wall of soup. When you have 25 or 30 varieties, that creates a destination because there's something there for every customer."

Bob Sewall, Blount Fine Foods, Fall River, MA



flavors, and chef crafted combinations that go beyond the basics.

"There's curiosity around Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and Eastern European influences," says Shalvi.

Sewall notes that variety is key to meeting diverse consumer needs.

"When you have organic, dairy-free and gluten-free options, there's something for every customer," he says.

For brands like The Matzo Project, emotional connection plays a major role. "It reminds people of their grandparents ... it's more than just a product, it's a memory," says Albert.

VISIBILITY IS ESSENTIAL

When it comes to merchandising, positioning the hot bar at the front of the deli with clear signage and strong aroma cues drives immediate traffic, while cross merchandising grab-and-go cups near sandwiches, salads and prepared meals captures shoppers looking for quick lunch and dinner options

"Soups should be positioned as a centerpiece of the deli," says Kayco Kosher's Shalvi. "Presentation also matters. Make it a station. It could be paired with a salad or other item to create a full meal."

As retailers look ahead, soup's role in the deli will continue to expand.

"Consumers increasingly want food that feels both familiar and differentiated," says Halaseh. "Convenience, premium quality, and global flavors will remain key drivers."

For Sewall, the opportunity is clear: "The No. 1 question is, 'What's for dinner?'" he says. "For retailers who execute well, soup can provide the answer for almost every dilemma in supermarket retail today." **DB**

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Successfully Selling Salads & Sides

Delis have an opportunity to increase sales and expand the customer base with these prepared food items.

BY LISA WHITE

With the supermarket deli department continuing to evolve, prepared foods have become more prevalent.

This includes the lucrative salads and sides categories, which have become more innovative and prominent.

In April 2025, data from the Madison, WI-based International Dairy Deli Bakery Association (IDDBA) revealed that salad sales are on the upswing. These totaled \$5.1 billion, an increase of 4% in sales and 5.4% in units from the same period in 2024. By the same token, sales of side dishes are also increasing. This category totaled \$2.2 billion in sales in April 2025, a rise of 4.6% in dollars and 3.9% in units sold compared to 2024.

In the Marietta, GA-based Refrigerated Foods Association's (RFA), February 2026 Trends newsletter, Philadelphia, PA-based Dietz & Watson notes that the deli category is evolving to meet changing consumer priorities around health, value, convenience and transparency.

In addition, there is a shift toward clean, simple proteins made with recognizable ingredients and minimal processing.

APPROPRIATE OFFERINGS

In response to these trends, salad and side dish providers are raising the bar.

Beaverton, OR-based Reser's Fine Foods offers deli salads and heat-and-serve side dishes, among other items.

"Consumers are always looking for convenience without compromising on flavor, and we're offering just that with our staple deli salads — like Reser's Macaroni Salad, Potato Salad and Cole Slaw," says Megan Torres, the company's brand strategy manager. "Over 14 million pounds of potato salad are purchased the week of the Fourth of July, and it's consistently ranked one of the



PHOTO COURTESY RESER'S

most popular side dishes for picnics, so we know people are counting on these favorites to be a part of their summer occasions."

Rachel's Table in Greenville, RI, offers marinated salads, like octopus, mussel and seafood, which is a surimi mayo-based salad.

"Consumers are always looking for good shelf life," says Adam La Greca, co-owner. "While mayonnaise-based salads [have a shorter shelf life], ours are 28 to 48 days because they are marinated in red wine vinaigrette."

The company's offerings are different from the traditional tuna or chicken salads.

"People can pair these with a bed of lettuce or salad, putting it on top with a lemon wedge," says La Greca.

He adds that healthier salads are popular but also unique from run-of-the-mill varieties.

According to Melanie Skloff, founder of Melanie's Medleys and head of marketing at Don's Prepared Foods, based in Schwenksville, PA, the deli staples continue to be tuna, chicken, egg and potato

and macaroni salads, along with cole slaw.

Recently, the company has debuted three new salads that are globally inspired.

Giardiniera Pasta includes cavatappi pasta tossed with briny giardiniera, roasted red peppers, Kalamata olives, feta and artichokes, then topped with a lemon-garlic dressing and fresh herbs. Tuna Tapenade combines skipjack tuna, muffuletta salad and celery coated in a mayonnaise and Dijon mustard dressing with fresh basil and lemon juice. Herbed Artichoke White Meat Chicken blends white meat chicken, marinated artichokes and celery with a mayonnaise dressing infused with Herbs de Provence.

Founded in 2011, Wildbrine produces naturally fermented vegetables using traditional wild fermentation. The company began as a spinoff from the Ceres Community Project, a Santa Rosa, CA-based nonprofit that provides meals to those living with cancer, diabetes and other conditions.

The founders of Wildbrine began by producing small batches of sauerkraut for customers who were looking for "food as

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WHAT THEY ARE *Saying*



“Over 14 million pounds of potato salad are purchased the week of the Fourth of July, and it’s consistently ranked one of the most popular side dishes for picnics, so we know people are counting on these classic favorites to be a part of their summer occasions.”

Megan Torres, Reser’s Fine Foods, Beaverton, OR

medicine,” to receive the health and wellness benefits that fermented foods can deliver. Eventually, the project became so successful that the business was rolled out as a separate entity, and Wildbrine was born.

Today, its lineup includes sauerkrauts, kimchis, bean salads, fermented condiments, and vinegar-pickled vegetables. All products are Non-GMO Project Verified, vegan, gluten-free and contain no added sugar.

According to the International Food Information Council (IFIC) 69% of Americans are actively trying to consume more fiber, and 71% are looking to increase protein intake. Meanwhile, sales of probiotic-rich fermented foods are growing 9% year-over-year.

To address this, Wildbrine launched fermented bean salad, creating a new category at the intersection of protein, fiber and probiotics. Wildbrine’s Fermented Chickpea Salads deliver protein, fiber and probiotic benefits. The 20-ounce jarred bean salads reflect a broader shift toward upgraded convenience; foods that require little effort, but deliver functionality.

“This is the kind of innovation that redefines an entire category,” says Jorge Azevedo, chief executive of Wildbrine. “Fermented foods have long been associated with gut health, and beans with plant-based protein and fiber, but never before have those benefits lived in one convenient, ready-to-eat product.”

Bubbies Fine Foods, based in Madison, WI, recently released a new sauerkraut in dill flavor with national distribution, as well as shelf-stable Pickled Beets.

“Bubbies has spent 40-plus years earning a reputation for real ingredients and the best-tasting pickles. Bubbies never compromises on flavor or health, so adding artificial ingredients was always out of the question,” says Mila North, chief marketing officer.

Bubbies also released a new Dill Sauerkraut, a take on sauerkraut made with garlic and fresh dill, available at retailers nationwide.

MARKETING & MERCHANDISING

Several marketing and merchandising tactics can take deli salads and sides to the next level. Departments that prioritize these products can see increased profit potential, as well as grow their demographic.

“Deli departments can strive to remind consumers, especially younger ones, that the deli is a great place to discover new,

convenient foods that are a delicious, affordable alternative to take-out,” says Torres at Reser’s Fine Foods. “This year, we capitalized on a viral Tik Tok moment to introduce Reser’s to a new audience.”

The company recruited content creator Courtney Cook. “Through our partnership, we were able to boost Reser’s visibility in front of a wider audience and show how our products, like our Deviled Egg Potato Salad, can be creatively incorporated into lunches,” Torres notes.

She adds that the company continually strives to meet shoppers where they’re at, which is becoming increasingly online.

“While the tradition of taking potato salad to a picnic remains the same, how consumers shop and discover new products has evolved,” she says. “Ordering grocery delivery from services, like Instacart or DoorDash, continues to grow in popularity. We’re connecting with busy shoppers by advertising on these platforms and using the rich insights from online shopping to learn more about purchase habits and behaviors.”

As more consumers seek healthier options, along with vegan and gluten-free options, manufacturers are heeding the call.

Skloff at Don’s Prepared Foods says restaurant-quality clean sides give retail deli a point of difference.

“Over the next two to three years, it is projected that 40% of consumers will use AI to find healthier items, and shopping habits will shift,” she says.

Don’s Prepared Foods’ lines are popular additions to deli meal bundling programs, Skloff notes.

“This is how retail can bring more dollars into their stores,” she notes. “Consumers seek solutions at their local grocer. Clean sides from Don’s offer retailers the tools to showcase complete meal solutions. This impacts Gen-Z a great deal, as they are searching for healthier meals in-store.”

Retailers can also gain an edge in the market with meal solutions, via in-store and digital ads and coupons.

“Don’s provides retailers with unique, flavorful items, recipe ideas, and tools to stand out,” Skloff notes.

CREATING A DESTINATION

With prepared foods, like salads and sides, creating a deli department destination not only ensures these items remain front and center but also gives a store a competitive edge in a crowded marketplace.

Torres at Reser’s Fine Foods recommends

deli departments make sure to reinforce core strengths with consistent messaging that emphasizes the promise of freshness, convenience and value.

“It’s also important to keep customers coming back by offering both the dependable favorites they love and introducing new, exciting, trend inspired choices that encourage repeat visits,” she says.

Salads and sides are best displayed in bulk in the deli or refrigerated case, with some items prepacked so customers can see how product looks in the case, Lagreca at Rachel’s Table recommends.

“We use domestic squid out of Rhode Island, so this way customers can see the red onions and other ingredients, which really pop when on display,” he explains. “We also recommend stores that have them taste it.”

To create a deli destination, Skloff at Don’s Prepared Foods says it’s imperative that retailers offer items unique to their stores and also salads and sides that are trending.

“At Don’s, we have unique and on-trend items,” she says. “Remember, it’s not the ’70s. Don’s offers true innovation, and we also are open to proprietary recipes for retailers.”

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Capitalize on Ham, America's Versatile Protein

A category with tradition behind it, delis have opportunities to tell this meat's story.

BY VANESSA SALVIA

“It’s always a good day when you wake up, and you know that you’re going to be talking about ham,” says Michael Burgess, director of marketing at Charcuterie Artisans in Mapleville, RI. And why not? Ham is a category with centuries of tradition behind it and numerous flavor profiles with a range of price points, giving delis many opportunities to tell its story.

Long before refrigeration, ham was salted and hung to dry, usually over the winter, in a barn or cellar. This created a preserved product that could sustain a family through the year. This act was necessary for survival, but eventually became craft.

David Yourd, president of Lady Edison, a small artisan producer of dry-cured and salted country ham in Chapel Hill, NC, knows the history, which shows that the preservation technique spread and evolved across continents, developing distinct regional characters tied to climate, soil and livestock breed.

Yourd points out that if you map the world’s great dry-cured ham regions — prosciutto di Parma, Ibérico from Spain, Jinhua from China, and American country ham — they all fall within a similar latitude. “It was where it wasn’t cold enough to freeze, but not hot enough to spoil,” he says. “The terroir drove the flavor.”

A CATEGORY WITH REMARKABLE RANGE

One of the most important things deli professionals can understand about ham is its sheer variety. Lauren Eni Canseco, chief marketing officer at Dietz & Watson, a producer and distributor of deli meats, cheeses and other specialty food products that began in 1939 in Philadelphia, PA, notes that the category spans up to 30 distinct flavor profiles, shaped by geography, curing method, spice blends, and aging time.



PHOTOS COURTESY DIETZ & WATSON

Different regions have different preferences. From mild, lightly cured deli slices to deeply funky, aged country hams that rival European charcuterie in complexity — there is no single “ham,” she says.

“Each variety serves a different role in the deli case,” she says. “Honey ham is sweeter and more approachable, with notes of honey, brown sugar or maple that make it especially appealing for families and entertaining. Black Forest is more robust, with a deeper smoky flavor and subtle spice from pepper and curing. Virginia-style is the most traditional. It’s savory, slightly milder and extremely versatile, which makes it a staple for everyday sandwiches. Offering that range allows deli operators to meet a variety of taste preferences and occasions.”

At the premium end, products like Lady

Edison’s two-year-cured country ham compete directly with imported prosciutto. The aging process draws out moisture and creates a more concentrated ham flavor. At the accessible end, everyday cooked hams offer mild, crowd-pleasing flavor at a price point that makes them ideal for sandwiches and hot bars.

Burgess at Charcuterie Artisans, which specializes in prosciutto with roots going back to 1945, offers a variety of price points through its different companies. Its flagship, Creminelli, is super-premium; Del Duca offers high quality at a more accessible price. Burgess says Charcuterie Artisans’ Creminelli 2-ounce prosciutto is the No. 1-selling prosciutto item, and the Del Duca 6-ounce prosciutto is the second-best-selling prosciutto item in the U.S., by both dollars and units.



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WHAT THEY ARE *Saying*

“A great deli ham should be tender, juicy and well-balanced, with a clean finish that doesn’t feel overly processed.”

Lauren Eni Canseco, Dietz & Watson, Philadelphia, PA

Charcuterie Artisans recently acquired La Quercia Cured Meats, which produces American-made prosciutto in Norwalk, IA. The company is pushing the category in a new direction with flavored prosciuttos. These are produced with heritage craftsmanship but are rubbed with blends, such as hot honey or Old Bay-style seasoning, then allowed to cure so the flavor penetrates the meat itself.

“There are some folks who are really traditionalists in this category,” Burgess acknowledges, “and what they’re doing is bucking tradition.”

Meanwhile, brands like Dietz & Watson are meeting evolving consumer demand with hams that carry cleaner labels, “using celery powder and cherry powder to cure and replacing synthetic preservatives with cupboard-familiar ingredients like vinegar,” says Eni Canseco.

She also notes that products like theirs, which are made from whole muscle, will never carry the “too processed” taste that has given lesser hams a bad reputation. “A great deli ham should be tender, juicy and well-balanced, with a clean finish that doesn’t feel overly processed,” she says.

FLAVOR CHARACTERISTICS AND PAIRINGS

Cory Dunn is director of retail sales at Lower Family Foods, which makes deli products from beef, pork and poultry in its Richmond, UT, facility. His advice to delis is to pair ham with straightforward accompaniments, like potatoes, gravy, green beans, and other simple sides for a pick-up-and-go home meal replacement (HMR).

Prosciutto is a different story. “The complexity of flavor, the depth of flavor of prosciutto makes it the star of the show,” Burgess says. “Nine times out of 10, you are

building the charcuterie board or the recipe around prosciutto.”

That intensity comes largely from fat. Sliced thin, the fat cap renders on the palate, creating what Burgess describes as “a really captivating, visceral experience.”

MERCHANDISING, MARKETING STRATEGIES

Claire Flannery, senior director of marketing and media at Greenridge Naturals, a deli meat and cheese company based in Chicago, IL, sees opportunity in creative cross-merchandising. Pairing ham with unexpected condiments, such as hot honey, interesting mustards or artisan pickles, increases impulse-buy moments that can lift basket size and move multiple items at once.

Dunn notes that ham is running around \$4 per pound while turkey and roast beef often fetch \$7 to \$9. That comfortable price point means delis can do a lot with demos. Nothing converts a hesitant shopper like tasting a product. Dunn describes bringing a competitor’s ham and a Lower Family Foods ham side by side, slicing both and letting the product speak for itself. “The more they know about our products, the more they can tell the consumers that come to the counter,” he says.

Samples remain one of the deli’s most powerful tools. “When people get a chance to taste something, they want to go back and get it,” Flannery says. “Or they’ll buy it right there.”

Charcuterie Artisans’ Burgess notes that consumers approach deli products much like they approach produce, meaning they want to inspect what they’re buying. He suggests showing them there’s a nice fat cap, meaning the strip of fat that runs along the outside, and tell them why that is desirable. Show them the consistent coloring on the lean

portion. “It should be a rich red color,” he says.

Delis that train their staff to guide customers through these quality checks build trust and justify premium price points.

Charcuterie Artisans offers a “Charcuterie 101” program, sending representatives directly to stores to train deli managers. “We will educate the deli managers and provide all the resources that they need to be able to hold these conversations really confidently with their customers,” says Burgess.

For specialty products like Lady Edison’s country ham, Yourd recommends telling the product’s story through American history. “People don’t understand that we have this traditional regional product that came out of the U.S. for hundreds of years, which is kind of rare in American food,” he says.

SELLING THE MOMENT

For deli professionals willing to engage with ham, and prosciutto in particular, it offers what Burgess calls “an emotional category.”

“I would compare it, maybe, to music or a sunset,” he says, “because prosciutto is such an intense, impactful sensory experience. It checks a lot of boxes in terms of what creates a moment. It helps to lock in a memory of that type of intense sensory experience.”

The deli counter is where that memory starts. A staff that understands the flavor differences and can walk a customer through what makes a great prosciutto or everyday ham by handing over a sample and explaining why it tastes the way it does turns casual shoppers into regulars. As Burgess puts it: “It’s a lot easier to get really energized about marketing when it’s for a collection of products that you just love.”

DB

Meeting Demand for Mediterranean

Deli retailers are expanding authentic meal solutions.

BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD

Mediterranean cuisine is moving from a niche to a necessity in supermarket delis as retailers respond to shoppers seeking fresh, flavorful foods that align with evolving eating habits.

At Busch's Food Market, a 16-store chain headquartered in Ann Arbor, MI, this shift is translating into a more authentic assortment from house-made chicken shawarma, sold in the retailer's Chef's Case, plus portioned for grab-and-go, to locally sourced staples, like spinach pies, grape leaves, hummus, and fresh salads.

"Mediterranean-style foods align almost perfectly with where consumer demand is heading right now," says Joanne Zlotorzynski, director of foodservice. "With the rise of GLP-1 medications, customers are prioritizing smaller portions, higher protein, and nutrient-dense foods that still feel satisfying. Mediterranean cuisine naturally delivers lean proteins, like grilled chicken, healthy fats from olive oil, and fresh vegetables."



PHOTOS COURTESY YAZA

A LIFESTYLE CATEGORY, NOT A NICHE

The Mediterranean diet has held the No. 1 spot in the U.S. News & World Report "Best Diets Overall" category for eight consecutive years, from 2018 through 2025. While the 2026 publication moved toward a more trend-focused format, a majority (69%) of panel experts continued to identify the Mediterranean diet as the healthiest long-term eating pattern to reduce chronic disease.

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“Mediterranean cuisine is one of the rare examples of a cuisine that’s appealing because it tastes great and people are intrigued by the dishes and ingredients, while also being popular for its perceived better-for-you benefits,” says Maeve Webster, president of Menu Matters, in Arlington, VT. “For retail deli and prepared foods departments, offering Mediterranean options will likely enjoy a halo of healthfulness.”

Interest in Mediterranean cuisine, especially of foods from sub-regions, such as the Levant, on the East Coast of the Mediterranean Sea, is generating the most sustained culinary momentum in Western retail and food service right now, according to Ehud Soriano, olive oil consultant for Sindyanna of Galilee, in Galilee, Israel.

“This is not a passing trend. It has been building for over a decade through the global influence of chefs, the rise of the Mediterranean Diet, and through social media acceleration, which has been enormously powerful in introducing preparation formats of Mediterranean dishes that translate directly into deli counter offerings.”

CLEAN LABEL, REAL INGREDIENTS

The top Mediterranean ingredient and flavor trends today continue to center around clean-label, better-for-you products made with simple, recognizable ingredients, says Aimee Tsakirellis, executive vice president of marketing and communications for Cedars Mediterranean Foods, in Haverhill, MA.

Tahini, with one ingredient: sesame, has an extremely short, recognizable ingredient list, which is a powerful commercial advantage in an era of clean-label consumer scrutiny, according to Soriano. “Tahini’s trajectory parallels olive oil’s mainstreaming arc. Extra virgin olive oil took approximately 20 years to move from a specialty import to a mainstream household staple in the U.S. Tahini is moving faster, driven by the clean-label alignment.”

Similarly, labneh, a thick, tangy, often-called “yogurt cheese,” has two ingredients: milk and salt.

“Consumers want variety, they want nutrition, and they want it to be straightforward,” says Karim Christian Khalil, founder of Yaza Foods, LLC, in Atlanta, GA. “Mediterranean food at its best is exactly that. Fresh, simple, real ingredients, no mystery. Deli and prepared foods operators who lean into that are going to capture the shopper that’s actively looking for a better option, and that shopper is growing fast.”

For Zacca Hummus in Boise, ID, the company’s chickpeas come from the maker’s Zenner Family Farm in Idaho, where they are grown regeneratively, with 100% traceability from field to shelf.

“This kind of vertical integration is genuinely rare in this category, and I believe it will matter more and more to both consumers and retail buyers,” says Janine Zacca Zenner, founder and managing partner. “I also think we’ll see the deli section reclaim hummus from the generic refrigerated dips aisle, especially in better grocery formats.”

BOLD, LAYERED FLAVORS

There’s a trend in manufacturing to integrate global and local cuisines into Mediterranean staples, such as hummus.

“Consumers who discover us on the traditional hummus will come back for the flavors,” says Zenner, adding that the company’s Spicy Mediterranean, Poblano Pepper, and Cilantro Parsley are quickly closing the sales gap.

Big Dill pickle-flavored hummus is the breakout flavor of 2026 for Hummus Goodness, in Birmingham, MI, says founder Hannah Awada. “It’s been picked up by influencers to an extent that has pleasantly shocked us.”



Taco, Beet and Spicy hummus, the latter of which has sriracha, are other of the maker’s unique flavors, all of which are made with olive oil.

DIPS, SPREADS, AND GRAZING

Post-pandemic, the culture of entertaining has strongly favored the spread-and-dip format, says Soriano of Sindyanna of Galilee.

“Tzatziki is leading the charge right now,” says Yaza Foods’ Khalil. “It launched into over 500 stores right out of the gate and has the highest protein of any tzatziki on the market because there are no milk powders in the Greek yogurt.”

Dips that can also work as sauces, such as toum and tahini, can expand usage occasions to small plates and meals via bowl cuisine.

“Made from olive oil and fresh California garlic, toum is traditionally used as a sauce with chicken shawarma,” says Steve Drapeau, co-founder of Anne’s Toum in the San Francisco Bay Area, CA, which makes original, lemon-sumac, and herby Za’atar flavors. “Like hummus years ago, toum isn’t as familiar today, but it comes from the same region of the world, and it’s much more versatile. Foodservice accounts are using it in their sandwich programs, as a pizza dip, on pub food like burgers, and as a topping in grain bowls.”

Like toum, tahini isn’t just a dip, according to Tal Garden, founder and chief executive officer of Tal’s Mediterranean, a Los Angeles, CA-based, women-owned company that makes fresh lemon and fiery chile tahini dips, as well as garlic and jalapeno cilantro toum.

“An excellent use is stirred into pasta or as a component in a rice or grain bowl,” says Garden. “Deli operators can either create sets with all the bowl-making components in one place for an easy dinner option. Or delis can create the bowls with our tahini products and sell them in the grab-and-go set.”

CROSS-MERCHANDISING

The Mediterranean deli category is moving toward a more modern, elevated, and usage-driven experience, while still staying rooted in authenticity, says FOODMatch’s Gross.

“Three key shifts are shaping the future. First, convenience without compromise. Shoppers want deli-quality products in formats that fit how they actually shop and eat today. That means growth in pre-pack, cups, and ready-to-use formats that work for snacking, meal building, and especially entertaining, without sacrificing the perception of freshness or quality.”

Secondly, a balance of discovery and familiarity, adds Gross. “There’s a continued appetite for discovery, but it must feel accessible. Products that anchor in something recognizable, like olives, peppers, or antipasti, while introducing a twist, are where we’re seeing the most traction.”

Third, he points to cross-merchandising and meal integration, and to the fact that Mediterranean items are increasingly seen as components of a broader eating occasion, not just standalone purchases.



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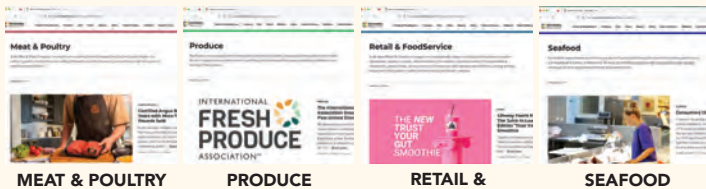


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Deli Packaging: Beyond Presentation, Portability

Containers prevent problems, provide solutions, meet legislative mandates, and are a sales force.

BY E. SHAUNN ALDERMAN

Deli Packaging Appreciation Day could be added to that quirky calendar of niche observances listing non-traditional holidays.

Aside from containing food, packaging is engineered toward meeting the goals of presentation, food safety/freshness, convenience, and ease/efficiency of handling by in-store labor.

No matter how great the packaging is, volume sales are unlikely if the food quality is inadequate.

"Everyone is trying to compete with dining dollars," says Alexis Medina, senior director of product management and marketing with Sabert in Sayreville, NJ. The manufacturing company offers several product lines for deli, foodservice and catering departments.

"Even as a packaging company, we view food as the lead actor and packaging as the supporting actor," claims Medina.

Shoppers eat with their eyes first, so the food must be seen, and it must be appealing. Perceptive deli operators know this rule and make packaging purchases with this mantra in mind.

Kurt Richars, director of marketing and custom with Anchor Packaging in St. Louis, MO, says the basics of retailing, such as merchandising, are vital in deli. "Merchandising is important. See more — sell more! The right packaging for the product triggers shoppers to buy."

Richars says if the deli product is crisp and beautiful, the packaging must show off and support those qualities.

ADDRESSING LABOR PRESSURES

Tight labor is a chronic challenge in the deli, and this obstacle has steered supermarkets to seek solutions as budget- and time-constrained consumers increasingly turn to the deli for snacking items, prepared meals, and grab-and-go possibilities. Selecting the right packaging for the multi-product deli department requires a no look-back approach.

Echoing this stance, Mark Medovitch, content manager for Inline Plastics Corp., Shelton, CT, says, "Supermarket delis are being asked to do more with less — prepared meals, more grab-and-go options, tighter labor models, and increasing sustainability mandates. In this environment, packaging isn't just a container. It's an operational tool."

Medovitch says a measurable difference occurs when deli teams with limited staffing implement packaging that reduces handling steps and prevents rework. He explains how compartmented polypropylene containers from Inline Plastics allow retailers to offer complete meals — entrée and sides — without food mixing during transport.



PHOTO COURTESY ANCHOR PACKAGING

"Because the 9x9, three-compartment container supports hot applications and microwaving, the same package moves from prep to display to the customer without additional materials or repackaging," he says. "Fewer steps. Less labor. More consistency."

GRAB-AND-GO GROWTH

On-the-go shoppers seeking snacks and convenient meals often expect the deli to be a no-wait zone. "Consumers are not necessarily buying less at the supermarket; they are simply purchasing foods that fit their moment of need," explains Zach Muscato, director of Sustainability and Innovation for Plastic Ingenuity based in Cross Plains, WI.

Muscato says, "Many shoppers are seeking smaller portions that provide meaningful satiety, particularly as protein-forward snacks increasingly replace traditional meals."

He proposes that deli operators recognize packaging design and usability are just as important as portion size in meeting these needs.

Medina of Sabert says for cold grab-and-go items and snack packaging, PET containers are ideal because shoppers have a 360-degree clear view of the products, and the freshness is truly showcased.

MAINTAIN APPEAL AND QUALITY

Retailers make buying decisions knowing consumers expect portability, freshness, and visible safety.

Medovitch of Inline Plastics says the company's expanded format products give flexibility for hot sides, sandwiches, and smaller prepared meals while maintaining structure under heat.

"Anti-fog and vented options help reduce condensation — a small detail that directly affects shelf appeal and impulse purchases," Medovitch explains. "When food looks fresh and stays visually clear under heat lamps or in refrigerated cases, it moves faster."

Medina appreciates the numerous levels of planning that deli operators are responsible for since the product lines vary substantially.

She says listening to buyers and presenting solutions is a strength at Sabert. "As a trusted solutions provider, we must and do provide products for different cooking instructions."

From the company's Hot Collection, for example, Medina mentions containers for fish from the deli as a product developed for a

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CATERING: A CONSIDERATION FOR EXPANDING DELI SALES

Supermarkets seeking options to expand customer bases may want to evaluate opportunities related to catering because party planning for holidays and at-home events is popular.

Alexus Medina, senior director of product management and marketing, Sabert, Sayreville, NJ, says, “We have seen steady year-over-year growth in catering. Consumers are outsourcing party prep. They go to local grocery stores for sandwiches, appetizers, and fruit platters.”

Additionally, she indicates some retailers are wisely tracking these purchases to evaluate the viability of expanding or better promoting the store’s catering services. “We see it more and more where outsourcing holiday meal prep is rising. Why not? The food is good, and consumers appreciate the convenience and easy clean up.”

Medina indicates savvy deli operators promote bundled meals and platters with several catering options by offering three different price points for the holiday specials. “We saw this effective approach the week before Valentine’s Day.”

Merchandising space is typically tight in the deli, but Medina urges operators to make their everyday customers aware of what can be ordered to simplify and



PHOTO COURTESY SABERT

enhance holiday entertaining.

Sabert’s pop-up catering tray, which is used by restaurants, can be an ideal vessel for supermarket delis because it is a convenient, product-filled carry-out box that can be customized.

Medina says stores provide their own logos and graphics, or branded concepts can be created by Sabert designers. The visibility of this item shows the store’s commitment to catering and enables everyday deli customers to see possibilities for future orders.

“Catering is a great place to grow more profits,” says Kurt Richars of Anchor Packaging, St. Louis, MO. He explains whether it is the return-to-office movement to be targeted — where the catering job could be 30 workers or 300, retailers can seize these opportunities as business builders.

“Small format catering is a worthwhile way for retailers to boost volume, while giving more deli options to consumers.”

Richars adds, research shows office employees eating a catered lunch featuring smartly presented quality food are highly likely to purchase from that same location on their own. Here is when branding steps in.

When making packaging decisions for transportable lunches Medina and Richars encourage retailers to go strong with store branding. “Our printed lunch box for multiple occasions, including outdoor events, can be the plain Kraft version or stores can select a fully customized option. We see retailers leaning into full branding,” explains Medina.

Regarding platters for the group or individual lunches, Richars notes a post-pandemic pattern for small catered office lunches hosted for around seven to 10 people. He has seen consumer preferences for executive-style/individual lunches, instead of platters.

Retailers will track purchasing patterns in their markets and make packaging decisions based on the patterns. “People want their own lunch,” says Richars, who advises retailers to not dismiss single-serve containers when launching into catering.

hot prepared item that might be taken home, refrigerated, and then microwaved or heated in the oven for evening enjoyment.

For cold applications, Medovitch of Inline Plastics says tamper protection has shifted from “nice to have” to an expected standard. The company offers a product line integrating tamper-evident features directly into the clamshell design.

Medovitch shares that this offering eliminates the need for secondary labels or seals. “And this not only reinforces food safety for shoppers, but also reduces extra handling at the store level.”

When purchasing suitable containers for products requiring a shelf life of 28 days or more, deli operators often use a polypropylene (PP) tray with an EVOH barrier, according to Muscato of Plastic Ingenuity. He says the company’s tray barrier is designed in accordance with the Association of Plastic Recyclers’ (APR) Design Guide criteria, which provides an optimal balance of food preservation, product protection and recyclability.

PERFORMANCE IS NON-NEGOTIABLE

While retailers are celebrating expanded department traffic with the popularity of ready-to-eat and ready-to-heat meals and kits, deli operators must answer to rigid food packaging regulations related to sustainability. For Sabert, Medina indicates the company’s commitment to customers strengthens with every regulation.

There is no dispute that deli packaging purchasing decisions are influenced by sustainability expectations, according to Medovitch of Inline Plastics. “Retailers are navigating recyclability goals, post-consumer content requirements, and regional regulations. The evolution of deli packaging over the past several years reflects a balancing act — meeting environmental objectives while protecting food quality, shelf life, and operational efficiency.”

ENSURING REPEAT SALES

Industry experts preach that food quality is the top factor for encouraging repeat deli sales.

Richars of Anchor Packaging states consumers are quick to cite order accuracy as a leading motive for multi-occasion purchases. He says this especially applies for online ordering because the consumer correlates this feature to the met expectation metric. “Was everything included in my package, such as the correct dressing or sauce, eating utensils, a napkin?”

Richars says from consumer research and feedback, his experience in the food packaging industry indicates consumers consistently list “No leaks” as a priority from any takeaway containers. Anchor Packaging offers an expansive selection of containers designed for deli takeout and delivery. “Whether it’s coffee or rotisserie chicken — consumers adamantly list no package leaks as a top expectation.”

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Going Green at the Counter

Supermarket delis can embrace sustainability for success.

BY VANESSA SALVIA

The numbers are hard to ignore. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates that roughly 30% to 40% of the U.S. food supply ends up as waste. “It’s not just the food that goes away with it,” says Kurt Richars, director of growth and marketing for St. Louis, MO-based Anchor Packaging. “It’s everything it took to produce that food — the energy, the other inputs. All that goes away when that food is lost.”

For supermarket deli operators, that reality translates into both a responsibility and an opportunity. Everything behind the deli counter, from the sliced meats to the prepared foods to the grab-and-go containers, goes home in some kind of packaging. Consumers don’t really have a choice in the matter, which means operators do.

“Today’s consumers are increasingly aware of the impact of their purchasing decisions, and they actively seek companies that align with their values,” says Emanuela Bigi, marketing manager for Veroni, a charcuterie supplier that reached the 100-year milestone in April 2025. “By committing to sustainability, we can meet these expectations while maintaining the high quality and authenticity that define our products.”

So, what does a more sustainable deli

actually look like in practice? Sustainability in the deli is not one single move. Instead, consider it a web of interconnected decisions about what products are stocked, how food is prepared, what containers are used, and how all of those decisions are communicated to customers.

THE FOOD WASTE CULPRIT

Richars, who has spent more than six years in foodservice packaging, points out that most food waste occurs between the restaurant or grocery store and the home. “That last leg,” he explains. “That’s why sustainability is exciting from a packaging perspective, because that’s exactly where packaging lives.”

Robert Mullen, global specialty product leader at Hussmann Corporation, a commercial refrigeration equipment company headquartered in Bridgeton, MO, says refrigeration equipment plays a direct role here as well. “We develop our products to extend the shelf life based on the type of product you’re actually going to put in the case,” he says. “Meat, deli, and produce all require different temperature ranges.”

Craig Muldrew, vice president of marketing at Lacerta, a leading thermoformer of foodservice containers based in Mansfield,

MA, says the company recently launched a new product line called Seal N’ Flip that is 25% less expensive and has 50% less plastic.

“The carbon footprint is half of what a traditional clamshell would be,” says Muldrew. “And probably more importantly, it helps extend the shelf life of the food because it’s film sealed.”

Muldrew notes that customer feedback shows the shelf-life extension is even more important than cost savings. When delis run low on product toward the end of a day, leaving sparse, unappetizing selections of sandwiches, they lose sales, and the food often goes to waste. Packaging that keeps food fresher longer means fuller shelves and less shrink. “By offering a packaging solution that helps them reduce waste and allows them to keep the shelf full, that’s a big opportunity to increase sales,” he says.

Veroni’s Bigi says the company, which has seven production plants in Italy and a slicing plant in Logan Township, NJ, includes sustainability in its product innovation strategy. “We are actively working on reducing the environmental impact of our packaging by minimizing plastic use and increasing the use of recyclable and more sustainable materials,” she says.

Paige Greenberg, sustainable packaging

engineer at Plastic Ingenuity, a custom thermoformer with locations across North America but headquartered in Cross Plains, WI, says the landscape is shifting.

"Sustainability in packaging was kind of a voluntary 'nice to have,' but it's really becoming more of a mandate," she says, pointing to the expansion of extended producer responsibility (EPR) legislation across U.S. states. So far, seven states are implementing EPR laws that hold producers financially responsible for the end-of-life management of their packaging. Through EPR legislation, packaging in recyclable or waste-reducing formats incurs lower fees, which is a financial incentive that's pushing manufacturers and retailers toward more sustainable choices. Plastic Ingenuity used post-consumer recycled PET content in more than 25% of its packaging last year.

Polypropylene is an emerging PCR market, and Plastic Ingenuity commercialized its first polypropylene PCR part last year — a ready-to-eat meal tray for a large brand. "We're getting more requests for that," says Greenberg.

On the question of which packaging is

truly more sustainable, Richards offers a counterintuitive perspective worth considering. A cucumber wrapped in plastic film, for example, may seem wasteful, but that packaging drastically extends the product's shelf life. Meanwhile, the plastic tray holding a prepared rotisserie chicken represents less than 1% of that meal's total environmental footprint because 99% of the impact lies in raising and processing the animal, Richard explains.

THE ENERGY USE CULPRIT

Husmann's Mullen says increasing energy efficiency is one of the most significant decisions deli operators can make to reduce environmental impact. The shift to LED lighting is one visible example, although it's something that most consumers may never see or even know about.

"The life cycle of LEDs is significantly longer, so you're not changing them as often, and you don't have waste from that," says Mullen.

But a much larger impact is possible with different refrigerated cases that reduce impact. The Environmental Protection Agency has implemented new regulations

WHAT THEY ARE Saying

"Today's consumers are increasingly aware of the impact of their purchasing decisions, and they actively seek companies that align with their values."

Emanuela Bigi,
Veroni, Logan
Township, NJ



that are pushing retailers toward low global warming potential (GWP) refrigerants. Many existing commercial refrigeration systems contain ozone-depleting refrigerants made from chlorofluorocarbons, which are being phased out. More environmentally friendly refrigerants include carbon dioxide, ammonia and propane.

"New stores are being set up with



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low-GWP refrigerants like CO2 or propane, where it really helps the environment long term,” he says.

Husmann recently launched the NAV8A, a self-contained deli case using R-290 (propane). This is an option for stores not connected to a centralized remote refrigeration system.

Installing cases with doors also makes a measurable difference. “A case with doors on it is about a 70% energy reduction compared to an open case,” says Mullen. He acknowledges that there’s an ongoing debate about whether or not doors on cases rescue impulse purchases. Although he says, consumers will continue to choose staples, such as milk and cheese, from cases whether there are doors on them or not.

Husmann also builds its cases to last at least a decade, and offers a “Husmann Refresh” program to extend the life of aging cases rather than replacing them. “We build our products to last 10 years or longer,” Mullen says. “The materials we use, and the product quality, allow the retailer to keep the product in their stores, so it’s not something that’s going to have a short life and have to be disposed of.”

PRECISION SLICING PAYS OFF

Sustainability gains are also coming from the equipment side. Carolyn Bilger, marketing director at Hobart Food Prep Equipment, a provider of food service equipment founded in 1897 and headquartered in Troy, OH, points to precision slicing as an underappreciated source of waste reduction in the deli.

Hobart’s HS Series portion scale slicers, available in manual (HS6-IPS) and automatic (HS7-IPS) models, feature an integrated scale that eliminates the need to walk to a separate station and takes the guesswork out of hitting the correct weight. “Meats and cheese are sliced to the exact weight needed,” Bilger says, “so there is less waste.”

In testing against a competitive brand, another line of Hobart equipment, the HS Series heavy-duty slicers, achieved a 97.2% yield on meat compared to 96.3% for the competitor, based on slicing 50 pounds of meat daily. For cheese, the Hobart slicer yielded 96.3% versus 93.4% for the competitor across 30 pounds sliced daily.

The cleaner cut translates to an additional \$1,478 in annual revenue on meat and \$2,828 on cheese. “The math speaks for itself,” Bilger says. “A slicer that offers cleaner cuts generates greater profits since there is less lost product due to shredding.”



PHOTO COURTESY HOBART

Looking ahead, Hobart plans to introduce its next generation of slicers this year, featuring proprietary capabilities for even more precise and consistent slicing.

SOURCING AND STRATEGY

What delis stock is as important as how they store and slice it. Claire Flannery, senior director of marketing and media at Greenridge Naturals, a deli meat and cheese company based in Chicago, IL, says consumers are driving demand for clean-label brands.

“Whether it’s organic or grass-fed beef or antibiotic-free poultry, brands that are sourcing from smaller organic farms can really reduce waste on a larger level,” she says.

Greenridge Naturals itself applies these principles across its product line. All of its meats fall under a natural or all-natural designation, with antibiotic-free and grass-fed claims featured prominently on packaging. The company hardwood-smokes its hams using actual hardwood chips — no liquid smoke — and uses in-house spice blends, producing them in small batches.

“Our methods kind of speak to the fact that deli meats can be minimally processed and can offer a healthy offering within the deli,” she notes.

The company has also worked to reduce its own packaging footprint by consolidating information, including the nutritional panel, onto a single front label.

MAKING SUSTAINABILITY VISIBLE AT THE COUNTER

Doing the work on sustainability is one thing. Making sure customers know about it is another. On-pack labeling and in-store signage are the primary tools delis should be using.

“You don’t see a lot of signage within the

deli, so I think it really has to happen on pack, through labeling,” says Lacerta’s Muldrew.

Bilger echoes that, suggesting charts at the counter showing recommended slice thicknesses for different applications can both reduce overproduction and signal to shoppers that sustainability is a priority.

Small shelf tags that call out local or clean label products are simple and effective. “Having those call-outs on packaging and in-store from the retailer side is super helpful,” Flannery says. “There are a lot of people who will gravitate to those products if they’re called out.”

Veroni’s Bigi notes that delis have both the direct connection to brands and a direct connection to consumers, making them essential in communicating sustainability efforts. “One of the most effective approaches is to keep communication clear, simple, and authentic,” she says. “Customers don’t need overly technical information: They want to understand where products come from and why they can trust them.”

Yes, she says, signage and labels bring attention to sustainable practices; however, they will never be as powerful as personal interaction. “Storytelling is especially impactful,” she says. “When customers learn about the care taken in raising animals or the efforts to reduce environmental impact, they feel more connected to the product.”

There’s a lot of value to the deli department in trying to find ways to serve food more sustainably.

Make one smarter packaging decision. Implement a tighter production schedule. Add one shelf tag.

“It’s a big web,” Flannery says, “and there are different methods and things that delis can do to hit all those marks.”

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A portrait of Megan Levin, a woman with curly brown hair, wearing a black blazer over a pink top, smiling. She is positioned in the upper left quadrant of the image, partially overlapping a blue rounded rectangle.

MEGAN LEVIN

Changemaker

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A GREAT AMERICAN STORY: DON'S PREPARED FOODS

Donald Skloff grew up in Philadelphia, PA, and served as a cook during the Korean War. After returning home, he worked in a deli where he introduced his grandmother's recipe for chopped chicken liver pâté.

The recipe quickly gained a following, with customers traveling from miles away just to purchase it. Donald soon realized that his true passion was not working in a deli, but creating exceptional prepared foods.

In 1970, he founded Don's Salads in a modest 1,400-square-foot facility. By 1980, the next generation stepped in as Victor Skloff took over leadership of the company. With a strong vision for the future, Victor combined a deep understanding of customers with a strategic focus on innovation and growth within the evolving food industry.

In 1987, Don's expanded into a larger facility in Philadelphia to support increasing demand. The company continued to grow rapidly, fueled by its commitment to quality, strong customer relationships, and passion for developing exceptional products.

By 2003, Don's had outgrown its city location and moved to a 31,000-square-foot facility in Montgomery County, allowing for expanded production and the development



From a Philadelphia, PA, deli counter to a thriving business, Korean War veteran Donald Skloff turned his grandmother's chopped chicken liver pâté into a customer favorite. That success inspired him to found Don's Salads in 1970.



In 1980, Don's son, Victor Skloff (pictured), took over leadership of the company.

of new and innovative recipes.

As demand continued to rise, Don's again expanded in 2019, increasing production and corporate office space to more than 55,000 square feet. Today, Don's serves a wide range of customers across foodservice, retail, commissary, military, airline and private label channels, offering more than 120 products along with a growing portfolio of custom recipes.

Don's mission is to be recognized as one

of the industry's leading prepared foods companies by consistently delivering high-quality salads, sides, and specialty items that help drive success for its partners. Central to that mission is a commitment to employees and creating an environment where individuals can grow professionally, support their families, and work in a culture defined by integrity, creativity and respect.

Looking ahead, Don's remains focused on innovation: exploring globally inspired flavors, responding to evolving consumer trends, and developing cleaner-label products that stand apart in the marketplace.

At Don's, the philosophy is simple: "We Do Delicious ... Differently."

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Irresistible Foods Group/Kings Hawaiian Rolls	21	310-533-3250	Irresistiblefoods.com
Ken's Foodservice, Inc.	33	508-229-1100	Kensfoodservice.com
LaClare Farms	47	920-670-0051	Laclarefamilycreamery.com
Oolie	7	770-561-4857	Ooliefoods.com
Refrigerated Foods Association (RFA)	53	678-426-8175	Refrigeratedfoods.org
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