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IT IS EASY BEING GREEN



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Sabra Expands Plant



Sabra Dipping Co., LLC recently broke ground on an expansion of the world's largest hummus-making facility, based in Chesterfield County, VA. The 40,000-square-foot expansion will enable Sabra to further expedite product delivery to retail. The new addition more than doubles Sabra's finished goods storage capacity, lays the groundwork for future packaging customization capabilities and will result in an improved carbon footprint. Sabra expects to add 12 full-time positions upon completion of the expansion, which will be designed to maintain Gold certification under the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED certification program.

The expansion will significantly improve efficiencies and increase cold storage capabilities while decreasing Sabra's carbon footprint by enabling freshly-packaged product to get to stores and consumers more quickly. The expanded facility will also provide the framework for future productivity projects and innovations.

According to Chicago-based market research firm IRI, the U.S. fresh dips category is estimated at \$2.15 billion, excluding foodservice and some club stores. Hummus represents more than 37 percent of the fresh dips category.

COMING NEXT IN DEC/JAN ISSUE

COVER STORY

Certified Humane

DELI MEATS

Trends

FEATURE STORIES

Cross Merchandising
Flatbreads

PREPARED FOODS

Take-out Foods

MERCHANDISING REVIEWS

Olives
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CHEESE CORNER

Buying Local
Spanish Cheeses

PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES

Italian

COMING IN FEB/MAR

DELI BUSINESS will be taking a look at Prepared Foods.

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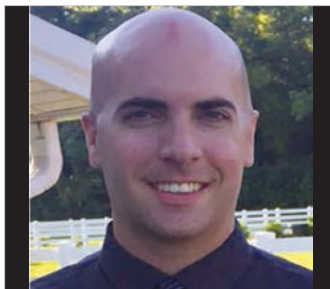
TRANSITION



SABRA ANNOUNCES POSTINGS

Sabra Dipping Co., White Plains, NY, has announced two appointments. Tomer Harpaz has been named CEO of the company. For the past four years, Harpaz served as CEO of Strauss Coffee. He will oversee both Sabra and Obela, another joint venture between PepsiCo and the Strauss Group that sells dips and spreads outside North America. Also, Cherie Floyd has been named chief technology officer. She will help set the product development course for Sabra's next phase of growth.

www.sabra.com



PLACON HIRES NEW MARKETING MANAGER

Placon, Madison, WI, has named Derek Skogen as marketing manager. He brings over seven years of product and brand management experience to Placon. Skogen formerly worked in the retail, e-commerce, industrial and food customer segments.

www.placon.com



VOLPI APPOINTS CHIEF CUSTOMER OFFICER

Volpi Foods, St. Louis, MO, has named John Gruender as chief customer officer. Over his 20-year career, Gruender has led teams at Conagra, Ralcorp and most recently at Treehouse Foods. In his new role, Gruender will lead brand-forward strategic initiatives overseeing all aspects related to sales, marketing and new product development.

www.Volpifoods.com



BLOUNT PROMOTES LEATHERWOOD

Blount Fine Foods, Fall River, MA, has promoted Robin Leatherwood to director of technical services, a role that provides regulatory, food safety and labeling support to the company's culinary and R&D functions. She had been manager of technical services. Under Leatherwood's leadership, Blount's Technical Services team is responsible for the scientific portion of the research and development process, providing information and insight needed to design and label products for food safety and regulatory compliance.

www.BlountFineFoods.com

ANNOUNCEMENT • NEW PRODUCTS



CONSIDER BARDWELL CHEESES WIN AT ACS

Consider Bardwell Farm, West Pawlet, VT, announced its creamery director, Leslie Goff, received four awards at the 2018 American Cheese Society Competition. Slyboro won first place in the Washed Rind Cheeses Aged more than 60 days; Goatlet took first place in the American Made/International Style; Manchester took second place in the Farmstead Cheeses Aged more than 60 days; and Pawlet took second place in the American Originals/Original Recipe.

www.considerbardwellfarm.com



SMALL BUT MIGHTY

Laura Chenel, Sebastopol, CA, has introduced Medallions—small, disk-shaped cheeses that have been crafted to provide tasty, healthy goat cheese at an accessible price. The limited edition Cranberry & Cinnamon Medallion is the perfect addition to holiday gatherings. Easy to demold, the Medallion complements any cheeseboard.

www.laurachenel.com



THE GOODNESS OF ANCIENT GRAINS

Sally Sherman Foods, Mt. Vernon, NY, has launched a new Ancient Grain line, which offers the grab-and-go convenience that modern customers want, packed with the healthy, mouth-watering Mediterranean flavors shoppers crave. Best of all, there's zero labor for store staff or customers. Hot and cold salads include Quinoa Cobb, Pesto Farro and Harvest Wheatberry.

www.sallyshermanfoods.com



HANDCRAFTED CHASHU PORK BELLY

Pocino Foods, City of Industry, CA, has launched Hana-Zen, a specialty line that includes handcrafted Chashu Pork Belly, in addition to Japanese Meatballs. Available for foodservice, these precooked meats are authentic, tender, full of flavor and ready to use in many different recipes. Handcrafted from premium pork bellies, Hana-Zen Chashu is hand-rolled to a round diameter and slow-cooked to ensure tender and flavorful meat. There are many options available, from whole to sliced, in various sauces and package sizes.

www.PocinoFoods.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**

NEW PRODUCTS



LIMITED RELEASE RESERVE GOUDA

Carr Valley Cheese Co., La Valle, WI, has debuted a new limited-release product, Reserve Gouda, a traditional variety with a twist. It starts with fresh cow milk delivered daily from a network of small, local farmers. Using traditional techniques, the cheese is crafted with special cultures that add a distinct flavor. The 10-pound wheels are then aged for over nine months to achieve peak flavor.

www.CarrValleyCheese.com



CRACKERS OFFER VARIETY

Primizie, Austin, TX, offers a number of flavors and varieties in its Flatbread Crisps line. In addition to its core products, which include Simply Salted, Gouda Garlic, Italian Everything and Ancient Sprouted Grains, the company offers a gluten-free line with Ancient Sprouted Grains, Green Harvest and Rustic Beet varieties. The crackers are all natural and trans fat free, with no preservatives or cholesterol. Grilled and lightly crisped, the line has a layered texture.

www.primiziesnacks.com



SALAMI CHUBS LINE LAUNCHES

1732 Meats, Philadelphia, has released its new retail Salami chubs. There are three available flavor profiles—Black Peppercorn, Spanish Smoked Paprika and Garlic Insanity. The company's mission is to encourage humane and sustainable farming practices using breeds of pig that have retained their natural characteristics as well as no hormones or antibiotics. It works with farmers and farming co-ops that raise only heritage breeds, primarily Berkshire, certified by the Humane Farm Animal Care Association.

www.1732meats.com



SPREADABLE CURED MEATS

La Quercia, Norwalk, IA, has introduced spreadable cured meat—Ground Pancetta and Pesto Bianco. The spreadable Pancetta features Pancetta Americana, antibiotic-free, pork belly, dry-cured with sea salt and spices. Pesto Bianco is a savory Lardo spread that begins with cured fat from prosciutto—a rich and creamy fat from vegetarian fed, antibiotic-free and family-farm raised hogs. The nine- to 12-month aged Lardo is blended with sea salt, black pepper, rosemary and red chili flake.

www.laquercia.us



ARTISAN CHEESE WITH EASE

Schuman Cheese, Fairfield, NJ, has recently launched Cello Quick Fix and Cello Cheese Flights, convenience-packaged products. Cello Quick Fix snack packs are portioned combinations of savory, award-winning cheeses and Olli Salumeria's artisan slow-cured salami. A trio of curated cheese paired with recommendations for complementary beer and wine pairings are part of the Cello Cheese Flights.

www.schumancheese.com



NEW BRANDING AND PACKAGING DEBUTS

Litehouse Inc., Sandpoint, ID, has a new look for its Litehouse Simply Artisan line that leverages design cues from the recently refreshed core line of Litehouse dressings and dips, including modernized branding, top-down photography, eye popping color and easy-to-read flavor names. The entire Litehouse Simply Artisan line will be refreshed, including Blue cheese and Gorgonzola wheels and center cuts, and Blue cheese, Gorgonzola and Feta cheese crumble cups and crumble pouches.

www.litehousefoods.com



A BOWL OF CONVENIENCE

Green Giant, Parsippany, NJ, has introduced a line of fresh vegetable vegan meal bowls. The six distinct world flavors can be microwaved in their bowl and ready in minutes. Varieties include Buddha; Burrito; Fried Rice; Pad Thai; Ramen; and Rancheros Bowls. Each is comprised of different value-added vegetable products and comes with sauces and/or seasoning packets.

www.greengiant.com



SINGLE SERVING OPTIONS

LaClare Family Creamery, Malone, WI, has recently expanded its offerings with sliced goat cheeses. Cheddar, Mozzarella and Jack varieties in peggable packages contain six 1-ounce slices. The complex Cheddar adds extra flavor to sandwiches or can be conveniently served on a cheese board. Mozzarella is a mild, creamy, meltable cheese. Jack has a rich buttery mouth feel and becomes increasingly creamy and flavorful with age.

www.laclarefamily-creamery.com

Supermarket Delis Perfectly Aligned For Omni-Channel Retailing



By
Jim Prevor
Editor-in-Chief

For many years, the growing importance of fresh departments has been widely recognized. With supercenters and warehouse clubs underpricing conventional supermarkets on center-of-the-store items, it became obvious that conventional retailers had to secure their future through the differentiation and profitability of the fresh departments. This has become only clearer with the growth of discount retailers, such as Aldi, Lidl and dollar stores, plus the many online delivery services that ship dry grocery items.

Now, however, the prospect of Omni-Channel Retailing offers to make the retail/foodservice aspect of supermarkets the key to the future.

This means there will be physical spaces in which people will engage. And no department offers a more physically-rooted space for engagement than the foodservice spaces in a store.

Omni-Channel Retailing is different than just having an online ordering portal and delivery service. Partly, Omni-Channel is about customer service. It is a way of serving customers in the ways they wish to be served. That may be a small convenience store or a large supercenter or via delivery.

Looked at from a business perspective, Omni-Channel is a way to maximize sales and profits by leveraging all available touch points. So, for example, Carrefour in France has established that allowing customers to return online purchases in stores increases total sales. Why? People are more likely to buy from a retailer online if they know they can return things conveniently to a local store, and returns often represent an additional purchase occasion.

But maintaining the viability of the store — the physical space — is essential. It does not seem likely that viability will be sustained with dry groceries. In fact, shopping itself may transform into a continuing replenishment model where your favorite shampoo gets delivered every three weeks. Indeed, one would expect Kayak-like digital services to get these branded products for you in the cheapest possible way.

Brands will be in deep trouble, as well. Ordering will increasingly be done through voice. A consumer might say, "I need a pound of sliced turkey breast," and if that consumer normally buys Boar's Head turkey from the neighborhood store where there is a visual cue, we don't really know if that will happen without the visual cue.

We also don't know how flexible consumers will be. If they do order Boar's Head, and Alexa says, "We don't have that, but we have Dietz & Watson, which also is of high quality and recommended," will consumers say "Ok, do that."? What if the system biases toward private label brands?

Foodservice, however, seems certain to play a big role. People like to eat, and they enjoy socializing. Sure, people can get lunch delivered to their desks or buy from a vending machine — and these are all aspects of Omni-Channel, as well — but just as the market for flowers for funerals is a "necessity" market — whereas picking up a bouquet for your dining room or significant other is more of an impulse buy — the decision to dine out translates into something more than nutrition. It is why people still go to movie theaters even though they can watch Netflix.

The thing we need to assess is how best to use the foodservice capability in an Omni-Channel world. Sampling seems an obvious win. If there is a new cooked item, for example, using the store foodservice option to introduce it seems a win-win for both retailer and manufacturer.

Just having people in the store creates loads of opportunities to showcase new items — in and out of the deli department. With small screens on mobile devices and no visual cues at all on voice ordering, perhaps supermarkets will be more like showrooms for manufacturers to showcase their products in displays built around vibrant foodservice operations.

So, Omni-Channel consumers can be drawn to supermarkets by these enticements:

- the foodservice operations,
- services such as online returns,
- some areas where consumers like to see, touch and smell before purchasing — say squeezing a melon in produce,
- items difficult to deliver online — hot donuts, for example.

Then the manufacturers will pay to expose consumers to their products just as magazines pay retailers for prominent display. Consumers could scan items with their phones to order whatever they see in-store, but the store would have limited inventory.

It is a brave new world, but it is built around primal human instincts — to eat, to share, to love. **DB**



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Expanding Deli Meat Sales



By
Lee Smith
Publisher

Once the bastion of deli department sales, deli meats have been overshadowed by expanding new categories, especially prepared foods and specialty cheese.

Today, prepared food sales are about three-times the sales of deli meat, and specialty cheese sales have grown to be a close runner up. Deli meat sales as a percentage of total deli sales now hover around 20 percent—a far cry from the 60 percent share of total deli during the deli meat heyday. In fact, there has been a reversal with New York City-based market research firm Nielsen reporting that 60 percent of supermarket deli sales are now in prepared foods.

While the percentage numbers look dismal, it is important to realize the deli department has grown significantly. According to London-based Statista, annual deli sales were over \$26 billion in 2017, with deli meat sales at over \$5 billion. Deli meat is still one of the backbones of the deli department and a significant sales contributor.

There also is one subcategory that is seeing tremendous growth—antibiotic-free—with sales increases of over 50 percent, according to Statista. Organic sales are slightly down and natural slightly up, but ‘no antibiotics’ is the leading label claim that is attracting consumers’ pocketbooks.

Sliced deli meats are becoming more interesting once again. While tonnage is down, sales are up. New products and packaging are emerging that entice today’s consumers. It’s no longer bologna for the kids and roast beef for the parents or deli meat for sandwich fixings.

The sales growth is attributed to the increase of high-quality, specialty meats. Sales are not the result of one specific product that has gained consumers’ share of stomach. Instead, it is the result of a category of products that have captured consumers’ taste buds.

The number one product standout is Prosciutto di Parma, the ringleader of the group. According to statistics provided by the Consorzio del Prosciutto di Parma, between 2013 and 2016, Prosciutto di Parma sales increased 39 percent, largely a result of the availability of pre-sliced. Sales in 2017 were up approximately 7 percent.

There are, however, several prosciutti available from Italy, from Prosciutto di San Danielle to Prosciutto di Toscano to the more mundane but more affordable generic prosciutto from Italy.

Italy is not the only dry-cured producer. Serrano and Iberico from Spain and Jambon de Bayonne from France are also making inroads. Of course, the United States cannot be left out. American prosciutto and other dry-cured products are gaining in popularity with exceptional quality, more availability and affordable prices.

It is just not dry-cured meats, but the entire specialty area that is fueling growth. Italian producers are now creating excellent products in the United States and some producers are making products in Italy and sending them to the U.S. to be pre-sliced. American producers have also upped the ante, making better products and, in many cases, exceptional products that rival all imports.

The growth of specialty has made a marked difference in packaging and merchandising. Pre-packaged was reserved for less expensive lunch meats usually sold in the meat department—the peg board deli meat. There is now a complete turnaround.

High retails, low sales and many products have led both suppliers and retailers to view the pre-packaged meat category with fresh eyes. For many specialty meats, sales are too low to guarantee absolute freshness and the need for skilled, behind-the-counter deli clerks impossible to obtain. With new technologies, pre-sliced is the way to go. Far less labor intensive and almost shrink-free, there is an absolute guarantee of freshness. Often, the quality for the consumer is much better and the inept, butchering of high-quality product is eliminated.

To capitalize, retailers need to rethink the pre-sliced category and give it the upscale panache it requires.

Finally, there are other merchandising opportunities. Specialty meats are often stand-alone products for snacking or in other uses not related to sandwiches. The most likely location for cross merchandising is within the specialty cheese department. Second is tying in with seasonal promotions—cantaloupe with prosciutto, holiday promos with fruit—speck with apples, for example.

DB

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

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IT IS EASY BEING GREEN



**The rise of sustainability
is becoming more prevalent in the deli**

BY KEITH LORIA

There was a time not too long ago when sustainability was a buzz word among niche groups and companies, but over the last decade, the concept of going green has really hit home with both consumers and food manufacturers as well as the stores that carry food products.

Millennials especially are more interested in products that are good for the environment, and that's why more stores and deli departments have made a strong commitment to be environmentally conscious.

Peter Gialantzi, fresh vice president, vendor management for KeHE Distributors LLC, headquartered in Naperville, IL, says as a distributor, the company aspires to carry a differentiated product mix for delis.

"The best way for us to do that is to be on the front side of emerging trends, and there is no other larger trend than sustainability," he says. "Stores are aligning themselves with forward-thinking vendors who are concerned about sustainability."

Sharissa Nanhekhan, marketing coordinator for Vandersterre



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Holland B.V., a wholesaler, brand distributor, exporter, service provider and packager of Dutch cheese specialty products based in the Netherlands, says as a manufacturer, it is important to think and act on sustainable products because that is what consumers are asking for more often.

"With all the products that are being developed right now, sustainability is key," she says. "For instance, we have a cheese made solely out of Jersey milk. The Jersey cow eats less feed and gives less manure."

Additionally, to operate more sustainably, the company's production facility gets most of its electricity from solar panels.

"We try to create sustainability through the whole chain—from cow to consumer," says Nanhekan. "We think it is really important that animal welfare is at the highest level possible. Next to this, we work on fair pricing for the farmer. These farmers deliver solely to us, and we make sure we get a fair price for the cheese."

David Gremmels, "Mr. Blue" at Rogue Creamery, headquartered in Central Point OR, says the company looks to make a sustainable difference one wheel at a time, ensuring its cheese products are environmentally friendly.

"It's in our DNA. In making the fine cheese we do, it allows us the opportunity to give back socially and environmentally, and we hope to set an example for other like-minded business leaders to do the same," he says. "Our goal is to give back more than we take to sustain future generations. We think about this in every business decision we make. That includes holistic land management and rotational grazing to lowering

Industry insiders agree that recyclable content and even post-consumer recycled content are trending.

carbon and rewarding teammates for riding bikes to work or carpooling."

Packaging Matters

Industry insiders agree that recyclable content and even post-consumer recycled content are trending, and manufacturers and retailers that are looking to differentiate themselves are moving into compostability.

For example, some delis are utilizing non GMO corn-based and other plant-based packages like bulrush for the salad bar, hot bars and soup bars, while reusable containers are showing up at many more forward-thinking stores. Reusable bowls and plates are also starting to gain some share in this area, and bulk bags for soup are on the rise, whereas in the past these would have been smaller plastic versions.

Packaging that uses the least amount of materials to protect food and is easy to recycle/compost with clear instructions on how to do so is becoming more prevalent. Packaging labeled "Biodegradable" means it will end up in a landfill. Only products labeled 'compostable' can be composted.

Amber Mahin, fresh senior director of strategic sales and merchandising for KeHE Distributors, says sustainability is about being future-focused in the service deli as well as forward thinking.

"Service delis are making a large impact

in consumer packaging," she says. "Most all forward-thinking natural retailers have gone to recyclable brown boxes and are eliminating plastic altogether. We are seeing more conventional retailers follow suit. With our focus on natural and specialty, our consumers are demanding the natural plant-based packaging."

Jennifer Figueiredo, communications manager for Sabert, headquartered in Sayreville, NJ, has seen more use of oxygen scavenger packaging to help increase the shelf life of certain foods. For instance, Sabert has a partnership with Sealed Air for OxyC2X, a technology that keeps things fresher in a more sustainable way.

At this year's International Dairy Deli Bakery (IDDBA) Show, Figueiredo noticed more compostable containers were being used for food items that are normally served in the deli.

"We also still see a strong usage of recyclable packages made from PET," she says. "This helps retailers communicate that the supermarket cares about the environment."

Still, some consumers and delis may not have access to a composting facility. She adds that while PET isn't compostable, it can be recycled practically everywhere, and there are some nonprofit organizations that turn recycled PET into other items like clothing.



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When it comes to packaging, Nanhekhan says the most important thing is that every producer looks for the most sustainable foil.

"We are constantly working on improving our packaging material," she says. "This includes providing thinner and lighter foil, but also biodegradable material."

Say No To Plastic

Peggy Cross, CEO and founder of EcoTensil, based in Corte Madera, CA, says there is diametric opposition between the two super-trends of Millennial demand for grab-and-go packaging and the growing focus on reducing plastic waste.

"EcoTensil bridges that distance," she says, explaining that the company offers sustainable tasting spoons and iScoop lids. Creating a more sustainable utensil has been a real challenge in the deli space, so EcoTensil reinvented the spoon/spork from scratch. Instead of trying to emulate a skinny utensil shape that depends on an indestructible material to provide strength, EcoTensil products use a renewable paper-board similar to a soda cup. The design includes a board neck and one simple fold to create a sturdy and pleasing spoon/scoop utensil.

There's been a significant change over the past two years in consumer demand for reducing single-use plastic waste in the food retailer industry. Whereby EcoTensil was once just sold to the natural/organic food sector looking for compostable/recyclable sampling options that didn't detract from the flavor of the food as wood does; now it has expanded tenfold due to the move toward going green.

"The specialty foods people adopted us soon after, because EcoTasters also offered such a pleasant sampling experience with their foods and elegant plating opportunities and the utensils are very compact and efficient," says Cross. "Now, due to the rapidly-growing awareness about the vast amounts of single-use plastics accumulating in the environment, we're seeing consumers across the board letting their dislike for such plastic be known on social media and in their actions."

In response, more mainstream retailers like HEB and Whole Foods are finding good non-plastic alternatives to plastic straws, plastic utensils, plastic bags and over-packaging in plastic.

"We are seeing retailers in Europe really step up to shopper demands for reductions in single-use plastic waste," says Cross.



"For example, Dutch retailer, Ecoplaza, launched their #PlasticFreeAisle early this year, which has given rise to a new focus on plastic waste and pollution with shoppers and the industry press."

Going Green=Saving Green?

One of the things some delis consider when thinking about making sustainable choices is the cost involved, but the high prices of running a sustainable business are not what they once were, and in the long-run, the ROI is strong.

"Going green can save money for delis in the case of reusable containers," says KeHe Distributors' Gialantzis. "The con-

sumer is educated and expects that, so for consumer growth, it generates money through sales and margin growth; it's making the store money. They are competing with other retailers and fast casual restaurants, and the entire industry is going there. Anyone that isn't, will be left behind in terms of reputation and sales growth."

Cross believes being greener can save money when delis use fewer materials, such as paper napkins or small waxed-paper squares in lieu of a plate. The real question is, can delis profit more?

"We're seeing early adapter retailers who are addressing the single-use plastic waste issue receive accolades from shop-

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pers and the press for their plastic waste reduction efforts,” says Cross. “European retailers have been more responsive to shopper demands for more sustainable options and packaging, but we’re starting to see some U.S. retailers take steps also.”

Sabert’s Figueiredo notes that if communicated as part of a brand image, going green can help the ROI of a store.

“Whole Foods is a great example,” she says. “They target consumers who care about the environment, have locally-sourced food and use organic ingredients [in prepared foods].”

Nanhekhan shares that sustainability initiatives will always give delis a better reputation, which in turn should lead to more customers and an uptick of rings at the register.

The Right Message

While there is a clear pro-sustainable stance by many customers, it’s still important for delis to let their customers know exactly what they’re doing and how they are following through with an environmentally-friendly mentality.

“Clear signage is a must, not only in the deli, but also at the point of purchase,” says

Mahin. “I think there needs to be education and demonstrations. Customers are pro-sustainability, but they are still learning, and it’s up to the retailer and manufacturer to help educate those customers.”

Cross notes delis need to not only visibly reduce single-use plastics in the store, but be visible with sustainability efforts, and this includes using packaging that visibly reduces plastic everywhere at the retail level or display signs that say “recycle” or “compostable.” Otherwise, how will customers know?

“Post signage around the store and parking lot, and communicate via social media

There are plenty of things that delis can be doing to improve their carbon footprint.

to let your shoppers know about efforts to reduce plastic pollution and reducing food waste,” she says. “Scale back on what ends up in the landfill and make the deli a haven for sustainable shoppers.”

Other Initiatives

There are plenty of things that delis can be doing to improve their carbon footprint, and it only takes some time and the commitment to get things right.

Implementing a food waste compost program in deli departments is an obvious step in the right direction and is less complicated and costly when food scraps can be tossed in with compostable service ware (such as compostable EcoTasters, wooden toothpicks, paperboard soufflé cups, parchment paper, etc.).

However, having employees sort food scraps along with utensils can be time-consuming and costly. Cross notes that as more local cities, such as San Francisco, Seattle and New York, require food waste composting, delis (like restaurants) must implement new food waste composting. It’s best to think of it not as a chore, but as an important service to the community and the environment.

In the UK, the retailer Morrisons has introduced a new points-based system for its “Bring Your Own Container” to the deli department, which saves customers money and entitles them to special deals. The store also received a positive response from shoppers by inviting local egg suppliers to reduce waste and packaging and swapping out plastic bags with recyclable brown paper bags.

“We’re seeing retailers focus on excessive plastic packaging and carbon footprint reduction by inviting local farmers and specialty food makers into their stores for sampling events and special promos,” says Cross. “Online grocery retailers cannot offer these types of local interactions.” **DB**





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Hummus Continues Its Rein In Delis

With innovative flavor profiles and cleaner labels, this versatile food remains a strong seller in deli departments

BY HOWARD RIELL

As 2019 approaches, the makers and sellers of hummus need only continue to emphasize its existing and overwhelmingly popular themes: exciting flavor varieties, portability and health. Americans being Americans, of course, flavor and variety will always come first.

David Gacom, executive vice president, Retail and Supply Chain, for Grecian Delight, a Pure Mediterranean Foods Co. based in Elk Grove Village, IL, says SKU proliferation from the past three years' category expansion is now going the other direction, with fewer but faster-moving products commanding shelf presence. "The top five flavors represent 80 percent of total category revenue," he says.

Gacom says sweet offerings are "starting to show themselves on-shelf, playing off of more of a specialty/dessert eating occasion." Shopper behavior long-term will determine "whether these were just fads and novelty items on-shelf. Not much new innovation has been introduced outside of alternative bean, sweet and hummus pairings with protein like chicken over the past three years.



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John McGuckin, CEO of Tribe Mediterranean Foods, LLC, headquartered in Wilkes-Barre, PA, says that “sweet hummus, as in chocolate, vanilla, mocha, etc., is the new phenomenon that is driving category growth.”

Sarah Leichnetz, marketing director for Hope Foods LLC in Louisville, CO, and her colleagues are seeing a variety of trends leading to growth of the category, from using dips and spreads as recipe starters to consumers’ desire for more exciting, flavorful and healthy snack options made from clean ingredients.

“In the natural channel, the hummus category is growing at a rate of 8 percent,” she says. “The majority of this growth is being driven by innovative and organic brands like ours. The organic items are growing at an average rate of 31.8 percent, and the non-organic items are growing at an average rate of 3.1 percent.”

Hope’s lineup includes nine hummus flavors, in addition to three guacamoles in two sizes, that can be consumed alone or shared with friends and family. Its hummus and guacamole products come in 8- and 15-ounce tubs.

Hope has the two top-selling SKUs in the natural channel of the refrigerated salsa and dip category in its Original Hummus and Spicy Avocado recipes. “Three of our additional flavors rank in the top 10 SKUs, including our Thai Coconut Curry, Jalapeno Cilantro and Kale Pesto recipes,” says Leichnetz.

Consumers continue to look for new and exciting hummus flavors to try.

There is an opportunity for retailers to be more bold in the options they share with their shoppers. “Shoppers are interested in more than a plain hummus or guacamole,” says Leichnetz. “They want to discover something they can enjoy throughout the day and share with friends and family. While some consumers certainly do buy on price in this category, others are coming to the dips and spreads category looking for inspiration. Let’s not leave these consumers hanging.”

Eric Greifenberger, vice president of marketing at Sabra Dipping Co. LLC in White Plains, NY, points out that his company’s classic hummus “continues to be a consumer favorite and top seller, but as always portability and pairings are key.”

Flavor Creativity

Consumers continue to look for new and exciting hummus flavors to try.

Sabra recently launched a smoky BBQ-flavored hummus with jackfruit and smoked paprika flavor that Greifenberger calls “unique to the category. We continue

to innovate, and have several new flavors on the horizon to keep consumers interested and invite new trial to the category.”

This year, Greifenberger advises retailers, “give extra consideration to portable plant-based snack options like almonds, fruit and hummus snackers, providing consumers with options they can pack into lunch boxes or easily have ready for after school snacks.” He cites Nielsen data that shows nearly 40 percent of consumers are actively trying to incorporate more plant-based foods into their diets.

McGuckin notes that portability is playing a growing role in the category. “Size-value is a prominent area of concern for younger shoppers,” he says.

Sabra also continues to expand its portable options. “We are really excited to have recently introduced Sabra Snackers with pita chips in addition to a pretzels option,” Greifenberger explains. “In addition, our Sabra Singles are the perfect size, with baby carrots for those looking for another option.”

Sabra offers a complete product line



to consumers, including Sabra Snackers (hummus paired with pretzels or pita chips), Sabra Singles (individually-portioned containers) and more than a dozen flavors in 10- and 17-ounce tub options. “Our Snackers are a really popular item, and people tell us they love the way they fit in your hand, your backpack, purse or even car cup holder,” says Greifenberger. “We recently refreshed our packaging design overall, which does make it easier to find a favorite flavor.”

Cleaner Ingredients

“Inherently, hummus as a product offering is pretty clean,” Gacom points out. “However, yes, organic and non-GMO are continuing to grow. With that being said, these offerings are less than 5 percent of the total share of the category.”

“Some key trends we see include organic and clean ingredients, healthier choices for typically unhealthy options and usage of dips/spreads as meal starters,” says Hope Foods’ Leichnetz. “Consumers are increasingly looking for options that can fit into a hectic life and choices that can help them feel as though they’re cooking, while also making smart, healthy choices for themselves and their families.”

From the start, explains Leichnetz, her firm has been set up to meet these demands via its organic, kosher, plant-based ingredients and its goal to deliver the freshest tasting dips and spreads. “It’s also important to us that we shine the light on the amazing and versatile possibilities for all our dips and spreads, showing how you can use something like kale pesto as an alternative for pasta sauce or incorporate black garlic hummus on avocado toast in the morning.”

Hope executives have also seen increased category focus on so-called cleaner ingredients as well as organic versions. Says Leichnetz, “As the first nationally-distributed organic hummus, Hope Foods has been using clean, organic ingredients from the start. For us, the use of next-level ingredients like extra-virgin olive oil, kale, pesto and black garlic means that our dips and spreads will taste as good in consumers’ kitchens as they do in ours.”

Another thing that sets Hope Foods apart, management feels, is that it cold-finishes all of its products utilizing state-of-the-art high-pressure processing (HPP) technology, which helps keep products safe and retains peak flavor, texture and nutrition. “Through HPP, we introduce our already sealed products to a high level



of water pressure,” Leichnetz explains. “This technique, similar to how packaged, cold-pressed juices are finished, keeps our products exceptionally safe without the need for heating or adding of artificial preservatives.” Today’s consumers are increasingly looking for cleaner ingredient options, she finds.

The company also seeks out third-party verification and certification of its ingredients and manufacturing processes to validate that its products are safe, “from using USDA organic certified ingredients to Non-GMO Project verification, GFCO certification, Orthodox Union (OU) certification and a Level II certification with the Safe Quality Food Institute as validation of our commitment to the highest level of in-house production and GFCO and kosher certifications,” says Leichnetz.

McGuckin is one of many who feels there has been an increased focus on ‘cleaner’ ingredients as well as organic versions. “Consumers are more well-educated on ingredients, and they are reading labels,” says McGuckin. “The category leader continues to contain artificial preservatives. It’s time for the category to provide clean labels as a matter of course.”

Greifenberger also sees that there has

been increased focus on ‘cleaner’ ingredients as well as organic versions. “We provide an option for whatever a consumer’s diet preferences are, including all natural, GMO-free and organic items.”

Marketing & Merchandising

Clearly, marketing and merchandising—when done well—will continue to spur growth in the hummus category. It’s key to position appropriately for grab and go sales.

Sabra has found that an effective merchandising approach is to offer Sabra Singles with carrots or Stacy’s Pita Chips via adjacent displays in combination promotions. The idea, Greifenberger says, is basic. “Buy both and save.”

“The goal now should be buy rate versus a penetration strategy,” Gacom is convinced. “Get shoppers buying it more frequently to drive turns. The top three players have flooded the market with trade dollars, so the average SRP has dropped over 30 percent in the past four years.”

To combat the overall trend of buying the same for less money, he adds, retailers need to drive frequency through cross merchandising deals with veggies, chips, other dips and proteins.

DB



Charcuterie: Beyond the Traditional Party Tray

A taste may be enough to lure new customers

BY BOB JOHNSON

In our segmented market, there is a growing number of consumers who might be willing to dip their toes in the water and give charcuterie a try.

There is already evidence higher end charcuterie is being served at social gatherings recently reserved for more pedestrian culinary fare.

"Consumers are moving beyond the traditional sandwich tray, opting for charcuterie boards and specialty cheeses," according to the International Dairy Deli Bakery Association's (IDDBA) *What's in Store 2018*. Dollar sales of Mozzarella, basil and prosciutto hors d'oeuvres have increased by more than 76 percent, according to New York-based market research firm Nielsen.

Deli retailers thinking of adding a modest charcuterie program to their lineup face the question of how they can know

if their customers are ready for these more upscale products.

"Sampling is what we found to be the most effective way to get people to try paté," advises Alexandra Groezinger, director of marketing at Alexian Pate & Specialty Meats, Neptune, NJ. "Get it into their mouth before they have to buy it. We can offer some free product for sampling to get them to try it."

Alexian has been offering a line of all natural, no artificial flavors, no artificial colors, no preservatives, no fillers patés and specialty meats for more than 35 years, and proudly publicizes that their meats come from farmers with certified humane animal welfare practices.

What Are the Basics

A deli putting together a new, or newly-conceived, charcuterie program would

do well to have a clear sense of the basics that must always be on hand.

"There are three staples that you need all year round," says Sebastien Espinasse, vice president of sales and marketing at Fabrique Delices, Hayward, CA. "You need truffle mousse with creamy chicken livers, truffles and mushrooms marinated in sherry wine; the next item is duck and pork mousse; finally, there is black pepper country paté."

Fabrique Delices offers a wide variety of patés and other specialty meats, and its website educates consumers and retailers alike on the bread and wine pairings for most of its products.

The truffle mousse with chicken livers, for example, pairs best with a traditional French baguette and, for the wine, merlot, tawny port, gewürztraminer, or Madeira.

Marinated in port wine, the duck



mousse pairs best with Riesling, cremant de Bourgogne rosé and gewürztraminer, and, again, a traditional French baguette.

Tuscan or rustic bread, along with the traditional French baguette, are recommended with the black pepper country paté, which pairs well with cabernet sauvignon, pinot noir, gigondas or St-Emilion Grand Cru.

Other producers have their own versions of the patés that form the foundation of a charcuterie program.

"I would suggest starting with three different styles of paté," says Groezinger. "A mousse is creamy and spreads easily, a country style has a courser texture, and there's a vegetarian or vegan paté, which is lower in calories.

Les Trois Petit Cochons (the Three Little Pigs), which has hand crafted small batches of all natural paté and charcuterie

for more than 40 years, also has various staple products.

"For Les Trois Petits Cochons, our staple products are our patés and mousses, saucissons and Jambon de Paris," says Neera Jokitalo, marketing director at Les Trois Petite Cochons, New York, NY. "We recently launched a new product line of charcuterie made with Basque ingredients, in particular Espelette Pepper, which is a unique ingredient from the Basque region of France."

Show Them and They Will Buy

Merchandising patés and other specialty meat products can sometimes be done best by also including in the deal other items that let the consumer see how to use their newfound prize.

"Charcuterie can be cross merchandised with cornichons, caperberries, olives

and other shelf stable items that you would add to a cocktail spread or charcuterie spread," says Jokitalo. "Paté, in particular, is often merchandised in the cheese department."

Some specialty meat producers are so exacting in their specifications that they developed their own companion products that go just right with the charcuterie.

"Crackers are a great product to promote with; we developed our own cracker because we didn't see anything that showcases or complements our product well," says Groezinger. "Delis can also try cross promotions with complementary products. In addition, the department can use products put on top of the paté, like cornichons, chutney, mustard or cheese."

It is worth investing a little time and imagination into the question of how to display the charcuterie and with what

appropriate companions.

"Charcuterie doesn't have to be limited to a cheese plate," according to *What's in Store 2018*. "Upscale soup, salads, pasta and pizza with an assortment of cured meats and specialty cheeses help share the story of where they came from."

Information on how to use the products can be an important part of persuading consumers to give charcuterie a try.

"We have serving instructions on our

packaging, since paté often requires educating the consumer due to its uniqueness. For our organic items, we use an easy peel packaging in order to make opening the package and serving the product easier," says Jokitalo. "On retail shelves, we have made our packaging, especially for our organic products, quite colorful and eye-catching, and highlighted unique ingredients effectively."

While three or so patés may be the

Having a clear sense of the basics is important.

foundation of a program, there are times when a deli may do well to go the extra mile.

"We have about 100 different products," says Espinasse. "Many retailers are interested in more duck products for the holidays, when customers are looking for something a little more upscale."

There are trends worth giving special attention to in order to keep the program up to date in its offerings.

"Dried cured meats are very big right now," says Groezinger. "Smoked meats are also making a comeback."

As a group, charcuterie consumers are a knowledgeable and discerning demographic who appreciates the best.

"Most charcuterie shoppers know what they are looking for, and are willing to spend more for quality," says Jokitalo.

"Customers are very appreciative of these new innovations, unique ingredients and high quality products," says Jokitalo.

Perhaps more than most products behind the deli counter, however, charcuterie does best when someone on duty really knows their stuff.

"It's always nice to have people who know what they are doing," says Groezinger. "The stores we go to tend to have high end cheese products and someone behind the counter who knows that category well."

With growing interest in authentic premium deli products, charcuterie represents an opportunity to take the entire department up a notch.

High-end salami and charcuterie are pushing the deli meat category to be a major growth opportunity, as consumers reveal their willingness to spend more for better quality, authenticity and variety in specialty meats and cheeses, according to *What's in Store 2018*. Merchandising and incorporation into prepared foods programs will only further drive growth.

This is good news for supermarket deli charcuterie programs. **DB**

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Tips for a successful deli fried chicken program

BY CAROL BAREUTHER

Fried chicken is a favorite that pulls shoppers into the deli at Lunds & Byerlys, a 27-store chain headquartered in Edina, MN. It's no wonder. The product, which is first marinated, then coated with a proprietary spice and batter blend, and finally pressure fried, ticks all the taste boxes: it's juicy, crispy and flavorful. What's more, it's always fresh, hot and plentiful.

John Stueland, Lunds & Byerlys' director of foodservice, makes sure this signature item gets extra attention, with staff training on everything from production to promotion. The eight-piece bucket is the best, but far from the only seller. Stueland has taken a page from foodservice competitors and kept up with latest trends for this old-fashioned comfort food. Thus, deli offerings include over a dozen choices, from spicy chicken tenders to a 2-pound bucket of Gen Tso's breaded boneless wings. The chain even tested a Spicy

Chicken & Waffle Wrap made with deli-fried chicken tenders last year.

Fried is the second-most common preparation method for chicken, just behind grilled, according to the *Meat and Poultry Keynote* report, released in December 2017 by Chicago-headquartered food industry market research firm, Datassential. Additionally, fried chicken is called out on 35 percent of menus today, up 4 percent over the past four years.

"Fried chicken is going to remain a staple that drives consistent sales in the deli," says Ben Leingang, executive chef for the Henry Penny Corp., an Eaton, OH-based manufacturer of commercial grade food equipment, such as the SmartHold cabinet,



which maintains quality and safety of fried chicken with a programmable temperature and humidity control. “The difference in coming years will most likely be number of variations available to carry out.”

Sell The Whole Bird

Chicken breast is the most commonly menued part of the bird, according to Jackie Rodriguez, senior project manager for Datassential. “We are seeing significant growth in chicken thighs, which are up 27 percent in the past year and 105 percent over the past four years, although appearing on only 3 percent of menus,” she says.

There are two demand drivers for thighs, based on the January 2018-published report, *Protein and Center Plate: Culinary Trend Tracking Series*, by Packaged Facts, a division of Rockville, MD-based MarketResearch.com, Inc. One is that the fattier dark meat on thighs is juicy and flavorful, thus appealing to customers who are tired of the leaner and often drier breast. Secondly, thighs offer a lower food cost advantage to operators, plus are versatile in preparation.

“Some delis are running with this trend towards greater diversity in product mix by offering a value take on the traditional eight-piece that contains four thighs and four drumsticks,” says Brad Dunn, director of retail deli for Koch Foods, Inc., in Park Ridge, IL.

There is definitely a demand for more hot, spicy and bold fried chicken flavors.

Fryer-friendly are still hot items and a favorite amongst chicken aficionados. In fact, these are called out on one-quarter of menus, based on Datassential's *Meat and Poultry Keynote*. Boneless wings, although usually made of breast meat, are growing, and most of these offerings are breaded and fried.

“Bone-in and boneless wings as well as tenders all have a prominent place in the deli's grab and go case. Portions can range from dinner for one to a massive catering option. It offers the ultimate in flexibility, consistency and bankable taste,” says Henny Penny's Leingang.

There's a customer for every part of the bird, says Lunds & Byerlys Stueland. “We put a variety of fried chicken pieces out on our hot bar. Customers can select what they want, in any combination, and purchase it by the pound.”

Spice It Up

In addition to the traditional Southern fried chicken taste, deli operators should

consider rotating in a second flavor, recommends Thomas Super, senior vice president for communications at the National Chicken Council, headquartered in Washington, DC. This could be “smoky fried, buttermilk fried, barbecue fried or Asian fried, to name a few.”

There's definitely a demand for more hot, spicy and bold fried chicken flavors. In fact, 45 percent of consumers' surveys for the *Flavor Consumer Trend Report*, released in 2017 by Chicago-based research firm, Technomic, Inc., said they craved bold flavors. This number is up nearly 10 percent, from 41 percent in 2015. Bold flavors in this study translated into intense, spicy, hot, sweet heat and strong.

Consumers' hankering for hotter tastes these days is why Lunds & Byerlys fried chicken offerings include Spicy Tenders as well as Buffalo- and Barbecue-flavored boneless wings.

“A ‘sub’ trend within the fried chicken category for the last couple of years has been Nashville Hot chicken. With





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Nashville Hot product, the chicken is fried and then tossed in a paste of spices and oil delivering a spicy taste with a smoky depth of flavor,” says Henny Penny’s Leingang.

Ethnic spices with a bite are popular, too.

Case in point is Lunds & Byerlys General Tso’s breaded boneless wings sold by the pound and in a 2-pound bucket. General Tso is a sweet-heated fried chicken of Chinese origin, which is popular in the U.S.

“We’ve experimented with Tajin as a topical rub and in the breading for fried chicken products,” says Eric Le Blanc, director of marketing for Tyson Foods, in Springdale, AR.

Tajin, a mix of dried ground red chilies, sea salt and dehydrated lime juice in its classic form, is one of Mexico’s most recognized spice brands.

Korean Fried Chicken, called the ‘other KFC’, is a hot trend identified in Packaged Fact’s *Protein and Center Plate: Culinary Trend Tracking Series* report. This product dons a thin crispy batter, is fried twice, then tossed with a sweet sauce made of garlic, ginger, soy and gochujang or fermented chili-bean sauce.

New York City-based food and restaurant consultants, Baum & Whitman, spotlighted Korean as one of three ‘next wave’ cuisines in its 2018 *Food & Beverage Trend Report*.

Tap Into Gluten-Free

More than one-fourth of consumers (27 percent) reported purchasing gluten-free products in the past three months, accord-

COOKING OILS: THE KEY TO GREAT FRIED CHICKEN

It’s a tasty take on an age-old question; what comes first, the chicken or the oil? It’s the oil. That’s because it doesn’t matter how fresh or high quality the chicken is, or how scrumptious the chef-seasoned breading, if the fryer oil imparts an off-flavor. After all, it’s the overall taste of the fried chicken that brings customers to the supermarket deli and back again for more.

“Today’s consumer makes fried chicken purchase decisions based on taste, quality, convenience and nutrition,” says Roger Daniels, vice president, research and development and innovation for Memphis, TN-based Stratas Foods, LLC, makers of a line of high oleic oils under the Frymax brand, which help advance the functionality of frying oils. “Frying oil suppliers thus are tasked with ensuring that their offerings meet all four criteria at an acceptable price for favorable deli operator consideration. In deep frying applications, which result in the tastiest fried chicken, oil selection by the operator when matched up with the chicken breading type results in distinct product offerings.”

There are many oils suitable for deli frying, depending on operators’ preferences and recipes, according to Aaron Buettner, senior vice president at White Plains, NY-headquartered Bunge Lodgers Crocklaan, which offers a broad portfolio of frying oils, ranging from liquid oils and creamy shortening to expeller pressed, non-GMO and organic. “In general, high oleic canola and high oleic soybean oils and their blends provide longer fry life and cleaner taste than canola and soybean oils. In some cases, creamy fry oils that contain a small amount of stearin crystal fat may improve the texture and taste of fried chicken.”

The healthfulness of an oil is a merchandising point some retail delis tout to sell more fried chicken. For example, the Quality Foods IGA, in Wausau, WI, proudly posts in-store and on its website that its famous pressure-fried chicken is cooked in a trans fat free oil.

Ventura Foods, Brea, CA, offers two new products—Mel -Fry Premium Non-GMO, which is a high performance oil made of a Mid-Oleic Sunflower and Canola blend. This is a cleaner-label item as it is Non-GMO and contains no preservatives. The second item is its Mel-Fry Original that was reformulated using a soybean and high-oleic soybean blend. This item is more naturally stable for longer fry life and shelf life.

Four in 10 consumers are concerned about the amount of saturated fat in their restaurant meals and consumers indicate they would frequent restaurants more often if they fried in better-for-you and environmentally-friendly oil, says Carson Callum, market manager for grains and oils at Corteva Agriscience, an agriculture division of DowDuPont, in Calgary, Canada. “Omega-9 Canola Oil can deliver this healthier option because it is uniquely high in monounsaturated fats, has among the lowest saturated fats of commercial cooking oils, and has zero trans fats. It can be used to create food products and menus with improved nutrition profiles without compromising quality or performance.”

According to David Hsia, category marketing manager, shortening and oil, at Ventura Foods, the key thing to remember is that there are four main enemies of oil – heat, oxygen, water and contaminants. It’s important not to overheat the oil, to cover the fryers at night, and filter and skim regularly to remove food par-

ing to the Bellevue, WA-based Hartman Group's 2018-published *hartman insight focus on...Eating Gluten-Free*, published this year. The top three reasons were: wanted to try something new (35 percent), believe they are healthier (30 percent) and trying to lose weight (23 percent).

Deli operators can make gluten-free fried chicken by substituting gluten-filled wheat-based breadcrumbs with Idahoan Food's Golden Potato Crusting.

"Operators can provide a crunchy, golden-brown finish that stays crisp for hours, not minutes," explains Chef David Macfarlane, director of culinary national accounts, for the Idaho Falls, ID-headquartered company. "The crusting adheres and cooks beautifully, with zero blackening. Operators can use Idahoan Golden Potato Crusting just as they would standard breadcrumbs—just dust in cornstarch, dip in egg wash and coat."

Think Outside The Bucket

There are more ways to sell fried chicken in the deli than by the piece or eight-piece bucket.

For example, Stueland at Lunds & Byerlys has varied from this theme in minor and major ways. "We recently added a four-piece (one each breast, thigh, leg and wing) and see it as a big opportunity, especially for smaller households. We've also tried several new items like Chicken and Waffles (deli-fried chicken tenders, crumbled Belgian waffles, pickled vegetables and chili cheese all rolled up in a flour tortilla), which has already came and went. Most recently, we've added a new chicken tender sandwich in one of our new stores that has a made-to-order sandwich station. It's made with our all-natural, buttermilk-marinated, hand-breaded fried tenders with pickles and our spicy reaper ranch dressing."

Further evidence of this protein's popularity is that more chicken is now being menued on pizzas, says Datassential's Rodriguez. "While not all of it is fried, some trending varieties, such as buffalo chicken pizza and chicken bacon ranch pizza, showcase fried bites."

Breakfast is another area of opportunity for fried chicken, with chicken and waffles probably the biggest success story in

recent years, Rodriguez adds. "About one-fifth of operators currently offer the dish, and another one-fourth plan to menu it in the future. Interest in Southern cuisine also has helped raise the profile of fried chicken and biscuits."

Fried chicken menu items, whether it's skin-on, bone-in, batter/breaded parts, nuggets, strips or patties, have a place in deli foodservice operations ranging from snack bars to sit-down restaurants. "To boost sales of fried chicken, operators need to make bundling for meals as convenient as possible," says the NCC's Super. "All the side foods don't need to be stacked around the fried chicken display, but a simple tear sheet with suggested companion foods should be readily available at the fried chicken display with specific notes stating where these foods are in the store. Shoppers should also be reminded if a deli has both hot and chilled fried chicken available. Packaging that better maintains the temperature of fried chicken may cost a bit more, but improved packaging enhances the value and image of the product and ultimately brings shoppers back for more." **DB**

ticulates. Fryers also should be cleaned and boiled out on a consistent basis.

Stratas Foods' Daniels offers four tips to preserve the life of a cooking oil. First, manage fryer temperature. For every 18 degrees F increase in oil temperature, oil degradation reactions double. Therefore, fry at minimum temperatures, check and calibrate fryer temperature often. Turn fryers off or down during slow periods and store fry oils at the recommended temperature of between 65 and 75 degrees F. Secondly, minimize water introduction to fryers from food by, for example, removing excess ice off frozen foods prior to frying and dry fryers after cleaning. Third, curtail exposure to oxygen and light, as these can cause frying oil to go rancid. To address this, check pumps for air leaks, cover fryers when not in use and store fry oil in a sealed container. Fourth and finally, lessen exposure to minor non-oil components. A good example is not salting food over the fryer.

"When the oil becomes dark, smokes, foams or the food has an off flavor and/or a dark appearance, it's time to change it out. Use food appearance as a general guideline, as oil color can be deceiving," explains Corteva Agriscience's Callum.

To ultimately necessitate fewer oil changes, Callum adds, "We are continuing to develop Omega-9 Canola Oil and look to increase usage of this versatile oil within the food industry. The unique fatty acid profile of Omega-9 Canola Oil allows for longer, cleaner frying, without additives or preservatives, and can extend fry life by up to 50 percent over commodity trans-fat free oils."

Oil disposal can be handled in many ways. Each deli operator should determine the most environmentally responsible, best option for their business based on their current oil usage.



"This best practice is disposing used oils through cooking oil recyclers who may use these discarded oils in other process, such as biodiesel or animal feed," says Bunge Loders Croklaan's Buettner.

DB

CONSUMERS ARE GOING VEGETARIAN

A rise in vegetarianism has impacted supermarket delis.

BY KEITH LORIA

A 2018 Gallup Poll revealed that 5 percent of Americans classify themselves as vegetarians and 3 percent say they are vegans.

While both of these haven't changed too much in recent years, Krystle Turnbull, brand manager for Litehouse, Inc., Sandpoint, ID, says there has been a rise in consumers seeking a flexitarian diet, thereby adding more vegetarian options to their shopping carts and daily menus.

"As a result, the number of vegetarian products on the shelf has also increased as well as those in supermarket delis," she says. "Consumers will likely continue to seek more sustainable and sound food choices, creating further opportunities for growth and variety at deli counters across the country."

For many vegetarians, cheese, eggs and meat alternatives, such as tofu and tempeh, are protein-rich dietary staples. Turnbull also adds that the company is starting to see more and more innovative format options with broad appeal, especially at the prepared deli counter.

Mark Miller, vice president of marketing at Simply Fresh Foods, Cypress, CA, notes Rojo's salsas and dips are great products for vegetarian lovers, though it depends on the level of vegetarian one classifies as.

For instance, he says there are vegans who won't eat dairy, and that segment of consumers wouldn't be able to eat several of the products, as they have some with sour cream or topped with Cheddar cheese. Still, there are plenty of opportunities for great-tasting items that are also dairy-free.

"I see modest offerings in the deli

department, be it lentils or salads or mushroom polenta, and some items even have tofu substitutes for meat items," he says. "This younger generation who is doing this more still needs to get protein, so they need to heavy up on grains."

The Demographic

Carl H. Cappelli, senior vice president of sales and business development for Don's Food Products, Schwenksville, PA, notes that younger people are definitely driving an interest in vegetarian products in the deli, citing the rise in interest among college students.

"What they are eating at school—healthy vegetarian options for meals—is now translating into the retail deli," he says. "As they graduate and come into society, more and more companies are looking to capitalize on this. The key to success in the segment is to offer products that have taste, flavor and strong texture."

Cappelli adds that casual dining and foodservice drives what ends up in delis, and with so many vegetarian meals appearing on menus these days, food companies are looking to expand on their offerings to offer these same foods by the pound in the deli department.

"We not only embrace the vegetarian culture in retail deli, we're walking that talk throughout our portfolio," he says.

Don's Food offers more than 58 items meeting the vegetarian criteria, with 30 that could also work for vegans.

"We have seen grains become one of our fastest growing segments," says Cappelli. "What we are finding is that in the more urban areas, people are starting

to know what barley is, and they know eating grains can taste good and be healthy. This makes them think about eating these on the side of a deli sandwich instead of a bag of chips."

Savvy Offerings

The Litehouse Simply Artisan line offers several vegetarian solutions, including Feta and award-winning Blue cheese.

"We continue to offer innovations in our cheese formats to meet the convenience needs of consumers, including wheels—perfect for entertaining, and crumble packs and pouches, which are ideal for topping salads, cooking and snacking," says Turnbull. "We recently refreshed the branding and packaging for our cheese line to create a more consistent look across the entire Litehouse portfolio and hope to see a lift in deli sales."

Though Rojo's products fit a vegetarian's lifestyle, the company doesn't do much to call out its vegetarian status.

"We don't play into it at all," says Miller. "It's probably a good idea for stores to highlight the fact, but we haven't found it necessary to do so."

Marketing Correctly

Recent studies have shown that many consumers — not just vegetarians — are looking for alternative protein sources to fit their individual needs and preferences for taste, nutrition and convenience.

"We're seeing more delis featuring cheese items and promoting them as an excellent non-meat source of protein as well as highlighting their meat alternative products," says Turnbull. "In response to



the rise in flexitarians as well as consumers who want to eat less meat—not reduce altogether—supermarket delis are starting to showcase healthier meat options as well as menu offerings that appeal to various dietary preferences.”

For example, a 2-tablespoon serving of Blue cheese has just 6 grams of protein, and smart delis are making this known.

Turnbull also believes deli departments should consider placing non-meat options

together with a display of vegetables, rice and herbs for a one-skillet meal option.

“Quick and easy recipes, as well as ‘make your own’ meals with prepared deli counter offerings, will help take the guesswork out of what’s for dinner and drive repeat visitation to the deli department,” she says.

One place where delis are really capitalizing on vegetarian items is with in-store meal kits, which are increasing at substan-

tial numbers. Because people can just pop in and buy a meal for lunch or dinner without having to shop for everything, retail stores are starting to take a hefty bite out of delivery services like Blue Apron by offering their own options.

And Cappelli says vegetarian-focused meal kits are in high demand.

He also recommends deli managers pair vegetarian items with wraps and encourages people to skip the potato chips and go for grains instead.

“A lot of time, people will wander into a store and have no idea what they want to buy for dinner,” says Cappelli. “A deli department needs to match these items as a meal solution and show them how easy it is to match grain sides with a fish or something else. Showing solutions is how you improve sales.”

The Potential

From a store perspective, plant-based food options are definitely something any deli should be looking into.

Last year, Nielsen reported that 19.5 percent of all food and beverage dollars came from products that met a plant-based diet. It only makes sense for delis to offer more of these grab-and-go products.

Consumers are all about choice and convenience, which is why savvy delis need to help consumers understand that the deli department offers more than just meat and that it can be a great place to find delicious cheeses, prepared sides, salads and entrées, and often, Mediterranean diet-friendly olives and relishes.

Turnbull notes that in addition to offering more non-meat or alternative meat options, Litehouse believes that delis can entice vegetarian consumers with more flexible and innovative products as well as a variety of mix and match options that empower them to create a full menu or well-rounded meal.

“Responding to consumer preferences and demands and offering the products and formats they want will help drive foot traffic to the deli,” she says.

For example, Litehouse cheese crumbles were a product innovation in response to consumer demand for convenience.

“In thinking about the larger store footprint, creatively and visually guiding vegetarian consumers from the produce aisle to the deli department will help educate them on the availability of product offerings, including meat alternatives, cheeses and more,” says Turnbull. **DB**



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Pizza Ready for a Makeover

**There is room for growth if
the product is unique**

BY BOB JOHNSON

Pizza continues to be a money maker in the deli, bringing in well over a quarter billion dollars a year, but some retailers could be leaving money on the table by neglecting some of the latest consumer trends.

Many consumers would prefer snack size or by the slice pizza, according to the Madison, WI-based International Dairy Deli Bakery Association's (IDDBA) *What's in Store 2018* report, and retailers who sweeten the deal with a little extra cheese might be pleasantly surprised by the reaction.





Although pizza fits important trends for convenient, high protein snack sized foods, deli dollar sales actually declined by 5 percent last year, which suggests there may be room to significantly up the ring.

Stand Out from the Crowd

With so many places offering pizza these days, including even some in other areas of the store, the deli must find some way to stand out from the crowd.

"You should tell a story; you should tell why what you do is different than they do down the street," advises Jeanette Catena, vice president for business development at Orlando Foods, Maywood, NJ. "If it is authentic Italian, all natural or local ingredients, you have to tell the story."

Orlando Foods is a third generation importing company that specializes in a limited number of food products. The company currently offers Ciao Brand Italian peeled tomatoes and pizza sauce, and authentic Torre Lupara brand buffalo Mozzarella, along with domestic BelGioioso Cheese products.

"Delis must use really great ingredients,"

advises Catena. "And offer fresh, recognizable flavors of good quality, not just the ingredients everyone else uses. Authentic and local flavors are important, too."

Once you have the right stuff, a next step is to maximize opportunities for customers to think about giving the pizza a try.

"Catch the customers at the entry and exits with made-to-order pizza while

they shop that is ready to go before they depart," suggests Jim Vitti, vice president for sales and marketing at Deiorio's Frozen Dough, Utica, NY.

Deiorio's has produced crafted dough products for nearly a century, and, while continuing old world traditions, has also kept up with the times with gluten free and organic options.





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For its pizza program the company produces an array of options, including dough balls, flats or shells, extended life dough and par baked shells.

"A reliable dough item, raw or par-baked, a quality sauce, and fresh Mozzarella are the staples," says Vitti. "As simple as it sounds, these three components can work in harmony to create an excellent, keep it simple solution. Keep it fresh. It takes time to build a reputation for consistent quality."

More than 40 percent of consumers want customizable pizzas, according to *What's in Store 2018*, and nearly half of those surveyed by market research firm Datassential said they would like to see snack-sized pizza at the deli.

"Consumers are also interested in pizza by the slice and grab-and-go sandwiches, which are underleveraged by operators overall," Claire Conaghan, senior account manager, Datassential, told IDDBA.

The success of the Pizza Hut stuffed crust program, which increased total sales by 7 percent, led Dairy Management Inc. president Barbara Brien to say, "if you use more cheese, you sell more pizza," according to *What's in Store 2018*.

The crust is one area where the deli can attract a broader customer base.

The Matter of the Crust

The crust is one area where the deli can attract a broader customer base and influence pizza consumption by offering better-for-you options.

"Some consumers are looking for healthier alternatives," says Vitti. "They would like a product that satiates their hunger and just happens to be gluten free, as well. Alternative grains and thin crust (lower carbs) healthier proteins, including plant proteins, are making significant inroads across the board."

Gail Becker started Caulipower because she could not find gluten free options that

weren't loaded with salt, sugar and calories for her two sons who have celiac disease.

The company's current products include veggie, three cheese, margherita and all natural pepperoni with a paleo cauliflower pizza crust.

Research presented in *What's in Store 2018* indicates a growing number of consumers are interested in crusts made from cauliflower or rice.

B & G Foods takes the trend seriously enough that this fall, as part of an expansion of its Green Giant Brand, the company is introducing an original and a Tuscan flavor cauliflower pizza crust.



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The trend toward cleaner labels goes beyond the crust, with Pizza Hut becoming the first national chain to remove artificial flavors and colors, and Papa John's following a year later by removing artificial colors, artificial flavors, flavor enhancers, sweeteners and preservatives.

enjoy and having coming fresh out of the oven checks all the boxes. A disadvantage would be extended life on the shelf and neglecting the integrity of the product as quality deteriorates over time."

Hot pizza and ready-to-bake both have unique requirements and challenges to

maintain quality.

"With takeout, there is always the challenge of having it stay fresh and hot," says Catena. "If you do ready-to-bake, you have to craft it so it is easy to cook at home."

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to selecting the equipment. Delis must decide on what to offer first and then bring in the necessary equipment.

"Define the concept first and foremost," advises Catena. "Then choose the proper ingredients and equipment. Support should come from both the ingredient and equipment providers."

The program deli departments envision should also go a long way toward deciding how much space to allot for pizza.

"Depending on how many items a deli wishes to offer will help determine the space requirements," says Vitti. "A pizza program can be covered in 8 to 10 linear feet, less than 80 square feet total. Delis could work with a simple shelf in the freezer or cooler, a 4-foot prep station, and a hot/cold display case."

Pizza programs are profit centers for deli departments. Knowing the demographic will help determine what varieties work best. Finally, deciding on the concept and the approach beforehand will go a long way to creating a successful destination for one of America's most popular foods. **DB**

Build a Program

Once the main ingredients and products are in place, cross merchandising can be an effective way to build the pizza program.

"Promotion, signage and cross merchandising are good ways to draw attention to the program," says Catena. "Delis can cross merchandise with ingredients used in the back of the house, along with the dough, so customers can go home and produce the same product with their family."

Cross merchandising can turn a pizza, or even just a convenient slice, into the heart of a meal deal.

"The classic bundles include beverages and sides," says Vitti at Deiorio's. "Dessert items, such as cinnamon breadsticks, are also always a hit."

One bundle worth exploring is a ready-to-bake pizza, along with all the other dishes that make for a meal.

"The main advantage of take out and ready-to-bake fresh pizza pies is convenience to the shopper who is constantly on-the-go," says Vitti. "The ability to bring home a meal the whole family can





Digging Into Cave-Aged Cheese

PHOTO COURTESY OF LE GRUYERE

Discover what distinguishes these cheeses and how this aging process impacts flavor, texture and quality

BY DIANA CERCONI

We've all heard the term cave-aged cheese. And with it the high price tag that comes with each wedge and wheel. But what exactly is cave-aged cheese? And why does it command the \$20, \$45 and up price per pound?

Cheese lovers know that cave-aged cheeses deliver more flavor, texture and richness than their mass-produced cheese counterparts.

Still questions remain. Here, several cave-aging cheese experts both in the U.S. and in Europe provide insight.

Simply put, cave aging or affinage, which is sometimes called ripening or maturing, takes place in a controlled environment, be it in a natural cave or man-made. The main governing elements of both are humidity, temperature, the duration of aging and the type, frequency and degree of treatments applied as well as the types of beneficial bacteria present. By allowing young

cheeses, which have not developed a rind yet, also known as green cheeses, to rest in this type of environment, the cheeses develop the appearance, aroma, texture and flavor that imbues their unique profiles.

But the process of cave-aging is far from simple. It is a delicate balancing act of multiple steps, pitch-perfect timing and countless tastings along the way. Like producing a fine wine needs the touch of a wine master, so, too, a cave-aged cheese, in order to be the best it can be, needs the



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guidance during its aging process of a cave master or affineur. (The term “cave master” is more often used in American cellars and caves than affineur, which is the preferred title in France.)

The affineur or cave master must excel in the knowledge of not only the aging steps, but also in that of the green cheese’s beginning, including the land stewardship and animal husbandry of the artisan cheesemaker and his herd’s (cow, goat, sheep, buffalo) milk production and its milk quality. Crucial to producing the cave-aged cheese is also the cave-master’s expertise in applying ripening treatments, such as washes, rubs and the introduction of beneficial bacteria.

Cheese Numbers Matter

Another influencing factor is the number of cheeses in the cave itself. For example, with too few cheeses on the shelf, the cave will be overly dry and breezy, resulting in an environment that discourages a beneficial colony of diverse bacteria. On the other hand, a well-stocked cave, with its moisture-filled shelves and its encouragement of good bacteria swapping, provides an ideal environment for aging and producing great-tasting cave-aged cheeses.

In addition, each type of cheese requires a different environment to bring out its best. This, too, the cave master or affineur must know and be attentive of.

According to Leigh Harding, national account manager for Greensboro Bend, VT-based Jasper Hill Farm, owners Mateo and Andy Kehler’s mission in starting their cellars was to preserve the landscape of their farming community and to encourage the production of local artisanal cheeses. They had begun selling their own artisanal cheeses under the farm’s name in 2003. To have more control of their cheeses, they took it a step further and built their own cave-aging facility, the Cellars, on their farm. The Cellars also allowed them to get a true taste of their land’s terroir, which later became their motto: A Taste of Place.

In 2006, the Kehlers cut through a natural hillside on their farm. The hill was dynamited, and concrete was laid for the 22,000-square-foot cellars. The Cellars is divided into seven individual vaults, each with its own microclimate tailored to the type of cheese being aged. At any one time, capacity of the Cellars is around 710,000 pounds of cheese, which translates to moving close to 1.5 million pounds of cheese a year. The ages of Jasper Hill



PHOTO COURTESY OF COLUMBIA CHEESE

cheeses vary from two to four weeks for bloomy rind cheeses to between nine and 14 months for harder styles like Alpha Tolman.

In many ways, says Harding, Jasper Hill Farm’s cave-aging process differs very little from that of Europe’s. “We have a temperature/climate controlled environment where our affineurs are constantly monitoring their vaults and their cheeses. Turning, patting, brushing and washing cheese occurs daily with most of our cheeses.” One difference between Jasper Hill Farm’s aging facility and those of Europe, she says, is that Jasper Hill ages different types of cheese (bloomy rinds, alpiners, Cheddar, washed rinds, natural rinds and blues), whereas most aging facilities focused on one type of cheese.

In the United States, there are two recently opened cave aging facilities—Murray’s Cheese Cave-Aged Program in Long Island City and Crown Finish Caves in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, NY. In 2004,

Murray’s built cheese caves beneath its Bleeker Street store. By 2013, the program expanded to their cave facility with four large caves and a drying room in Long Island City. The caves combine Old World knowledge with modern technology. Humidifiers regulated by sensors aid in retaining humidity, and since the cement walls are porous, they are breathable, thereby working to promote each cave’s microbial community. In addition, proper air flow and the prevention of condensation are controlled by low-velocity fans.

Each cave is dedicated to a different style of cheese—washed rind, bloomy rind, natural rind and alpine. And each is meticulously monitored in tune with the cheese’s needs as it ages. The Bloomy Rind Cave, for instance, is kept a little drier and cooler to prevent rapid mold growth and skin slippage (when the rind detaches from the main cheese body).

Overseeing the aging operations is cave master Peter Jenkelunas, whose approach



Gruyère AOP Mild is aged minimum 5 months and has buttery notes, hints of almond and caramel with a slightly firm texture. The iconic distinguished taste of the Gruyère AOP is perfect for cheese boards or grating and shredding.

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is both scientific and sensorial. The reason behind opening Murray's caves has evolved over the years, he says. At first, it was more on a triage basis of nursing the cheeses back to health after they arrived from shipping and to maintain their flavor profile and freshness. Now the emphasis is on aging the cheeses so that they are unique in taste and exclusive to Murray's. For example, he cites Murray's Hudson Flowers cheese. It begins as young wheels of sheep's milk cheese from Old Chatham Shepherding Co. However, after coating it in a secret blend of hops and herbs, and allowing the mold to bloom all around, it finishes as a totally different and exciting cheese, says Jenkelunas.

A Unique Conversion

Converting an old brewery 30 feet below the street with an average year-round temperature of 50 degrees F into a cave for aging cheese seemed to be the way to go for Crown Finish Caves. In 2014, after extensive renovations to meet codes and obtain licensing as a New York cheese aging facility, the caves were ready. At any one time, there are about 28,000 pounds of cheese aging in the caves, which is mainly

one large tunnel, says Caroline Hesse, sales manager for Crown Finish. Knowing which space is best for a cheese is crucial, she says. For example, air moves from front to back. The cheeses placed on the furthest wooden shelves in the back benefit from the wild yeast and natural flora found in the caves. Natural rind cheeses like Taleggio are stacked here. Small batch triple crèmes, such as Trifecta and Gatekeeper, do well in the front.

Crown Finish methods follow traditional European cave-aging processes, Hesse says. "Where we differ is in the freedom to be more experimental."

In contrast, Le Gruyère AOP holds tradition as sacred, and the cheese must meet certain specifications. According to Philippe Bardet, the director of the Interprofession du Gruyère, the cheese must be aged in underground caves located in the five cantons of Western Switzerland. In addition, cave temperature must range between 12 and 18 degrees C with a high humidity of 90 percent or higher. The affinage lasts between five and 18 months.

Once the cheesemaker hands over his cheese to an affineur, the quality of Gruyère AOP is measured and maintained

by hand on a batch-to-batch basis, he says. Each batch is then graded periodically to determine whether the aging process is complete or it displays the right characteristics for continued aging. It is this close relationship between affineur and his cheese, Bardet says, that ensures the quality of each wheel and maintains its distinctive quality and flavor.

Aging Requirements Differ

Cheese importer Columbia Cheese, Long Island City, NY, currently works with cheesemakers and affineurs in Italy; Switzerland; Germany; Austria; Sweden; France; Spain; and Belgium and has been importing cheese since the 1940s. Each cheese requires a different cave-aging process, says Jonathan Richardson, national sales manager at Columbia. "The process for Taleggio or Gorgonzola, for instance, is much different than that of a Gruyère or Bergkase. Taleggio and Gorgonzola have a shorter aging period, but more labor intensive with more salting, rubbing and moving environments."

"Cheese costs quite a bit to age," he says. "An old estimate I had was at least 30 cents a pound per month — and this is before the costs of any handling, importing, etc." However, the quality, taste, texture and richness of a cave-aged cheese easily offsets its higher ticket price at the counter.

"I think American consumers are engaging with longer aged cheeses because they are learning to discern the elegance and subtlety of the flavors that are released at nine, 12 or 18 months," says Richardson. "They always knew they preferred real Parmigiano Reggiano (minimum of 24 months), and now they are showing a preference for longer aged Gruyère and especially for new cheeses like Challerhocker that exist, in many ways because of how expressive they are after a longer aging period."

The cheese business is not a competition, he says. It's more like a cooperative. Richardson is as thrilled to see customers buy Challerhocker (a Swiss cheese washed in brine and spices aged for a minimum of 12 months and carried by Columbia) as he is when customers buy Jasper Hill's Harbison. "It means they get it."

Richardson recommends cheesemongers encourage their customers to taste a cave-aged cheese at its different stages of ripening. "It's like unlocking a secret for the customer."

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BY LISA WHITE

"Delis typically carry a nice variety of cracker types

Consumers shopping the deli for crackers are ingredient conscious and seeking high quality.

and flavors intended to be used as a part of a greater whole, like for cheese platters and appetizer creations,” says Steve Lorenz, head of marketing at La Panzanella Artisanal Foods Co., Tukwila, WA. “Crackers in the deli department, like our La Panzanella Croccantini Minis, are typically baked in a style and texture, usually using subtle flavors, intended to be a perfect accompaniment to the items being merchandised in the deli.”

The healthier snacking trend has also led to new, artisanal offerings in the snack pack offerings.

“With the continued trend toward healthier snacking and prepared meals, the perimeter of the store, primarily the deli

space, has upped their game when it comes to offering meal-replacements items and kits,” says Lorenz. “This trend has flowed through to the specialty cracker category. There has been an increase in flavors, but more prevalent has been the growth in the variety of types and textures of crackers entering the space. There tends to be more flatbread types in varying sizes as well as new entrants in wafer thins and fruit and nut crisps.”

Denver-based 34 Degrees has been making its line of specialty crisp crackers for 10 years.

“We launched into the deli right away,” says Jen Swift, the company’s director of marketing. “Its positioning is to create pair-

ings with cheeses and cured meats.”

Consumers with food sensitivities and those seeking cleaner labels have impacted deli department cracker innovations.

“Everyone is looking for non GMO crackers, and some are seeking gluten free,” says Pam Pollack, who owns Brooklyn, NY-based Z Crackers with her husband Keith. “When I look at crackers, there is [more money to be made] in specialty brands.”

Deli departments also are a good place for crackers that can stand on their own.

Biscuits from Effie’s Homemade, Hyde Park, MA, can be used as a vehicle for toppings or served solo.

“In specialty areas such as deli, it’s more about flavor rather than a healthy product profile,” says Joan Macissac, co-owner of Effie’s Homemade. “The grocery aisle is housing the organic and wheat crackers, whereas deli shoppers are seeking something special, along with unique flavors and different ingredients.”

What’s Trending

Consumers shopping the deli for crackers are ingredient conscious and seeking high quality.

“Shoppers are better informed and look for certifications, such as non-GMO and organic as well as free-from claims



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CASTLETON (UPPER LEFT) AND EFFIE'S HOMEMADE



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like gluten free, to help them decide which products to buy,” says Lorenz.

La Panzanella's Original Croccantini Mini has three ingredients—enriched flour, two oils and salt, and the company recently introduced a line of Gluten-Free Oat Thins. Its crackers are all non-GMO verified.

“In the deli, the emphasis is on premium artisan products made with a handful of ingredients,” says Swift. “With new flavor trends, we’re seeing different spices and unique flavors.”

Capitalizing on the move toward sweeter flavor profiles, 34 Degrees launched its chocolate, cinnamon, sweet lemon and vanilla Sweet Crisps line geared for the deli.

“Sweet and savory are popular trends as well as gluten free and whole grain crackers,” says Angie Underwood, sales manager at Vermont Farmstead Cheese Co., the South Woodstock, VT-based maker of Castleton Crackers.

Crackers in the deli tend to have more unusual or upscale packaging that lends to a specialty impression.

“Over the last several years, cracker trends have gone towards an interesting combination of herbs and spices with a mind toward pairings of crackers with complimentary toppings,” says Pollack. “Heritage brands are interesting in this segment, with people looking for multi texture and grains.”

Cracker varieties with inclusions, such as nuts, seeds and dried fruit, also have become more prevalent.

“What I’m seeing that’s more interesting is people are getting into single ingredient crackers, like buckwheat flour, which is gluten tolerant,” says Macissac.

Marketing & Merchandising

Unlike the grocery aisle, there are more merchandising opportunities for crackers in the deli as well as pairing potentials to boost register rings.

“We’re seeing two to three cracker varieties and multiple brands being featured in kicker sets that are more retail than manufacturer driven,” says Bozo at IDDBA. “Retailers also are taking more liberties with merchandising and leveraging their strengths with box meal kits.”

With these displays, consumers don’t have to go far into the store to shop; everything is available in one section. Whether as a snack or part of a meal, crackers can be the lynchpin for the department.

A focus should be given to pair items



visually or through demos and suggested selling.

Since the latter two aren’t always an option, there are a few effective ways to market and merchandise items that work well together.

Lorenz suggests the following:

Suggestive sell via signage. A deli person can’t always be there to help a customer put food pairings together. By creating signage that either describes how the product tastes and/or what it pairs well with, delis take the guesswork out of the shopper’s mind, and they can feel confident they are making good choices because they trust the deli manager.

Merchandise items together. Merchandising above or below the cheese case serves a few purposes. It reminds the shopper when they are buying cheeses not to forget the crackers. It gives crackers the ‘endorsement’ of the deli that they go great with cheese. It makes it easy for the person working the cheese case at that time to suggestive sell to the shopper.

When shippers are offered, particularly during the holidays, it is best to place these near the cheese cases. Deli managers can take this a step further by providing small containers and special pricing to allow shoppers to customize and create their own snack kits. In addition, the deli managers can work with the produce department to supplement these offerings with comple-

mentary fruits and vegetables to create a ‘mini meal’.

Feature support. Whether on the retailer’s website, through an e-blast or a feature piece in the store circular, cross promoting and featuring complementary items together is another great tool for helping deli shoppers visualize what would work great on their cheese platter or as a light meal or snack.

Sampling. One of the most successful merchandising tactics is sampling. This makes it easy for the shopper to see how these things taste together and for them to pick them up. Offering coupons during demos also helps entice the purchase.

“We found working with retailers to create promotions effective to consumers, depending on time of year, has a huge emphasis on sales,” says Swift. “It goes back to product positioning and looking at how the consumer is using crackers.”

For example, in the fourth quarter, focusing on entertaining solutions with cheese, jam and spreads adjacent to crackers is effective.

“People are walking the periphery of the store to see what’s special,” says Macissac. “Putting samples in someone’s hands is the best way to sell the products. And because the deli is a curated area and a section of the store where there is interaction with consumers, it’s a good opportunity to sell and provide a great experience.” **DB**

"New Seniors" Redefining Deli Opportunities



By
Sharon Olson
executive director,
Culinary Visions® Panel

The results of this food and lifestyle study made it clear that this large demographic has no intention of compromising their quality of life or their culinary expectations.

Early Baby Boomers are collecting their first social security checks, yet they are showing no signs of diminishing their expectations for food and experiences. Their zest for culinary adventure and quest for no-compromise convenience can mean significant opportunities for the deli.

Today's "new seniors" were the subject of a recent nationwide study of 500 consumers over the age of 55 by Culinary Visions® Panel. Of those surveyed, 90 percent were currently living independently. The results of this food and lifestyle study made it clear that this large demographic has no intention of compromising their quality of life or their culinary expectations.

The Fresh Experience

Fresh has become one of the most powerful adjectives in food marketing today, and there are few food venues as well positioned as the deli to deliver freshness. Cross merchandising programs

with produce hit the sweet spot with today's seniors. Among the most important characteristics desired by seniors was "real food, no artificial ingredients," noted by 87 percent of respondents.

Restaurant Quality Dining

Ambiance is an essential part of the dining experience to "new seniors" who defined the restaurant industry in its growth years. In fact, quality of food and quality of atmosphere ranked of equal importance to those who participated in this study at 87 percent.

Of those who had explored the idea of a senior community for themselves – 83 percent said it was important to have a chef on staff. Today's chef-inspired meal kits and chef-ready foods help seniors create an experience at home. Unlike younger consumers who are often happy to enjoy their meals straight from the takeout container, meal components that can easily be prepared, finished or reheated and served on dinnerware can

appeal to seniors.

Time to Entertain

After retirement, there is more time to enjoy life, which often includes entertaining. Of seniors considering a senior community for themselves, 75 percent said that a private dining room where they could entertain family and friends was important and 92 percent said it was important to have food that they are proud to serve. With the rise of in-store restaurants, the resources to build an enhanced catering menu are often in place. Offering a wider variety of catered options can encourage seniors to pick up a delicious and imaginative offering for social occasions at home.

Balancing Health and Indulgence

Comfort foods satisfy every generation, yet they are often synonymous with indulgence and descriptions, such as hearty and creamy. Balancing healthfulness with indulgence is something that the deli is uniquely qualified to offer. This is especially true, if your store has a dietitian who is connected to your customers. Of seniors surveyed, 77 percent of those considering a senior community said it was important to have a registered dietitian on staff, and 79 percent said it was important to have menus for special diets.

Considering Convenience

In today's fast-paced world, convenience is more important than ever, and it's no different with seniors. When asked about the type of meal service that would be important to everyday life in a senior community, a convenience retail market was the number one type of venue noted by 95 percent of seniors considering a community for themselves. All day snacking has become part of today's food culture, and seniors enjoy on-demand access to their favorite foods and beverages as much as any other demographic.

It's often said that Baby Boomers will die before they admit to being old. The deli is ideally positioned to feed the youthful exuberance of "new seniors."

DB

Sharon Olson is executive director of Culinary Visions® Panel, a division of Olson Communications based in Chicago, Illinois. Culinary Visions Panel is a food-focused insight and trend-forecasting firm that provides original consumer and culinary professional research for companies in the food industry.

Blending Old World with Innovation

There are long-standing cheesemakers that have made their mark and then there is Carr Valley Cheese, which has 125 years of family cheesemaking behind it. The La Valle, WI-based company has not only crafted artisan and specialty cheeses made from cow, goat and sheep's milk, but has produced more than 80 award-winning varieties ranging from the traditional to the originals. Its nonrBGH induced milk is procured from local family farms daily. Several affinage techniques are utilized, including waxing, smearing, dry-curing and open-air cave aging, for the unique cheese varieties.. In the last decade alone, Carr Valley cheeses have won more than 550 top awards in U.S. and international cheese competitions.

It all began back in 1883, when 13-year-old Ed Lepley began making cheese at the Spring Dale cheese factory north of Viola, WI. It became a family business, when Lepley's brother Simon's three children—Lee, Sarah and Alice—became cheese makers. As more members of the family joined the cheesemaking business, it continued to expand through the next 70 years.

It was 1986 when fourth generation Sid Cook, Sarah Lepley's grandson, purchased Carr Valley Cheese. Now a Certified Master Cheesemaker, Cook has won more top national and international



awards than any other cheesemaker in North America. As a fourth-generation cheesemaker, he received his cheesemaking license when he was 16, and now owns and operates four cheese plants and eight retail cheese stores in Wisconsin.

Cook entered his first American Cheese Society competition in Washington, D.C. in 2002 and won 12 awards, the most awards by a single competitor.

Today, Carr Valley Cheese is best known for producing high-quality, artisanal aged Cheddars. The company now produces more than 50 original varieties. .

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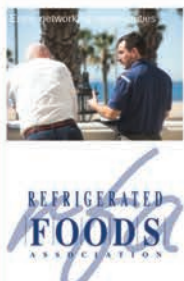
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