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COVER STORY 15

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Emmi Roth Acquires Great Lakes Cheese's Seymour Plant



Emmi Roth, a Fitchburg, WI-based producer of specialty cheese, is expanding with the acquisition of Great Lakes Cheese's Blue cheese plant in Seymour, WI.

Emmi Roth is known for award-winning Wisconsin-made Blue cheeses including Roth Buttermilk Blue, a creamy raw milk Blue cheese; Roth Buttermilk Blue Affinée, an aged version of Buttermilk Blue; and Roth Moody Blue, a small-batch smoky Blue cheese.

With the purchase of the Great Lakes Cheese plant, Emmi Roth will not only be able to expand its Blue cheese production, but also increase its capabilities to develop new Blue cheese products and packaging solutions.

Under the agreement, Emmi Roth has assumed ownership of Great Lakes Cheese's Seymour factory, related land, production facility and equipment.

Great Lakes Cheese's Seymour plant currently employs 50 people; Emmi Roth will offer continued employment to all employees at this location.

This acquisition will grow Emmi Roth to four locations in Wisconsin, including Monroe, Platteville and Fitchburg, employing nearly 300 people.

COMING NEXT IN APRIL/MAY ISSUE

COVER STORY

Sandwiches

FEATURE

Food Safety
Guacamole

MERCHANDISING REVIEWS

Sandwich Condiments
Pickles

PROCUREMENT STRATEGIES

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DELI MEATS

Artisan Salami
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PREPARED FOODS

Pasta
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CHEESE CORNER

The Basque
American Blues

COMING IN JUNE/JULY

DELI BUSINESS will announce the 14th Annual People's Awards

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TRANSITIONS



BLOUNT ANNOUNCES ACCOUNT MANAGER

Blount Fine Foods, Fall River, MA, has promoted Rachael Blount Girard to foodservice national accounts market manager. She will continue to report to Blount's senior director of marketing David Vittorio. Girard will be responsible for generating awareness for Blount products among restaurant chains and large foodservice operators across the country, which she will accomplish with a mix of traditional and digital advertising, digital and direct contact engagement, and content creation and distribution.

www.blountfinefoods.com



IDDBA HIRES MARKETING VP

The International Dairy Deli Bakery Association, Madison, WI, has hired Whitney Atkins as the vice president of marketing. She will lead the marketing team and is responsible for telling the story of the association and driving member engagement. Atkins comes to IDDBA with more than 20 years experience in marketing communications. Her most recent role was communications manager for the City of San Antonio Parks and Recreation Department.

www.iddba.org

ANNOUNCEMENTS



CARR VALLEY TAKES HONORS AT WORLD CHEESE AWARDS

Carr Valley Cheese, La Valle, WI, took nine awards at the 2018 World Cheese Awards in Bergen, Norway recently. Its Cave Aged Marisa was named one of the 78 best cheeses in the world with Super Gold for the second time. Its Gold winners include Glacier Point Blue and Black Sheep Truffle. Mobay won Silver and Menage Smoked Glacier Blue, Mauston; Snow White Goat Cheddar and Chevré au Lait took Bronze.

www.carrvalleycheese.com



LIPARI FOODS ACQUIRES HEAGY FOODS

Lipari Foods, Warren, MI, closed on the acquisition of the specialty deli company, Lancaster, PA-based Heagy Foods, including the Guernsey's Gift brand. The opportunity increases Lipari's eastern Pennsylvania distribution area, along with expanding its portfolio of specialty deli product offerings.

www.liparifoods.com

NEW PRODUCT



FOREVER CHEESE ANNOUNCES REBRAND

Forever Cheese, New York, is launching a rebranding campaign in honor of its 20th anniversary. The rebrand includes a new logo and brand identity for its main brand, Mitica. Its new tagline, "A Passion for Great Taste," emphasizes Forever Cheese's goal in finding exceptional foods from the Mediterranean. Updated packaging with the new branding also is being rolled out.

www.forevercheese.com



FRESH INGREDIENT COMBO

Castella Imports, Edgewood, NY, has launched premium Tapenade Creations made with fresh ingredients that combine the rich flavors of the Mediterranean and blend aromatic spices. Its traditional Olive Tapenade is a spread made from its black and green olives, capers and blend of spices. It can be used on pizza, poultry and fish for a Mediterranean flavor. It also can be spread on crackers or added to a sandwich for extra olive flavor.

www.castella.com



SUSTAINABLE SUSHI

Genji, a subsidiary of Hana Group's Peace Dining Corp., Philadelphia, has rolled out seven new sushi platters. Packed with favorites like the Shrimp California Roll and the Salmon Avocado Roll, the restaurant-quality sushi is made from 100 percent sustainable ingredients. The Veggie Platter is 100 percent vegan, and the Kids Platter is completely cooked. As another way of catering to various dietary preferences, all platters can be made with either white or brown rice, except for Happy Birthday and American Dream.

www.genjiweb.com



VEGAN DELI SLICES

Maestri d'Italia Inc., Lakewood, NJ, has launched the Good and Green Line of plant-based deli slices. These deli slices provide sandwich, appetizer and pizza topping options for those looking for a meat-alternative in their diet. The slices are textured like deli meat, but are 100 percent vegan. Crafted in Italy and freshly sliced in the U.S., Good and Green Deli Slices provide a healthy deli alternative. Varieties include Veggie Prosciutto, Lupini Beans, and Spicy and Veggie Carpaccio.

www.maestriditalia.com

What Role Will Prepared Foods Play In The Deli Of The Future?



By
Jim Prevora
Editor-in-Chief

The role of prepared foods in the modern deli department is, as Winston Churchill said in another context, “a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma.” On the one hand, it is impossible to overstate their importance. In an age where almost everything in the center store is being sold cheaper or more conveniently at a warehouse club, supercenter or via a delivery service, it is increasingly hard to see a future for stores that pin the future on selling Tide laundry detergent, Heinz Tomato Ketchup and cans of Campbell’s Soup.

On the other hand, doing a great job with prepared foods is exceedingly difficult. If the focus is on fresh preparations, it is only upscale concepts such as Whole Foods Market or very high volume stores such as Wegmans that have seen much success. Many U.S. retailers have tried to introduce wide assortments of refrigerated prepared foods, but the outcome has rarely been a success.

In coming to America, Tesco — with its Fresh & Easy concept — thought it could triumph by offering a wide assortment of UK-style prepared foods. This was a priority so important that Tesco persuaded its UK suppliers to open facilities in America. Walmart tried the same with its Marketside concept.

In the end, Tesco had to bail out its vaunted British suppliers, and both Fresh & Easy and Marketside — shuttered their doors. In both cases, the prepared food operations modeled after UK assortments suffered from a kind of Catch-22. They opened the stores with large assortments of prepared foods, which were thought to be necessary to attract consumers and differentiate the offers from those presented by other retailers — and even the typical take-out offerings of restaurants.

In both cases, however, sales volume was not sufficient to support the broad range. As the food was fresh, not canned or frozen, there was substantial shrink. To reduce the amount of product being sold either at great discount or simply tossed, the retailers reduced the range. In a short amount of time, what started as a prepared foods program shrank to just popular favorites such as lasagna and mac and cheese.

Alone, these types of products may or may have not been successful, but they were not enough to be a game-changer when it came to consumer shopping habits. Such a small assortment could not be the magnet that would draw consumers away

from other retail concepts. Thus, these stores failed.

There are many categories of prepared foods: Fresh foods accompanied by service — say a wok station or subs made to order; fresh foods without service — pre-made in a store, a commissary or by a vendor, say pre-made sandwiches, such as you would see at Pret a Manger; cooked foods typically prepared by vendors and sold out of service cases — say mac and cheese or the same product pre-packed either by the vendor or the store. There are specialized programs, such as pizza programs, rotisserie or fried chicken programs and specialized displays or food bars — wing programs, olive bars, soup bars, etc.

Again, though, the dilemma remains. The typical supermarket can sustain only a limited number of these programs, and all of us have been to grand openings with numerous service stations — from sushi bars to wine and cheese bars — only to return six months later and find the service employees gone and these once labor-intensive areas being used as extensive display options for semi- or non-perishables. In other words, the sales couldn’t cover the labor costs.

But without this service, it is hard to see how pre-packaged mac and cheese will keep the customers yearning for the local supermarket.

Some vendors point to product differentiation as the answer: Organic, ethnic, local or gluten-free. They point to storytelling to quench the public’s supposedly unquenchable thirst to know where their food comes from. Doubtless this is a solution for some stores, but in a world where Walmart is the No. 1 retailer and Aldi the fastest growing, it is hard to see this as some kind of universal answer.

Yet, the problem remains. How can a store differentiate itself and attract customers? If you are looking for a bet, one can see those Amazon-owned Whole Foods stores bifurcating. Half of each store might offer an expanded foodservice/prepared foods section with expanded seating, pick-up and delivery options. The other half might offer click-and-collect lockers activated by one’s mobile device.

Trader Joe’s has made its stock in trade by offering a kind of epicurean experience with trademark items and flavors.

The deli of tomorrow will have to do the same but with fresh foods. It won’t be easy, but surviving by just slicing meat and cheese and selling it in quarter-pound units will certainly be impossible. **DB**

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "James J. Prevora".



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Welcome To The Veggie Forward Deli



By
Lee Smith
Publisher

While we always assign topics we think will be of interest to deli executives, we do not tell our writers what to write. Rarely does an issue come together with the consensus of thought as this one has.

From Sharon Olson's independent research, she writes of delis being looked at as the "fresh" department. She also writes of a growing desire for more veggie dishes and more vegetarians, vegans and people who want to cut down on the meat they eat as a growing consumer base. Reflecting her research, deli meat sales are down to approximately 20 percent of sales. Prepared food sales are the driver.

This leads to one of the most important trends and, maybe, the most important trend—the veggie forward deli department. Every deli will continue to sell traditional deli meats, and in many areas, sales' growth will continue to be found in more upscale, organic and eco-friendly products.

While there have always been subgroups such as vegan and gluten-free customers, today's trends reflect a significant difference. The trend is toward a flexitarian lifestyle. It means less meat and more center-of-the-plate dishes that are meat-free, whether it is a vegetarian or vegan dish.

In past generations, kids hoped the dog would eat the carrots slipped under the table and Brussels sprouts were hidden in deep pockets. Today, popular appetizers in family-friendly, casual restaurants include grilled cauliflower and braised Brussels sprouts. Riced cauliflower is everywhere, and dishes such as sautéed spinach, asparagus and tomato salads are being gobbled up by kids, teens and Baby Boomers.

Where do we go—or maybe what should deli executives be thinking? Where is the biggest bang for the dollar? And, of course, what do customers want?

Customers are looking for fresh foods and that translates into organic, natural and locally produced. Fresh foods can be cooked, but they are generally less processed. In-store dishes made from fresh ingredients are a big draw, yet most retailers have not made the investment in full kitchens in the deli or commissaries. That leaves fresh food suppliers, who know how to work with perishables that result in acceptable shelf lives at a reasonable cost.

The biggest obstacle to success is not on the manufacturers' side, but deli buyers who are unwilling to pay more for better quality. Often, higher sales are great, but not at the expense of gross profit. All indicators are that customers are willing to pay for better quality, but it doesn't matter if buyers are judged by gross profit and deli managers are judged solely by shrink. Executives need to find other measurements of success, and customer satisfaction should be number one. It is important to remember food dollars are almost equally spent between retail and restaurants. Those retail dollars are ever more fractured by local farmers' markets and farm stands. Farmers have embraced selling directly to the consumer, often for lower prices and better quality.

Retailers need to re-evaluate traditional views about who their customers are. More customers are changing the way they eat. For years, it was all about restaurants or eating at home. Today, every venue is fair game. Baby Boomers, concerned with health and fitness, are no longer die-hard meat eaters. Gen Z kids and young adults are much more concerned about animal welfare and demanding vegetarian and vegan options. For some, it is about saving the world and climate change, but the result is still veggies at every meal.

Successful retailers will need to understand the changing dynamic and offer fresher foods, lighter options and meat alternatives. Everything will need to taste like it came from a great restaurant **DB**

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

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Profiting From Prepared Foods

Delis can create destinations with the right product mix and unique offerings

BY LISA WHITE

Prepared food can be a game changer for supermarket delis. This is a category that can set a department apart, create a destination and serve as a profit center for stores.

Yet, some retailers are not taking full advantage of the opportunities and what they have to offer. This is where thinking outside the box can be beneficial, whether by upscaling sides, delving into new or different center of the plate options or establishing a meal kit or bundling program that rivals restaurants'.

"Growing 6.1 percent from 2016-2017, supermarket foodservice is booming, as more consumers rely on freshly-prepared meals at retail," says Rachael Lynch, global marketing manager at Potatoes USA, based in Denver. "The segment is forecasted to grow an additional 6.5 percent from 2017 to 2022."

In the Madison, WI-based International Dairy Deli Bakery Association's (IDDBA) 2019 *What's in Store* report, Nielsen Perishable Group reported the deli prepared foods segment had modest gains between 2012 and 2016, comprising almost 60 percent of sales. Yet it far outweighed all other major categories in the department, including deli meat, which was stable at about 20 percent, and even cheese, which was between 16 and 17 percent of sales.

The IDDBA report reveals total annual deli foodservice sales totaled \$19.3 billion in the 52 weeks ending July 21, 2018, a 19 percent increase over 2015, according to Nielsen data. The average weekly deli prepared items that are selling per store number 101.7.

"According to [Chicago-based research firm] IRI, deli prepared foods were driving between 6 and 8 percent





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growth three to five years ago. This has slowed to just 1.6 percent year to date in 2018,” says Kyle Lock, senior director of retail marketing for Butterball, headquartered in Garner, NC. “It’s time to shake things up in the deli to get it growing again. Retail service delis have the beginnings of a vitality issue. Deli shoppers skew older, and if retailers don’t add modern, convenient and delicious options to the department, they risk sales erosion.”

Talking Trends

“We’re seeing a lot more prepared entrées, such as rotisserie chicken and wings, along with more prepackaged and custom sandwiches, meal kits and ready-to-eat entrées and sides, in today’s delis,” says Mark Miller, vice president of marketing at Simply Fresh Foods, based in Cypress, CA. “These are being sold in stand-alone hot sections as well as refrigerated cases for heating up at home.”

Yet, in supermarket deli prepared food programs, the lack and cost of labor is having a major impact.

“These issues are shaping what’s going

on with prepared foods in both chains and independents,” says Robert Sewall, executive vice president of sales and marketing, at Blount Fine Foods, based in Fall River, MA. “As a result, we’re seeing hot soup as a focal point in delis due to the minimum amount of labor required to get a hot bar up and running.”

The company is noticing more of a move toward clean and healthier ingredients as well as foods that are gluten free, organic and non GMO.

“Mediterranean flavors are big—including Greek and North African,” says Sewall.

In response to this, Blount has introduced a lemon chicken orzo soup based on Mediterranean flavors that includes rough cut vegetables and antibiotic-free chicken.

When it comes to soup staples, these tend to be regional. While the East and West Coasts tend to favor seafood soups, the Midwest varieties are heartier, with wild rice a popular component.

The trend with all natural has extended to meat products as well as ingredients. According to a 2017 study by IRI, more than a third of Americans surveyed agreed

that all natural product benefits are important when choosing turkey.

“The same study indicated two key influences in food purchases—60 percent of consumers agree they make food choices based on what’s healthiest, and 80 percent say they make food choices based on what tastes best,” says Lock.

While supermarket deli sides used to be limited to the ubiquitous potato salad, cole slaw and mac and cheese, varieties are now more globally inspired.

Don’s Food Products, Schwenksville PA, has introduced five new gourmet sides to capitalize on this trend, including Beets with Tahini; Carrot & Chickpea with Chermoula; Korean BBQ Green Beans; Braised Italian White Beans; and Coconut Rice & Lentils.

“The eruption of meal kits still has relevancy for retailers, whether in prepared foods or deli sections,” says Carl Cappelli, Don’s Foods’ vice president of sales and business development. “It’s a more diverse population, so in addition to health, wellness and the convenience of grab and go, delis need cool, edgy flavors.”

WHAT’S NEW IN PREPARED FOOD PACKAGING

Currently, the most important trends in prepared food packaging used in the supermarket deli for takeout products, prepared food and other items include convenient grab-and-go options, snack-sized packaging and larger home meal replacement packaging solutions.

“Consumers want freshly-prepared grab-and-go food that can easily replace a meal they would prepare at home and are also looking for compartmental packaging and portion control for quick and convenient snacks between meals,” says Derek Skogen, marketing manager at Fitchburg, WI-based packaging provider Placon.

Today, the materials being utilized most often in the prepared foods space includes PET and polypropylene.

“PET and EcoStar post-consumer recycled PET provide the clarity needed for packaging solutions, while the polypropylene is microwavable and useful to the end user,” says Skogen. “Both are recyclable.”

As consumers continue to gain a better understanding of recyclability and sustainability, environmentally-conscious packaging continues to be a top priority for consumers.

“Consumers would prefer to buy food

in earth-conscious packaging that can be reused for other purposes and eventually recycled,” says Skogen. “They feel it is their social responsibility to minimize waste and make a difference through their purchasing decisions.”

Placon’s food containers are made with EcoStar post-consumer recycled PET material. This is FDA-approved, food grade PET material, which is recycled from curbside plastic bottles and thermoforms that otherwise would have ended up in a landfill. After use, these containers can be recycled again.

“We are able to process 120,000 pounds of recycled thermoforms and PET bottles back into reusable PET flake every day in our EcoStar facility, located in Madison, WI,” says Skogen.

The most important qualities in prepared food packaging materials continue to be clarity, safety and protection, and sustainability.

“Clarity continues to be the most important design element in prepared food packaging,” says Skogen. “Product visibility highlights the appearance of the food to lead the consumer to a purchase. People purchase with their eyes.”

Consumers also expect protection from packaging, including properties like secure seals, tight-fitting lids and a leak-resistant design, ensuring no messes or spills when handling, says Skogen. Tamper-resistant packaging also increases shelf life, keeping the product safe and fresh for longer.

In addition to materials, labeling also is a key component in today’s prepared food packaging.

“Prominent nutrition labels featured on the front of products, clear callouts for what is not in products, like deli meat that is free from nitrates and nitrites, and verified claims about sustainably- or humanely-raised products, are trends in labeling,” says Kyle Lock, senior director of retail marketing at Butterball, headquartered in Garner, NC.

In terms of format, the more convenient, the better.

“Grab and go or prepacked cups are a trend,” says Carl Cappelli, vice president of sales and business development at Don’s Food Products, Schwenksville PA. “Due to the risk of food safety, delis are moving away from self-serve cups.”

DB



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Sushi also has taken off due to the increasing focus on ethnic as well as its healthier profile.

"Sushi is popular because it's a lighter option," says Breana Jones, marketing director at Hissho Sushi, based in Charlotte, NC. "It's also affordable, convenient and healthier."

The company is introducing a plant-based sushi line, which has more broad-based appeal.

Despite the emergence of more exotic prepared foods options, the tried and true deli prepared food items still remain popular. For example, potatoes are a key component because they are versatile, profitable and are a blank canvas that absorb and carry ethnic and regional/local flavor profiles.

Overcoming Challenges

One of the biggest challenges deli prepared food programs face is competition from restaurants and the stigma of a lack of selection.

"Younger consumers want more from their food than much of what is carried in the prepared food area in many delis today," says Butterball's Lock. "Fried and rotisserie chicken are staples, but likely are not

It can be difficult relaying product information to customers with prepared foods.

attracting new consumers to the department who want to know what is in and, more importantly, what's not in their food."

Butterball has had success selling fully cooked whole turkeys as a part of supermarket holiday meal kits to address the retail delis' challenge.

"Supermarket delis need to have stuff that moves fast," says Miller at Simply Fresh. "Much is custom, but the department also needs to be careful on minimum orders and shelf life."

In an effort to address shelf life, Hissho Sushi partners with retailers.

"For us, when we work with retailers, they know we have a food safety and compliance team that's top of the line, and our logistics team is first class," says Jones. "Our products are tracked through the entire chain of distribution."

It can be difficult relaying product information to customers with prepared foods, as packaging is not always a prevalent factor with these products.

To address this, Blount Foods is working on creating kettle packs with a nutritional and ingredients deck as well as call out information to communicate these details.

"Delis are fighting fast food, Walmart, Whole Foods, Trader Joe's and convenience stores that also offer prepared foods programs," says Cappelli at Don's Food Products. "But in all classes of trade, Americans are reading labels, looking for more farm-to-table options and locally-grown ingredients, and picking up healthier meal solutions."

Marketing to Move Product

Prepared food suppliers are providing marketing support for delis to bring more attention to their offerings as well as in an effort to provide added transparency where ingredient sourcing is concerned.

For example, Potatoes USA connects retailers with growers and manufacturers, provides on-trend recipes designed specifically for their operation, offers innovation sessions and supplies custom point of sale marketing materials.

"Our custom innovation sessions offer retail partners the opportunity to collaborate with our culinary research team to conduct culinary ideation sessions, recipe testing and cuttings/samplings," says Lynch. "We also provide the latest research on potato menu items to help narrow the menu focus."

Hissho Sushi provides marketing and operational support, while also auditing its locations to make sure the necessary standards are being met.

"We communicate this to deli customers, as well," says Jones. "It's important to build brand awareness and trust so consumers know that, wherever they purchase our products, the quality, service and consistency will be the same."

Miller at Simply Fresh Foods recommends merchandising prepared foods in more islands and dislocated displays, which can create impulse buys and interrupt customers' shopping pattern.

"When customers walk in the deli, they should be hit by rotisserie chickens, wings and prepared foods that are for immediate consumption," he says. "Also, self-serve offerings, such as cheese, pickles and other items [that are complimentary] should be prominent. Seasonal or limited time offers also are effective."

Blount supplies delis with marketing tools, including kettle cards for the hot bar.

"You'll see more healthy to-go items and meals in bowls that are nutritious, flavorful and for grab-and-go sections," says Sewall. "Companies like ours are dedicated to help the category grow."

When it comes to solving the problem of what to have for breakfast, lunch or dinner, delis should be positioned not as an afterthought, but as a meal destination.

"Consumers will spend their money where they get the biggest benefit," says Cappelli at Don's Food Products. "It's about saving time, providing a healthy meal and also presenting choices and solutions. The secret is to take the dollars out of casual dining and bring them into the grocery store."

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Creating Fresh Appeal In The Deli

New consumer research delves into generational perspectives on fresh

BY SHARON OLSON

Today's consumers consider "fresh" an essential characteristic of quality and value when they discuss the food choices they make at home and away from home. A new study from Culinary Visions explored this topic with 1,500 consumers across the country. The perimeters of the supermarket have long been the areas that create fresh perceptions of the store, yet different generations of consumers have unique perspectives on fresh.

Consumers 18 to 24 have comfortably settled into their role as trendsetters, and they are now in the work force and raising their own families. As the leading edge of Gen Z consumers are graduating from college, they are taking the expectations of Millennials up another notch and setting their own standards. And a vast wave of Baby Boomers are having the time of their lives in what might have been quiet retirement years for previous generations their age.

One size rarely fits all, and that is especially true when it comes to describing huge demographic groups—Gen Z includes children and young adults, the huge Millennial generation has long been dissected by life-

style and income, Gen X has come to be a transitional generation with attributes of the generations surrounding it. Baby Boomers are as likely to be living young as they are to be considering retirement options. Successful deli operations often have to appeal to all of these generations. The good news from this study is that generational perspectives on fresh are very much in agreement on many key factors.

The definition of fresh is becoming as elusive as the definition of healthy, yet 84 percent of the consumers surveyed said that their supermarket had great fresh food.

Defining Fresh

Some of the top scoring characteristics in defining fresh were not related to the food offerings at all, but to the perceptions of the deli department. Four attributes tied for the most important factors in defining fresh food at 93 percent included a clean floor around the service area; clean display areas; the staff clearly follows sanitation guidelines; and labeled expiration date. A clean bathroom was ranked as an important factor by 91 percent of those surveyed.

The findings suggest that cleanliness can be a powerful selling tool in an environment

like the deli, where the freshness of the food is expected.

Consumers of all ages agree that locally-sourced food items are the freshest—84 percent of those surveyed agreed with this statement. With the growth of the farm to table movement in restaurants identifying local sources by grower, location and the stories of the farmers and providers, today's consumers are coming to expect more of a connection.

When considering factors that make food fresh, only 50 percent identified organic as an important factor. Organic appeals most to shoppers 18 to 34. In fact, 65 percent of this age group, compared to 52 percent of Gen X and 40 percent of Boomers, agree that organic food is the freshest choice.

Fresh Merchandising

Delis have set the standard for fresh food merchandising, and consumers notice. They notice the clean, beautiful cases and pay attention to the variety and quantity of product displayed for freshness cues. Ninety-four percent of consumers noted a clean display case is an important freshness cue, and 76 percent reported that a

fully-stocked display case is important to determining freshness.

Packaging and labeling are also important to the merchandising experience. Consumers like transparency of information as well as transparent packaging. Eighty-eight percent said a label stating when the food was prepared is important, and 85 percent noted transparent packaging as an important characteristic. Clearly displayed nutritional information is also important to 78 percent of those surveyed, and this is something that is not always readily available on items prepared in the supermarket deli.

Clutter is the enemy of fresh perceptions. Ninety percent of consumers said a clear, uncluttered shopping, dining and ordering space was important to their perception of the freshness of the offerings.

Fresh Foodservice Experiences

Display kitchens in restaurants, action stations in on-site foodservice operations and customized assembly in quick service restaurants are all meant to bring the



kitchen up front and center stage for customers' viewing pleasure.

Connecting customers with the employees preparing their food in the deli builds the confidence and rapport that is important to customers—79 percent of the consumers surveyed said that they prefer food they can see being prepared.

Traditional salad bars have become extravagant fresh food marketplaces in supermarkets and fast casual restaurants. Salad bars are popular, with 86 percent of consumers surveyed reporting that they enjoy getting food from them. When it comes to the fresh perception of salad bars, supermarkets have the edge. Seventy-five percent of consumers indicated they were likely to purchase a salad from a supermarket salad bar, more than both fast food salads (55 percent) and convenience store salads (32 percent). Even when consumers enjoy prepared meals, 82 percent report that they prefer to add fresh ingredients.

Salad bars can help consumers bring restaurant quality to their home cooked meals, as well. The food dollar is split almost evenly between spending at home and away from home; yet according to this survey 81 percent of consumers prefer self-prepared meals. It is easy and economical to buy just enough roasted red peppers, sautéed mushrooms or pickled vegetables from the salad bar to add speed scratch convenience to home cooking.

The fresh perception that supermarkets enjoy can also transfer to in-store restaurants, which capture sales on-site and to-go. In-store restaurants feed the consumer's desire for freshness and convenience in one quick stop, and 18- to 34-year-olds are the most likely generation to buy food from supermarket restaurants (78 percent) compared to 68 percent of 35 to 54 year olds and 65 percent of shoppers over 55.

In today's fast-paced and time-starved



world, snacks have become the new meal creating demand for a snacking experience that is healthful and delicious. Creating fresh, healthful snacks is an opportunity, with 65 percent of consumers surveyed saying it is hard to find fresh snacks on the go. Sixty-nine percent said they don't mind paying extra for healthy snacks, and almost half (46 percent) reported that they would skip snacking if they can't find an option that is both convenient and fresh.

Fresh Convenience

When it comes to snacking behavior, there are some significant differences among different age groups. Consumers over 55 years of age are the healthiest snackers, according to the survey. Even when on the go, 62 percent still care about the healthfulness of their snack, while younger consumers are more willing to sacrifice healthfulness when they are in a hurry—more than half of Gen X (53 percent) and Millennials (55 percent) let convenience, rather than healthfulness, drive their food choices when they are in a rush.

Millennials are most willing to pay a premium for conveniently-packaged fresh snacks, with 82 percent saying they are likely to buy fresh, single-serving snacks as opposed to 75 percent of Gen X and 68 percent of seniors.

For meals, customization can trump convenience, with 86 percent of consumers saying they would be willing to wait for a customized sandwich rather than grab one and go. Only 34 percent said they would be willing to sacrifice flavor for convenience. Eighty-two percent said they were likely to order customizable menu items.

Despite the recent boom in delivery services and their corresponding apps, Millennials are the most skeptical of delivered food of all the age groups surveyed. Fewer than half of Millennials surveyed (42 percent) agreed that delivered food is usually fresh, with Gen X consumers in the middle at 49 percent and Boomers shouldering the highest fresh delivery expectations at 63 percent.

Generational Perspectives

Gen Z. Members of Gen Z were born into a digital and social world. This is the generation that grew up with school gardens and very specific preferences for fresh food made to order. They redefined school lunch and assured that vegetable-centricity is part of the mainstream food culture. The

Consumers of all ages agree that locally-sourced food items are the freshest.

majority are still carnivores, but they like their vegetables.

When they dine out, Wi-Fi is the new playground in quick-service restaurants. Sixty-two percent of high school and college-aged consumers like to share their dining experiences on social media.

Gen Zers are consumers of food media and enjoy shorter-format “Tasty” style videos. They are confident in their culinary abilities, with 56 percent of this group between 15 and 18 saying they try to cook things they have seen in videos on social media platforms. Forty-four percent of this group believes they are the best cook in their house.

Millennials. Working and starting families has done little to change this generation's perspective of themselves as trend setters. They have continued to drive fast-casual and chef-driven dining with their dedication to convenience without compromise. They are the biggest believers in the value of organic food.

They have had a significant impact on the convenience store business that has evolved to convenient gourmet retail and coffee cafés from the standard quick trip store of previous decades. They are significantly more likely to enjoy hot food from a convenience store than other generations.

Millennials are adventurous and experimental in their dining habits. They enjoy exotic ingredients and are more likely to try unfamiliar flavors than older generations. They value transparency and authenticity.

Gen X. This transitional generation identifies with Millennials or Boomers on most issues related to food. They held the middle opinion on 73 percent of the questions asked in this survey. Although there are few break away issues found with this generation, they are still focused on value. Those raising families are definitely shaping the attitudes and perspectives of their Gen Z children.

As a group, they are not nearly as competitive as their Baby Boomer predecessors, but they are finding their own ways of expressing themselves on social

media. Catering to the needs of their allergy-prone, ingredient-sensitive off-spring, they are becoming advocates for their families' nutrition. An internet search of mom-made school lunches shows off some impressive creativity and nutrition savvy.

Baby Boomers. This generation has never relinquished their desire to set the trends, and today they are defining modern retirement by “living young.” Whether they are living it up during retirement or evaluating senior living communities, restaurant quality is what defines their dining expectations. Their focus is on healthfulness, and they are willing to sacrifice more than other generations on convenience because Baby Boomers tend to have more time to take care of themselves and push for healthier dining options.

They are veg-forward in their food choices, with 87 percent saying they would like to get more vegetables into their diets, yet 80 percent report that they love meat. They are the most set in their eating habits of the generations, with 76 percent reporting that they are likely to order the same menu items they always order.

When it comes to freshness, all of the generations value locally-sourced foods, trusted brands, salad bars and menu items made with fresh ingredients. The deli is in a unique position to captivate consumers with fresh appeal because it's a part of the store where consumers already have a high expectation of freshness. Being mindful of merchandising cues, product variety and coaching employees on the importance their knowledge and behavior can all contribute to a best in class reputation. **DB**

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The Wide & Delicious World of Pecorino

This Italian sheep's milk cheese is born of tradition with a variety of regional flavor options.

BY HANNAH HOWARD

The name 'Pecorino' is broad—it refers to Italian cheeses made from sheep's milk, of which there are many. The term comes from the Italian *pecora*, which means sheep. Think of Pecorino not as a specific type of cheese, but as a whole family of related but diverse cheeses. To survey Pecorinos is to take a journey through Italy.

Every Italian region has its own variety of Pecorino, and often fresh, semi-aged and mature versions (*fresco*, *semi-stagionato* and *stagionato*) of the cheese. Pecorino PDOs (Protected Denomination of Origin) are recognized by the EU: Pecorino Romano; Pecorino Toscano; Pecorino Sardo; Pecorino di Filiano; Pecorino Crotonese; Pecorino di Picinisco; and Pecorino Siciliano. These cheeses are crafted according to specific protocol, in precise areas, with techniques regulated by the agricultural system.

To sample a piece from a region is to experience its history, personality and *terroir*.

"Those big-fat fat molecules give Pecorinos a big

advantage," says Jen Lopez of Forever Cheese in Long Island City, NY. Sheep's milk is significantly higher in fat and protein than cow or goat's milk. Sheep are efficient producers—they need only grass (not alfalfa or grain) to produce rich milk, and the high levels of fat and protein in the milk means it takes a smaller quantity to make cheese than either cow's or goat's milk. The high fat content of sheep's milk gives its cheese a buttery, rich dimension. It also tends to be nutty, sometimes with a hint of gaminess.

The gamy notes dissipate with age, as Pecorinos become firmer and more intense. "I don't think I've ever had a Pecorino I didn't love," says Lorie Appleby, sales manager at InterSource, Inc. "But my favorite are the more aged cheeses. I think the aging





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allows the sweet, nutty characteristics of the sheep's milk to really come through. A two-year aged Gran Pecorino is probably my all time favorite. It's rubbed with olive oil, which really enhances the flavor."

"Sheep's milk has nearly twice the fat and protein of cow or goat milk," Appleby explains. "There are such a wide range of flavors of sheep's milk cheeses—sometimes tangy, subtle and approachable, or more sweet with notes of caramel butter-scotch, to piquant and intense." The flavors of Pecorino are extraordinary and diverse.

Romano

One of the most common varieties available in the U.S. and throughout the world is Pecorino Romano, which has been made since ancient times in the countryside near Rome. It was a favorite at imperial banquets and celebrations, and a staple in the diet of legionnaires—the cheese delivered plenty of protein and could hold up through long, brutal voyages. Pliny the Elder first recorded producing the cheese, which relies on continuous salting to achieve its distinct character and dry texture.

Although production methods have been modernized, Pecorino Romano is still

made much the same way as it was centuries ago—using lamb rennet and rubbed with salt. The curds are drained, uncooked and pressed tightly into wheel-shaped molds. The cheese is aged from about five to eight months, with the older wheels developing a more robust, sharp flavor.

In the end of the 19th century, city legislators in Rome passed a ban on cheesemakers from salting cheeses inside their shops. Production of Pecorino Romano moved across the Tyrrhenian Sea to Sardinia, where it remains today, protected by the DOP and the Consorzio per la Tutela del Formaggio Pecorino Romano. Sheep roam in the pastures of Lazio, Sardegna and the province of Grosseto, and their milk is transformed into this classic cheese.

"It's sharp as the devil, and irreplaceable in the cuisine of Southern Italy," writes author Steven Jenkins of Pecorino Romano in his book "Cheese Primer". "It is peppery, very sheepy and salty. Southern Italians use it the same way Northern Italians use Parmigiano Reggiano, which is pretty much on everything." Because the cheese's moisture content is so low, it's not easy to melt. It's perfect for grating over pasta or munching with crusty bread, fresh

vegetables and fruit, and a juicy red wine, like Cabernet Sauvignon or Chianti.

Pecorino Toscano

Pecorino Toscano is considerably milder and mellower than its Roman cousin. Pecorino Toscano DOP is crafted in the regions of Tuscany, Lazio and Umbria, and each micro-area imparts its own particular ineffable characteristics, its own *terroir*.

Fragrant grasses and wildflowers that vary from farm to farm contribute to each version's unique taste. So does each producer's interpretation of the recipe, and the different ages of the wheels. One piece of Pecorino Toscano may be bright and grassy, the next might be buttery with a hint of funk. The younger varieties have a softness and tang.

"A big thing we work on as a team of cheesemongers is getting our guests to see that Pecorino is so much more than Pecorino Romano," says Tess McNamara, director of retail and operations at New York City's Lucy's Whey. "There are a plethora of inviting, cheese plate-worthy Pecorinos available that don't require grating."

Pecorino Toscano is a popular finale to a meal, served with chestnut or acacia honey and slices of ripe pear. It is also often paired with toasted walnuts or a loaf of walnut bread—the bitterness of the walnuts brings out the nutty, bold flavor of the cheese.

Pecorino Sardo

Sometimes referred to as Fiore Sardo, Pecorino Sardo is crafted on the island of Sardinia off Italy's coast, due west of Naples. It's a sweeping, scenic place where about three million sheep roam on craggy hillsides. "Fiore Sardo is gently piquant, firm but not rock hard, and usually made in 4-pound discs," writes Jenkins in "Cheese Primer". "It can be a great value for money," he adds.

Fiore Sardo is traditionally produced from unpasteurized Sardinian sheep's milk from a single flock, made by shepherds in small mountain huts called *pinnette*. Smoke from the huts' open fires impart smoky flavors in the finished cheese.

"The fact that the sheep graze freely on the wild Mediterranean grasses and herbs of Sardinia is what makes those cheeses so unique," Appleby explains. Cheeses are left to dry near the fires. Over months, they are carefully turned, flipped and rubbed with olive oil to keep their rinds from cracking. The resulting wheels are firm, with notes

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of caramel, smoke and salt.

"Having lived in Italy, I'm a big fan of anything Pecorino Sardo with fava beans," says McNamara. "But that's a tough thing to enjoy stateside. The fava beans can be so tough to find. But it's such a tried and true pairing experience."

A hunk of Pecorino Sardo is also great savored with a glass of Montepulciano or a hoppy IPA.

Pecorino Siciliano

Called "Picurinu Sicilianu" in the Sicilian language, this is the largest of the Pecorino cheeses, weighing in at about 26 pounds a wheel.

It may predate even Pecorino Romano. The Greeks came to Rome by way of Sicily, and Ulysses tells the tale of the cyclops Polyphemus packing ewe's milk cheese into wicker baskets (some say it was Feta, but the Sicilians say Pecorino). It's made throughout Sicily, especially in the provinces of Agrigento, Caltanissetta, Enna, Trapani and Palermo.

To make this ancient cheese, lamb rennet is used to curdle sheep's milk curds, which are cut to the size of a rice grain with a wooden stick. The pressed curds are then heated for a few hours, which is a different step than the methods for other Pecorino types. The cheese is then generously salted and left to age for about four months.

Like Pecorino Romano, Pecorino Siciliano is dry, hard and crumbly, but the Sicilian version is substantially less salty. It's wonderful grated over traditional Sicilian

seafood dishes, like stuffed sardines with pignoli and bread crumbs or served with Moscato for dessert.

And Beyond

There are many other varieties of Pecorino. Some wheels are rubbed with olive oil or fresh tomato paste. Others are aged in grape must, wrapped in walnut or chestnut leaves. Sometimes peppercorns or truffles may be incorporated into the paste before the cheese is shaped.

Crafted in Emilia Romagna, Pecorino Foglie Noce is a unique example of Pecorino. At approximately one week of age, the young wheels are coated with a layer of ash and wrapped in walnut leaves before being left to mature for about three months. The ivory-colored cheese has a flaky texture and a woody sweetness, making it a good cheese board option.

Pecorino al Tartufo is a semi-soft wheel speckled with earthy black truffles. The cheese has a delicate semi-soft texture, dotted with pieces of sliced truffle. It has rich, buttery and sheepy flavors, with a hint of lanolin and earth. Pecorino al Tartufo can be served as an appetizer alongside cured meats and a bottle of Barolo.

One of Lopez's favorite varieties is Pecorino Camomilla. This is made in the summer, after sheep have grazed on the year's most abundant grass and when the chamomile flowers are plentiful. It's carefully crafted, then coated in the fragrant flowers and aged for about 60 days. It develops an herbaceous aroma and notes

of apple blossoms.

"Aromatics are such a huge trend now, but we have a producer who makes a Pecorino using an old recipe of his grandmother's," says Lopez. "The cheese ages in mounds of chamomile and the rind is covered in flowers. The aromas are floral with hints of honey. The wheel is petite and so lovely to behold. I'm such a sucker for something that feels so heartfelt."

The Pecorino Camomilla is best served with chablis or cup of chamomile tea with toasted pullman. The cheese is delicate and bold flavors easily overwhelm it and crash the party.

The Nuvola di Pecora is an unctuous pillow of sheep's milk. "It's truly unique," Lopez explains. "I can't think of anything like it. It has a beautiful natural rind and ridiculously creamy texture and mouth feel. For cheese its age it shows a lot of complexity. That's a credit to the quality of the milk source and the cheesemaker's sensibility." Lopez recommends serving it with a medium-bodied red, like a cold climate pinot noir or southern Rhone style. "A forest or cherry honey on a cocoa Effie's biscuit," she suggests. "I'd eat that."

As for McNamara, she's most excited about younger styles of Pecorino right now. "I'm loving Pecorino Gregoriano and Pecorino Fiorello from importer Marcelli Formaggi," she says. "Both are unique in texture—smooth, velvety custard—and Fiorello is stunning in that goat's milk yogurt is added to the make in addition to raw sheep's milk."

DB

ALTO ADIGE

THE HOME OF SPECK

Learn what makes this
Northern Italian specialty unique

BY LEE SMITH

Located in Northern Italy, Trentino-Alto Adige or as it is also called, South Tyrol, is a peaceful autonomous region of Italy sharing the border of Switzerland and Austria. Its past is a series of changing borders, cultural diversity and raging wars. Sitting on the south side of the Alps and Dolomite Mountains, the terrain is beautiful and mountainous.

During the First World War, the area was the scene of some major battles and considered a key, strategic location. After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian war, Italian troops occupied the area, and it was later annexed as part of Italy in 1918.

The result is a complex mix of cultures. A number of languages are spoken in this area, including Italian, German, Ladin, Mòcheno and Cimbrian. The last two are old Bavarian dialects. After the Roman Empire, centuries before, integrated the Alps, the local Rhaetian people adopted Ladin as their language. Isolated, they developed their own cultural identity.

The area is a unique, autonomous area of Italy with a cuisine more typical of Germany and Switzerland. Here, you'll find knuddels (bread dumplings), apple strudel, dark gravies, local cheeses, fine wines and, of course, the famous Speck Alto Adige PGI.

Speck Alto Adige PGI

Is it any surprise that Speck Alto Adige is a mixture of Mediterranean and Northern European cultures? Between ancient and modern times, Alto Adige has been a diversified mixture of many cultural identities.

Speck Alto Adige should not be confused with the German speck. On the contrary, Speck Alto Adige is unique. Made from the thighs of specially-raised pigs, the meat must meet specific standards. Speck is smoked, but it should never be confused with prosciutto from Italy.

The process combines preservation techniques from the Mediterranean and Northern Europe. From the Mediterranean, the hams are dry-cured using salt and aged in the mountain winds. From Northern Europe comes the method of salting, smoking and seasoning with local herbs and spices. The result is a dry-cured ham best described as "a little salt, a little smoke and lots of fresh mountain air."



When it comes to the spices, every producer has their own recipe, often closely guarded for generations. The actual production includes five separate processes.

Step one is the selection of the raw material. The pigs are fed a specific diet, and speck is made from lean, full meat thighs that have passed through a careful inspection. The meat must not be frozen or imported from another region. Each ham will be marked with its own identification number indicating the beginning of the production process. This assures the ham will be properly aged, and no shortcuts are taken.

Step two is the seasoning of the hams. The salt and pepper mixture remains the same for all, but each producer adds its own carefully-guarded recipe that includes its own mixture of spices. Typically, juniper berries, rosemary, oregano and bay leaves are used, but garlic, coriander or cumin may also be added. This gives the

ham its characteristic fragrant aroma.

Before the smoking process, the thighs will be allowed to marinate for up to three weeks in cold rooms. During this period, the hams will be turned, and the marinade will penetrate. At the end, salt must not be more than 5 percent of weight. This is the process that will distinguish producer from producer. This will be the mark of distinction.

Step three occurs after the curing. The hams will be smoked in a traditional manner using a little smoke and lots of fresh air. The process will alternate between smoking and air-drying.

Beach wood is the typical wood used, and it is a cold smoke process. If the temperature gets too high, the pores of the ham will close, not allowing the smoke to penetrate.

Step four is when the hams will rest. This long and slow curing process allows the hams to mature and develop a mild, sweet taste. As in the past, the cellars of South Tyrolean farms are well ventilated with mountain air, fresh and clean. The time to maturity averages about 22 weeks.

An edible layer of mold will develop on the rind, preventing the ham from drying out too much. Once the hams are finished aging, the mold layer will be washed off prior to packaging. It is this layer of mold that allows the aging to be even. It balances out the intense flavors and aromas.

Step five is the stringent quality checks that assure Speck Alto Adige PGI delivers on its promise of high quality and satisfied consumers. Auditors have access to every step in the process and check on everything from the fat to lean ratio, the salt content, fragrance and flavor.

Eating Well

Keep in mind, this is not prosciutto. It is uniquely Speck Alto Adige PGI. It may be eaten in paper-thin slices, but traditionally it is cut by hand into thicker slices. Do not cut off the fat, as it is meant to be eaten. Many people, however, prefer to cut off the crust, as it may be strong and aromatic.

Speck can be served as a snack by itself or with fruit, such as apples and pears, or with cheese. A perfect pairing is Asiago from nearby Trentino, although any alpine-style cow's milk cheese will do.

Speck is also used in cooking, such as chopped and incorporated into dumplings.

DB

Guacamole's Popularity Continues to Grow



**This heart-healthy dip or spread
spells opportunity**

BY BOB JOHNSON

A quarter of a billion avocados are consumed on that day known as Super Bowl Sunday, as guacamole has become standard communion fare at this end of the football season celebration.

Avocados have gone mainstream in a big way, and the deli is well-positioned to feature the many uses of the creamy dip or spread made with this delicious but nutritious fruit.

"Guacamole has been growing, both in deli and throughout the grocery store and has seen very strong growth in foodservice, as well," says Neha Goradia, associate marketing director at Sabra Dipping Co., White Plains, NY.

Sabra started as a hummus manufacturer in 1986 in Astoria Queens, NY, and over the decades developed a number of flavor profiles that allowed it to become the category leader and play a major role in taking the traditional Middle Eastern spread mainstream.

An Increasing Opportunity

The versatile, rough-skinned avocado has been discovered as a rare item — a delicious, heart-healthy source of cholesterol-free fat, which has led to greater interest in this incredibly popular dip.

"Overall, refrigerated guacamole sales are continuing to increase in both the deli and produce sections of the store, which is predominately where refrigerated guacamole is sold in retail stores," says Diana Pusiri, brand manager for Wholly Guacamole, a subsidiary of Hormel Foods, Austin, MN.

supermarket shelves showcase the recent prevalence and love for salumi.

Volpi recently debuted a new Heritage line of products crafted with humanely-raised pork from independent family farms. “We were able to leverage our social media platforms to tell the story behind the product—showing real footage of the free-roaming hogs and taking viewers into our aging rooms,” says Depke.

Fratelli Beretta USA, Inc. based in Mt. Olive, NJ, is a family-owned Italian charcuterie business that has been curing meats since 1812. “In our state-of-the-art facility in the U.S., we brought with us this tradition and method from over 200 years in Italy,” says president and COO Simone Bocchini. “We never rush salami or prosciutto curing; time is considered one of the most important ingredients in our process.”

Bocchini, who pays careful attention to market trends, says he is noticing an “interest in clean label, simple ingredients and a process that can be clearly understood and explained.” Artisan salumi, rich in history and tradition, and with a short and wholesome list of ingredients, is the perfect “clean label” food. It carries with it a sense of history and of place, and although air-drying meats and sausages are a centuries-old artisanal tradition in Italy, they are having a serious moment in the U.S. right now. The moment is poised to turn into something more permanent.

Although salumi is rooted in Italian tradition, many American artisans are making it their own. Columbus Craft Meats, based in Hayward, CA, was founded by Tuscan immigrants in San Francisco who saw an opportunity to bring a taste of their home to their new neighborhood. More than a century later, the company’s cured meats are crafted with pork and other meats.

Volpi began in 1902, when John Volpi, who was born in Milan, opened Volpi Foods at the intersection of two dirt roads in St. Louis. But in the last decade, cured meats have really taken off in the U.S., from fine dining restaurants to supermarket delis.

“Volpi has made heavy investments in educational tools for consumers to learn exactly what makes their favorite salami taste so good,” Depke explains.

Essential Products to Carry

Where to start with a seemingly endless lineup of salami? Sopressata is a familiar and crowd-pleasing variety, a Tuscan sausage made from pork, packed with whole black peppercorn and garlic and slow-aged





"The growing sales can be attributed to an increase in U.S. households that are purchasing refrigerated guacamole — current household penetration rate is around 22 percent, which is up a little under 5 percent."

Guacamole in the supermarket deli can be particularly inviting as an ingredient that adds something special to fare served at a social gathering.

"Deli is a convenient section of the store for people to grab quick items for a gathering," says Pusiri. "In comparison to guacamole that is sold in the produce section, deli guacamole over indexes with party or group occasions. Many delis offer their own store-packed guacamole, which often uses a combination of prepared guacamole and other fresh ingredients."

While a number of producers offer bulk or consumer packs, some supermarket delis take advantage of their unique opportunity to offer the freshest possible guacamole by making it in-house using ripe or even over-ripe avocados from the produce department.

"The retailers I'm aware of are bringing avocados to their store and taking them from the produce department to the deli for guacamole when they are ripe," says Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing at the California Avocado Commission, Irvine, CA. "There is a trend toward fresh guacamole, prepared in their deli. They are using avocados that are guacamole ready. They might even be too ripe to eat, but they are perfect for guacamole. It's an opportunity to reduce shrink. The flavor profile is awesome, because it is fresh."

Although Mexico produces most of the avocados eaten in the United States, California farmers account for the lion's share of the domestic harvest, with 50,000 acres planted almost entirely in the variety first sold by Southern California mail carrier Rudolph Hass.

Hoping to augment his pay delivering the mail in Pasadena in the mid 1920s, Hass used every dollar he had and a few borrowed from his sister Ida Hass, to buy an acre-and-a-half orchard of avocados of the Fuerte variety, which was the standard of the day.

He discovered what has become the dominant variety by accident. One of the seeds he bought from a local nursery was a highly productive and manageable-off type that Hass gave his name before he took out a patent and planted 80 acres in the Fallbrook area near San Diego, which is still

a center of domestic avocado production.

The California Avocado Commission helps market this fruit from the state's 3,000 avocado growers under the slogan 'A Taste of California.'

"When we are in season, some of the stores are putting up 'Made With California Avocados' signs by the guacamole," says DeLyser. "We're seeing more and more guacamole in the stores."

The Hass Avocado Board offers dozens of recipes, including many for mild to spicy guacamole, and for dozens of dishes that include guacamole as an ingredient.

The major suppliers offer recipes and ideas for the deli to expand its use of guacamole or pass on to the customers.

"We continue to see a lot of opportunity to expand on the already strong popularity of guacamole by sharing recipes and inspiring guacamole uses on menus in more creative ways," says Sabra's Goradia.

One of the Sabra recipes helps expand the use of guacamole to the breakfast hour as the featured ingredient in the increasingly popular avocado toast.

The Full Display

A full display in the deli should include, in addition to generous portions appropriate for a social gathering, small packages suitable for a single person.

"Guacamole is often sold in a tub container, which is great for sharing, but we also make guacamole available in single containers for individual use, and we get a lot of positive feedback for that," notes Goradia. "People are on-the-go and often use guacamole on a pretty regular basis, even outside of larger gatherings, so individual servings are appreciated."

Guacamole can be used as an ingredient in deli sandwiches or salads and can also be the mainstay in a variety of grab-and-go deli snack products.

"In our newer offerings, we pair Sabra's popular Guacamole Snackers with Tostitos for a snack, and one of the most exciting new offerings has been Sabra's Breakfast Avocado Toast — a blend of Hass avocados ready-to-spread and paired with crusty whole grain toasts," says Goradia. "It is a convenient on-the-go breakfast snack."

Smaller packs expand the range of uses for guacamole as a convenient grab-and-go snack item.

"There are many opportunities for guacamole in foodservice deli programs," says Pusiri. "It is great as a spread or a quick add-on using Wholly Guacamole Minis."

The Hass Avocado Board has set the lofty goal of doubling consumption, from 7 to 14 pounds per capita, in the four short years from 2017 to 2021.

The growing popularity of guacamole and avocados is off the charts: The U.S. Department of Agriculture Foreign Agricultural Service forecasts imports of more than 4 billion pounds of avocados from Mexico in the 2018-2019 season.

U.S. retail avocado sales in dollars increased nearly 32 percent more than the previous year in the quarter ending Sept. 30, 2018, according to Hass Avocado Board statistics, which easily outpaced tangerines as the fastest growing fruit. The Hass Avocado Board has set the lofty goal of doubling consumption, from 7 to 14 pounds per capita, in the four short years from 2017 to 2021.

The Hass Avocado Board annual consumer survey demonstrates the strong position this fruit has already gained in the marketplace.

Although Hispanics are the strongest market, more than 70 percent of non-Hispanics buy avocados at least monthly, and this group consumes an increasing average

of more than 75 a year, with the news that avocados are good for you; outpacing even taste, appearance and price in reasons for customer purchase.

The U.S. guacamole market has already reached around \$375 million, according to Chicago-based IRI market research, and the opportunity has attracted a number of large and medium-sized firms competing for supermarket and deli business.

Over the last decade, the Strauss Group and PepsiCo acquired the Sabra brand and expanded the hummus leader to become a dipping company producing, in addition to hummus, a line of guacamole.

In addition to the PepsiCo and Strauss Group operation, Santa Clara, CA-based Landec's Apio unit late last year acquired Yucatan, which markets guacamole under its Yucatan and Cabo Fresh brands, and a decade ago Hormel and Herdez del Fuerte formed MegaMex Foods, which produces salsas, sauces, tortillas, peppers and dressings, in addition to guacamole. **DB**



inades in their very own kitchen.

"We also partner with local chefs to create recipes inspired from their signature flavor profiles," she says. "This is a big draw and brings in people who might not otherwise consider wings for a meal or snack."

Alan Hummel, meat department category manager of New Seasons Market, notes while sales are consistent throughout the year, he does notice seasonal sales increases with wings.

"In the Portland market, wing sales peak during holidays and special events like holiday entertaining, New Year's Eve, Super Bowl, summer grilling or any major sports event focused on basketball or local college football games," he says. "That's why it's important to plan ahead for the peak sales events that drive sales into the wing category. Ensure you are working well in advance with suppliers to secure inventories to meet the sales needs."

According to Hardin, the New Seasons team makes it fun for the stores by having sales contests and creating some competitive spirit around merchandising, signage, recipe ideas and overall customer engagement for these categories.

Daniel Levine, director of the Avant-Guide Institute in New York City, and publisher of WikiTrend.org, says one of the big trends for chicken wings con-

tinues to be healthier varieties of this snack staple, including meatless wings, like Gardeinbrand's barbecue chicken wings, which might appeal to vegans and vegetarians.

"Flavored wings are trending in restaurants, and it's likely that supermarket delis are not far behind," he says. "Look for salted caramel chicken wings (which recently showed up at chain Buffalo Wild Wings) and 24 Karat Champagne Wings (which popped up at Popeyes last fall)."

Don't Forget the Ribs

Another category that has seen a growth in sales of late is ribs. Much like wings, these are especially popular during big events where groups of people get together to celebrate.

Hummel shares that the Super Bowl is

always a big time for sales of ribs, and people are attracted to the sauces.

Levine says as the anti-health food, ribs are being sold as a heartier food.

"That's why go big or go home is the ethos behind the move at Sam's Club to selling supersized buckets of seasoned, cooked and pre-cut Jack Daniel's ribs," he says. "Designed to feed a large crowd of meat lovers, they come pre-cooked, so they only need to be heated before serving."

The promise of deli items is that they are easy and simple to prepare and eat, which is why ribs and chicken wings are both strong sellers.

"They save you time as well as money," says Levine. "For merchandisers, the message should be 'quicker and easier and when you want' at a price point that is clearly less expensive than a restaurant."

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Ribs and wings are especially popular during big events where people get together to celebrate.





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Pizza

Still Unfolding

The latest trends show up first in specialty pizza restaurants, then in today's delis

BY BOB JOHNSON

The custom pizza menu at restaurant chain Pieology begins with a choice of six premium crusts, including artisan thin and artisan thin hearty wheat, hand crafted deep dish, gluten free and cauliflower.

Atop this premium crust at this fast-growing enterprise with 135 franchises, 74 of them in California, the sauce can range from fiery buffalo to pesto or sunflower-olive blend. The many

meat choices include, in addition to pepperoni and sausage, two flavors of all-natural cage-free chicken, and customers also can have fresh cilantro, spinach and jalapeños nestled within the vegan 'Mozzarella'.

Pizza brings the deli a healthy \$275 million a year, according to the Madison, WI-based International Dairy Deli Bakery Association's *What's in Store 2018*, but the place to look for the latest trends is not at other supermarket delis. While pizza accounts for nearly 5 percent of deli prepared foods sales, and nearly 3 percent of all sales, the best place to scout the latest is down the street at Pieology and the other specialists.

"The trends in pizza are not set by the deli; they are set by the pizza restaurants," says Mark Snyder, national foodservice sales



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manager at ItalCrust, Newton, MA. “Deli pizza is probably going to get better.”

ItalCrust won the National Restaurant Association’s FABI Award in 2011 and 2013 for its clean label, authentic, wood-fired pizza crusts and flatbreads.

“I do not work with retailers outside of their supermarket delis, which essentially function like a take-out restaurant,” says Snyder. “My expertise is strongest in the restaurant category, but I do see a lot of what goes on in delis.”

Snyder and others most familiar with developments in pizza see two major trends—a demand for healthier crusts and toppings and a desire for more interesting toppings, especially ethnic flavors.

Add the Ethnic Touch

Pepperoni and sausage continue to reign supreme on top of the pizza category but other, perhaps healthier, options are gaining some favor.

“Pizza is a fairly old category that hasn’t done a lot of moving yet,” says Snyder. “Deli pizza is somewhat stale. The latest deli trends are in prepared foods. Asian or sushi are the trend setters.”

The ethnic meats are just starting to

make an appearance in pizza, after previously gaining favor in sandwiches and other menu items.

“You still have the pepperoni and Italian sausage, and pork as well, but with that we see interest in Mexican and Japanese meat products,” says Diane Slome, director of marketing at Pocino Foods, City of Industry, CA. “They are a little slow to make their way to pizza. You see Japanese or other Asian meats in pizza, but adoption is slow.”

Pocino’s offers a variety of deli meats and pizza toppings, offering especially Asian, Mexican and Italian options.

Among the trends Slome considers worth following are healthier meat choices, along with pork and beef.

“You have more turkey and chicken options, but I also see quicker adoption of the Asian flavors, the Japanese and Korean seasoning,” she says. “That’s where I see things going. We are seeing it not just in urban areas, but also in the more rural areas of the country.”

With new trends growing up alongside the traditional pizza standards, the deli does well to think through a strategy for how many toppings and crusts to offer.

“The key to a program is variety in toppings and in styles, with flatbread, regular crust or Sicilian thick crust,” says Enrico Piraino, president of DePalo Foods, Belmont, NC. “Pepperoni is always number one; it’s 90 percent of your sales, but variety is what gets people coming back.”

DePalo is a family-owned and operated company making calzones, strombolis and pinwheels, in addition to plain, wheat and organic pizza dough.

In the deli, however, the danger of having product go bad adds another obstacle to the challenge of developing a plan to offer variety.

“You have shrink in the deli, so they watch and watch until they are sure something new will sell,” says Piraino. “With frozen, you don’t get shrink. Sell it hot by the slice. Hot is a lot like a sampling program; if you like a slice, you’ll buy the whole pizza.”

Shrink may be a danger, but the supermarket deli will always have a freshness advantage over the pizzas in the frozen food section of the store.

“The main advantage of take out and ready to bake is that the consumer can purchase a fresh product, bring it home and



bake it in the oven for a 'home-style' meal that is convenient and more cost effective than buying all the components separately," says Jim Vitti, vice president for sales and marketing at Delorio's Frozen Dough, Utica, NY. "A disadvantage is maintaining sufficient shelf-life at the store level without jeopardizing a relatively 'clean label' that meets customers' current health-conscious expectations."

Delorio's makes lines of bread, rolls, pizza dough and topped pizza, including organic options.

Variety in deli pizza can be risky, but it also offers opportunities to take advantage of emerging consumer tastes.

"There are tremendous differences in pizza from one place to another," says Snyder. "You have Chicago style and New York style just to start. Square flat pizza is a trend. Wood fired is doing great right now, although you don't see it in the deli except at a few Whole Foods and Wegman's. They are not truly wood fired; they are gas fired with a wood fired element. It is hot right now, but the equipment is expensive."

In filling out the list of pizza offerings, authentic, high-quality crust is one option to consider.

"We make the gold standard for pizza crust," says Snyder. "We are not the cheapest or the lowest calorie, but when it comes to quality and authenticity, we're the best. We meet all the high quality standards—wood fired, clean ingredients and authentic."

Make it Healthier

Growing consumer interest in healthier options, in both crusts and toppings, is one trend definitely worth considering in developing a pizza program.

Recent advances are allowing Delorio's to offer consistent, shelf-stable options, while using clean label ingredients.

"Self-rising crust formulations have continued to improve over the past year, and we are more able to utilize 'cleaner labels' while still maintaining product performance attributes throughout the baking process," says Vitti.

Vitti has noticed, in particular, a recent surge in demand for gluten free pizza crusts.

"Don't be afraid to offer healthier options," he says. "Gluten free has come a very long way in short time. There is an underserved community of consumers looking for healthier options and willing to pay a premium for quality. You can have several gluten free offerings for those out-

side of the celiac community. It is important to disclose that, even though the product is gluten free, it has also been prepared in a non-gluten free environment. This is fine for the large segment of the population looking to explore such options, but who are not sensitive to gluten."

One alternative worth watching is cauliflower-based pizza crusts, which are growing more popular in the specialty pizzerias and could make their way into the supermarket deli.

"There is more interest in gluten free and an interest in cauliflower crust, but the deli has not caught on yet," says Snyder. "Healthier crusts, particularly gluten free and cauliflower, are grabbing market share at a breakneck pace, but the total sales volume on that isn't near what it is for standard crusts, and the position of these healthier crusts in delis is not apparent yet compared to restaurants and pizzerias."

Many previously unheard of ingredients are making an appearance in crusts at the more imaginative specialty pizza dining establishments.

"Healthier crust options are absolutely gaining market share," says Vitti. "Some new items we are coming to market with include some 'gluten-less' offset options, such as ancient grains, cauliflower crusts, broccoli-and-cheddar crusts and sweet potato crusts, to name a few."

Atop the pie, pepperoni and sausage still reign supreme, but meats usually thought of as healthier are making an appearance.

"People want more healthy options," Piraino says. "People think of buffalo chicken as healthier. There's also a lot of cauliflower crust, but I don't see it in the deli yet."

The interest in healthier pizza also shows up as a desire for more and different vegetables in the toppings.

"People are moving away from sausage and pepperoni to healthier sounding ingredients, like roasted cauliflower and Brussels

sprouts," says Snyder.

But while curiosity about cleaner labels and healthier ingredients is developing, alongside it there is still a strong market for the forbidden pleasures that have made pizza popular.

"Pepperoni continues to be popular, but we have people asking for more natural products," says Slome. "They want to know the health claims; they want to know about nitrates and sugar."

Should you grow tired of looking around the corner for what's next in pizza, take solace in knowing that the deli will always be more convenient than the trend-setting specialty pizza restaurants.

"Convenience and ease-of-use for the next generation of buyers is essential," says Vitti. "Expectations for a family meal today include an appetizer item (breadsticks); main course (pizza); beverage options; and a dessert item. It doesn't have to be complicated to be effective."

Another advantage at the deli is the almost endless possibilities for cross merchandising pizza with other complementary items.

"Bundling has always been an effective tool for the grab-and-go consumer," says Vitti. "Utilizing today's available technology in various ways that save the customers time used to be optional, but it is quickly becoming a store necessity."

The supermarket deli pizza program has the possibility of occupying a higher-quality version of the niche found in successful convenience stores.

"The convenience store industry, to an extent, has worked on limited space and personnel to incorporate foodservice and represents a nice model to simulate," says Vitti. "A pizza prep table, conveyor or stone deck oven, proper freezer and refrigeration are necessary components, along with a nice display area to keep items fresh and warm."

That's preparing pizza properly.

DB

THE RISE OF ROTISSERIE CHICKEN

How delis are getting the most out of their programs

BY KEITH LORIA

Retailers—especially in their deli departments—have given legs to the popularity of rotisserie chicken by offering rotisserie-style chicken breast meat, chicken salad with the rotisserie flavor, rotisserie chicken soup, rotisserie chicken tortilla soup and similar line extensions.

Rotisserie chicken has good consumer acceptance as being healthy, affordable, flavorful and convenient, which are the main reasons that it is increasing in sales in deli departments across the country.

increased following, it will not be long before the secret sauce is copied. It may be that, with the higher price points, retailers will be more willing to experiment to find the next widely accepted flavors.”

On the Rise

Consumer expenditures for rotisserie chicken in 2018 are estimated by the National Chicken Council to be almost \$5 billion, including both retail grocery and foodservice. Of the \$5 billion, it is further estimated that more than \$3.5 billion can

“Although there were likely more rotisserie chickens sold in 2018 despite the higher sticker prices, USDA reports some slippage in the number being processed in the small bird category,” says Super.

One large national membership club chain that likely accounts for 10 percent of total U.S. rotisserie chicken sales continues to hold fast to its \$4.99 per bird price, an amount that has not changed since the rotisserie program was launched many years ago.

“The company publicly acknowledges that the price point results in the product being a loss leader, but fully believes the concept results in more customer traffic and a bigger bundle of food in the shopping cart,” says Super.

Tracy Hardin, director of merchandising in charge of prepared foods at New Seasons Market, based in Portland, OR, says the rotisserie chicken category fits consumers’ busy lifestyles perfectly.

“Many customers come to the store for solutions when they don’t know what’s for dinner,” she says. “With our strategy of focusing on quality first, followed by enhancing awareness and excitement through events, new flavor combinations, organic options and more, we’re proving that elevating a classic rotisserie chicken program will stand the test of time.”

Eric Le Blanc, director of marketing, deli for Tyson Foods, based in Springdale, AR, says consumers are starting to see

Rotisserie chicken has good consumer acceptance as being healthy, affordable, flavorful and convenient, which are the main reasons it is increasing in sales.

“New and different seasonings and flavors for rotisserie chicken seem to gain in certain stores and regions, but the traditional home roasted version continues to be the leading offering,” says Tom Super, senior vice president of communications for the National Chicken Council, headquartered in Washington, D.C. “However, once a new flavor is found to have an

be attributed to retail grocery, membership club chains and similar outlets aimed at the at-home market.

Super says this volume is ahead of 2017 mainly due to a number of chains bumping up their packaged prices for the traditional version of hot and chilled rotisserie chicken and also as more specialty and organic chicken is added to the rotisserie programs.





more of a global flavor influence in rotisserie chicken, as more retailers offer shoppers a limited-time-only selection to bring interest to the category.

"In the first place, the strategy of offering LTO has been shown to increase overall rotisserie sales so the new flavor is definitely not just cannibalizing existing flavors, but bringing new users to the category or increasing frequency of existing users," he says. "As for the flavors we're seeing, they can run from seasonal favorites—for example, classic fall flavors, to more daring flavor profiles like Hatch chile, harissa or South American-inspired flavors, like Peruvian."

Up to the Challenge

According to Le Blanc, there are a few very tough challenges for a rotisserie program. One of the most serious issues for success is controlling in-stock position.

For example, Tyson recently surveyed 1,300 stores during peak meal periods and found 10 percent of the stores were out of stock on rotisserie chicken.

"Ouch! In what department would that be acceptable? When you cook more, you sell more," Le Blanc says. "We worked with a retailer over a two-week period to increase their rotisserie chicken production, and during that two weeks their sales in the category were up 45 percent. That tells you there is a ton of unmet demand."

The reason stores shy away from producing more product is fear that they will be left with leftover chickens by the end of the day. Tysons has some solutions for possible shrink.

"First, have a repurposing program for your product," says Le Blanc. "For example, a chicken salad program. Some retailers are so successful with this program that they wind up having to cook rotisserie chicken just for their repurposing program."

Another idea is to chill the chicken for next day sales and put these in a designated, high-traffic merchandising location that highlights the product.

"For those consumers who are going to use the rotisserie for ingredient use, cold product may be preferred," says Le Blanc. "And don't forget that cold rotisserie chicken is eligible for SNAP programs, which 43 million Americans are currently on. In addition to capturing another segment of sales, you're doing a good thing by making a great product available to people who may be food insecure."

The National Chicken Council shares

that there is a rising trend of suggested bundled meals that include rotisserie chicken as the primary protein.

"These bundled meals compete well with the in-store meal kits in terms of the overall cost to the food shopper and flexibility of choosing the options of side dishes," says Super.

The Art of Meal Bundling

Meal bundling is an important part of rotisserie sales, but it has to be done right. Le Blanc notes that proper meal bundling is not offering rotisserie chicken plus a beverage or rotisserie chicken plus one or more tired sides and a beverage.

"Nobody on the planet wants a rotisserie chicken; what they want is dinner. And what we should be prepared to do is leverage the strength of the supermarket in offering quality, freshness and variety to our rotisserie chicken shoppers," he says. "Why not feature a rotisserie chicken, package of strawberries, package of almonds and a bag of lettuce for a delicious rotisserie chicken salad that feels fresh and is incredibly easy?"

He notes cole slaw or potato salad in a sealed container is not communicating freshness or quality.

"Enhancing the rotisserie experience is all about educating the shopper to the possibilities your whole supermarket presents and inspiring them to do it," says Le Blanc. "Co-merchandising is nice, but you can't co-merchandise everything. Use all of your channels to reach your shoppers and educate and inspire them."

Merchandising Matters

Alan Hummel, meat department category manager of New Seasons Market, notes the best way to merchandise a rotisserie program is to highlight added value to the customers focused on ease of preparations and serving.

"Take the work out of it," he says. "For customers with busy lifestyles, it's key to offer quality food that is easy, flexible for a variety of meal solutions and food that tastes good."

Tyson recently worked with a retailer on a test program where the only thing they changed was how they communicated about their program, getting the word out about their offerings.

"It was all about communication," says Le Blanc. "And despite no price changes, no merchandising changes and no feature changes,

they saw a 12 percent increase in total department sales."

New Tech On the Way

Alto-Shaam, headquartered in Menomonee Falls, WI, recently introduced a self-cleaning rotisserie oven at this year's North American Association of Food Equipment Manufacturers (NAFEM) Show that is geared for supermarket delis, as it has a cooking capacity of 21 chickens, weighing 3.5 pounds each.

"Traditional rotisserie ovens are difficult and time consuming to clean; not to mention the grease extraction and disposal can be a safety hazard. With Alto-Shaam's self-cleaning rotisserie, deli workers will no longer have to worry about spilling hot grease on their hands, arms and body," says Tami Olson, director of retail national accounts for the company. "The grease collection system automatically activates during the cooking process by pumping grease into an external collection container for safe handling and disposal. By eliminating the need to lift and carry grease collection pans, foodservice operators are able to save labor and improve safety."

The oven also offers a self-cleaning system, touchscreen and programmable controls. The unit is stylish with a slim design that has flat or curved glass door options as well as exterior finishes in stainless steel or a custom

color. The illuminated oven cavity offers a theater effect for front-of-the-house operations.

"The rotisserie oven's features are easy to use and will save time and labor for deli operators," Olson says. "Operators can place the rotisserie on stands and counters or configure it with other Alto-Shaam solutions, such as its companion holding cabinet or a second rotisserie oven. Customers are also able to unload and load product as needed, with reach-in and pass-through configurations available."

With feed costs slated to remain favorable to animal agriculture and with more pork and beef production in 2019, chicken's value to supermarket deli programs will continue to grow.

"Chicken companies will be working with their retail store clients and messaging to food shoppers and food editor/writers that rotisserie chicken can be the basis for an easy, quick-to-prepare, creative meal for dinner, lunch or in-between," says Super.

DB



History from Field to Fork

Raised on a 40-cow dairy farm near Beloit, WI, brothers Charles, George, Thomas and Mark Crave began farming together in 1978 in Mount Horeb, milking 57 cows on a 160-acre rented farm. They then purchased a 220-acre, 90-cow Waterloo dairy farm in 1980, with the goal of building a successful agribusiness.

Ten years later, the four brothers purchased a 600-acre, 600-cow farm in Waterloo and hired four employees. It was in 1999 that the brothers bought out their partner Dave Wieckert. Then, two years later, a cheese facility was built in Waterloo, the company expanded to 30 employees and George became a licensed cheesemaker.

In 2008, a manure digester was installed as part of the operation's focus on sustainability. This computer-controlled anaerobic digestion system generates enough



electricity to power the farm, cheese factory and 300 area homes. In addition, the digester helps manage the farm's manure, provides clean, renewable energy for the farm, and produces excess electricity that is sold on the grid. By 2009, Crave expanded to 1,700

acres, 2,000 cows and 40 employees.

Four years later, the brothers began a satellite dairy operation. In 2015, the next generation of the Crave family joined the company. Patrick serves as herd manager; Jordan manages the crops and forage; and Andrew is the company's maintenance manager.

Today, with four generations of Craves on the farm and at the cheese facility, along with 80 employees, Crave Brothers now has 3,000 acres in Waterloo with 2,000 cows that produce 160,000 pounds of milk per day. It works in cooperation with other local farmers for custom feed harvesting, custom heifer raising and machinery sharing.

Its farm and its cheeses, which include Mascarpone, fresh Mozzarella and Farmer's Rope Cheese, have won numerous awards over the years, a testament to the brothers' innovation and hard work.

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*roasted
tomatoes
& artichokes*

*roasted
calamata
olives*

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