

MODERN DELI



CHEESE *Please*

Natural and specialty
blended cheese
propel category growth

Post-Process Lethality:
Technology enhances deli meat safety

The Catering Connection:
Off-site functions increase revenue

Going for the Green:
Packaging bans impact delis

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- Steve Mikoljczak
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Dear Readers –

Since our cover story on the exploding market for bacon in January 2008, the proliferation of bacon uses (now in ice cream and candy?) and the expanding volume of sales (four slices on a burger!) has been nothing short of amazing.

With all this interest it should not be surprising that one of Weber's four new production innovations is a high-performance Bacon Slicer, introduced this May, that we believe offers our customers significant advantages in throughput, slice quality and hygiene.

Innovation related to market forces has always been the most direct path out of economic doldrums, and successful *Modern Deli* readers are also leading the foodservice industry down that route.

Within this issue you will discover stories that examine how your competitors and suppliers are reacting to consumer demands for "greener" products and packaging; "cleaner" labels and healthier foods; and greater margins and marketing alternatives through expanded cheese and catering service options.

We trust that your business is also searching for innovations you can adopt and further improve and that you will take several productive thoughts from this new *Modern Deli*.

As always, we look forward to your feedback. Please drop us an email and let us know what you are doing differently to succeed.

Guenther Weber, Founder and CEO
Weber Maschinenbau, GmbH

Scott Scriven, President and CEO
Weber North America



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Cover photo: © Foodlovers / Fotolia

CHEESE

Please

Natural and specialty blended products propel category growth

By Maya Dollarhide

When your customers order a sandwich or a pound of cheese, chances are they'll skip the old standards—blocks of mild Cheddar, unnaturally yellow processed American or Muenster—and head straight for the more flavorful natural and specialty blended cheeses, like a sharp farmstead Cheddar or a blended Colby-Jack.

If your deli hasn't expanded its cheese case, you may be missing potential sales. Americans are consuming more artisan, farmstead, organic and locally made products than ever before, industry experts say.

For proof, look no further than *Natural and Specialty Cheeses: The U.S. Market and a Global Perspective*, a report released in March by Packaged Facts and Dairy Food Communication. Based on a study of more than 300 varieties of natural cheese and specialty blended cow's milk cheese packaged and sold through U.S. retail channels, the report shows how consumers' appetites for cheese are expanding. In part, the report concludes that, "The retail natural and specialty blended cheese market showed healthy growth from 2005 to 2009, posting a compound annual growth rate of seven percent." Packaged Facts projects the market will approach \$17 billion by 2014.

The market's rise compares to consumers' desire for specialty items like artisan breads; imported, organic and fair trade coffees; and fine chocolate,

according to Don Montuori, vice president of publishing for Packaged Facts.

"Overall, in the food industry, there has been a move to better quality products and an interest in specialty foods. By and large, items that were once considered gourmet are now in the mainstream," Montuori says.

Montuori backs his point with a myriad of examples. "Look at coffee. Starbucks used to be special, and they are everywhere now. You can get sourdough bread from San Francisco and Italian bread from New York," he offers. "All you need to do is go to the supermarket or deli. Fancy dark chocolate was once special, now everyone is selling it. It makes sense that cheese is following along the same line in America."

More than one-third of all milk products produced in the United States annually are used to manufacture cheese, and almost all U.S.-manufactured cheese is from cow's milk, according to the Packaged Facts report. Even in the midst of the recession, Americans will pay top dollar for special cheeses, and they are not necessarily buying cheese made abroad. Locally and regionally

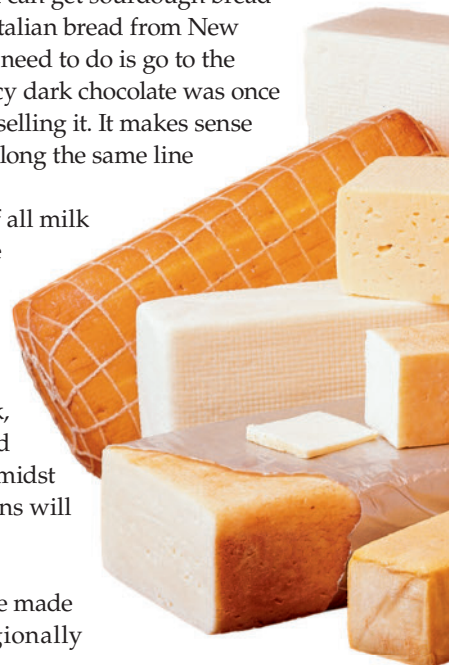


Photo courtesy of Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board

Exact Weight Cheese Sales by Variety

Varieties with Highest Growth Rates¹, 2004-2008

Variety	Growth Rate (%)	Volume Sales, 2008 (1,000 Lbs)
Natural All Other Cold Pack*	51.2%	1,710
Natural Variety Pack	33%	4,908
Natural Fresh Mozzarella	27.3%	11,666
Natural Queso Quesadilla	24.5%	1,138
Natural Queso Blanco	24.5%	2,688
Natural All Other Curd**	20.7%	71
Natural Mascarpone	19.1%	866
Natural Fontina	15.7%	351
Natural Havarti	12.2%	4,363
Natural Gruyere	11.7%	488

* Excludes Natural Cheddar Cold Pack, Natural Swiss Cold Pack, and Natural Unknown Variety Cold Pack

** Excludes Natural Cheddar Curd and Natural Unknown Variety Curd

¹ Compound Annual Growth Rate.

Source: IRI Scanner Data, Total U.S.; provided by Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board



produced items are extremely popular, industry experts note.

Despite all that cheese being made and sold, it's hard to get folks to agree on a favorite. "We've found you can't pinpoint a trend in terms of specific ages or population preferences for a specific type of specialty cheese. It's a personal preference, much more so than bread or chocolate," Montuori says.

What constitutes a specialty cheese? Marilyn Wilkinson, director of National Product Communications for the Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board (WMMB), agrees it is difficult to pin that definition down.

"The future looks bright for specialty cheeses. But please note that measuring specialty cheese as a category is tricky because everyone tracking this category determines their own criteria for determining which cheeses are 'specialty,'" Wilkinson says.



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One thing is certain: The consumption of processed cheese products is spiraling down while natural cheese sales are rising. The growth of artisan, organic, ethnic and other specialty cheeses is outpacing non-specialty cheeses, the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery (IDDBA) *What's in Store 2010* report reveals. And while natural cheese sales are projected to increase by 14.2 percent by 2013, processed cheese sales are projected to decline by 3.2 percent, the report predicts.

"To support the 'why' behind this phenomenal growth, we typically point to consumers' emerging tastes—the increasing interest in bolder flavors—and the renaissance in (particular) of American-made specialty cheeses that are more affordable to consumers," Wilkinson says.

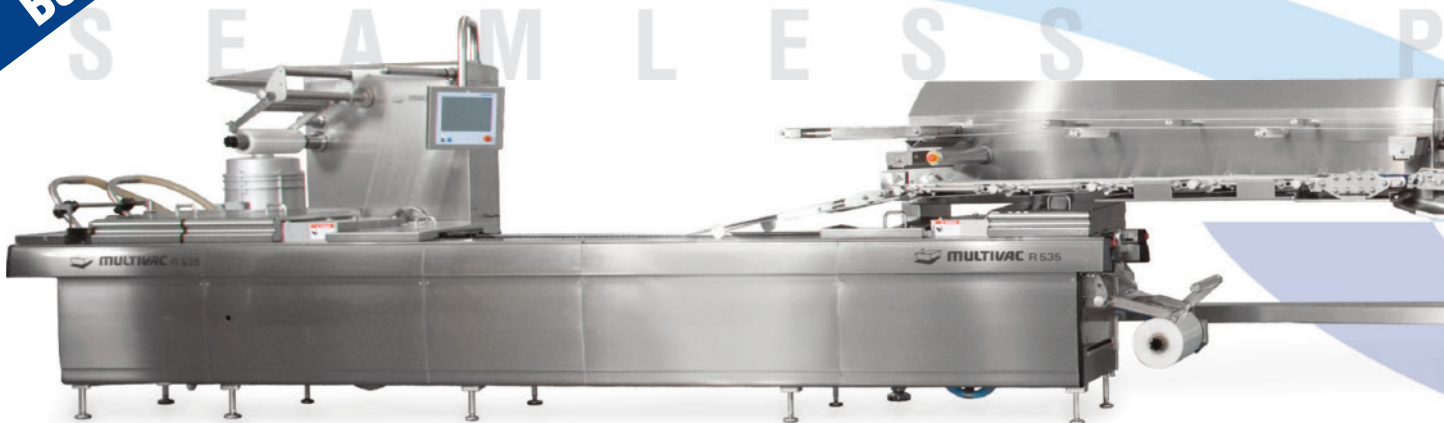
Dairyland in the Heartland

When on the lookout for unique, made-in-America cheeses, retailers can turn to Wisconsin for an array of artisan cheeses.

The state makes more specialty cheese than any other, and is also the only state to track its specialty cheese production. "We estimate that Wisconsin produces approximately 44 percent of the nation's specialty cheese," Wilkinson says. Among the state's offerings are 600 varieties, types and styles

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of cheese from Cranberry Cheddar to Chicken Soup Cheese.

Phil Robnett, vice president of marketing & sales for the Hilmar Cheese Company in California, another state known for producing excellent artisan cheese, reports his customers' demand for mild Cheddar and Monterey Jack has slowed compared to their demand for Colby-Jack, Jalapeño Pepper Jack and other specialty cheeses used in shred blends.

What do consumers want? Vibrant and bold flavors, Robnett says. "Some new flavor combinations outside of the normal scope of 'cheeses' use more intense condiments added to milk cheeses like black pepper, habanero peppers and garlic," he adds.

Organic and Local Products Drive Sales

As consumers become better educated and more adventuresome, retailers would be wise to carry high-end cheeses and expand the varieties offered in the dairy case, David Freedheim, retail sales consultant for the California Milk Advisory Board (CMAB), suggests.

"Artisan cheeses, identified by the chef members of the American Culinary Federation as one of the 'hot food trends in 2010,' are stars on high-end restaurant menus. Consumers are noticing these

cheeses and looking for them in retail," Freedheim says. "Cheese is a perfect fit for supermarkets and delis looking to offer whole meal solutions for consumers. Offering artisan cheeses allows consumers to indulge at home."

How can you best market natural and specialty blended cheese products? "Information, information, information," Montuori says. "Tell your customers where the cheese comes from, how it was made and where it was made. Tell them about the cows that made the milk for the cheese. Raise awareness about your cheeses by creating stick tags and signs that clearly identify the cheese.

"If you can, hire a cheese specialist who is dedicated to selling your cheese. You have to make a serious effort to let customers taste the cheeses and learn more about the cheeses they are potentially purchasing," Montuori continues. "A cheese specialist can tell them why and how a particular cheese is unique, and don't forget the local angle—selling cheese from nearby regions depending on the retailer is an important aspect of marketing. Make sure the customer understands why the cheese they are buying is special."

For information about how to merchandise cheese for maximum profit, see sidebar on page 8. MD

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S E A M L E S S P E R F O R M A N C E

Merchandising Cheese for Retail

Offering a wide selection of cheeses makes good business sense for any in-store deli. But stocking it isn't enough; knowing the nuances of each item you inventory, and training staff so they can help customers select the right cheese, is key to profitability.

The California Milk Advisory Board (CMAB) shares the following tips about how to merchandise cheese to maximize sales.

Train Staff

Hold staff tastings as often as possible. Let the staff taste cheeses side-by-side and describe the flavor and texture differences so they can confidently inform customers. Teach customer service personnel which cheeses are best for party trays or for cooking. Suggest they approach customers by asking how they plan to use the cheese.

Tell the Cheese Story

Give customers information about where the cheese is made and by whom, its history, the breeds of cows or goats used in production, and any special techniques the cheesemaker employs.

Pair Cheese and Wine

If your store sells wine, give staff guidelines on matching wine with cheese selections. Write wine pairing ideas on the back of cheese signs in the case. Suggest wine and cheese as hostess gifts.

Deliver Great Service

Help customers discover how to use new cheeses. Suggest varieties of cheese that go well together on a party plate. If the customer is looking for a particular cheese to use in a recipe, help them find it or suggest a substitute. If possible, customers should



be allowed to sample the cheeses and begin to understand the flavors they prefer.

Display Product Effectively

Cut cheese needs to be rotated to assure only good quality cheese is sold. Newly cut and wrapped cheese should be stacked behind cheeses already in the display. In a cheese case that displays pre-cut and pre-wrapped portions, take these steps:

- Effectively face the case for maximum sales impact.
- Group cheese by

type (fresh, soft-ripened, hard, etc.). The case should provide an appearance of abundance. Position cheeses within easy reach, and present cheese with the face of the cheese showing. When replenishing, write down what cheeses need to be cut, and then plan to cut by family of cheese. Wash your cutting board and sanitize between cutting each family so the integrity of the cheeses isn't compromised.

- Create signs that inform and sell. Signs are important even when a sales person is on hand. Assume most customers do not know much about cheese beyond the most common types. Make signs clear and interesting so your customers will take the time to read and buy. Signs should state the name of the cheese and provide a brief description of its style and flavor, where the cheese is made, as well as the price.

For the complete guide to merchandising cheese at retail, visit www.realcaliforniamilk.com/content/retail-foodservice-professionals-guide-california-cheese.

Photo courtesy of IDDBA



By Kathleen Furore

deli meats:

Education is key in this all-important category

Do your employees know the difference between Black Forest and Virginia ham? Can they explain brining and curing and what each process does to deli meats? Do they know the best way to slice turkey?

If not, your service deli is likely relinquishing deli meat sales to competitors eager to capture the largest share possible of this multi-billion-dollar market.

“Deli meat is the largest deli sales contributor at about \$4.5 billion — roughly 36 percent of deli business,” notes Mary Kay O’Connor, director of education for the International Dairy-Deli-Bakery Association (IDDBA). Those numbers are 2009 statistics from FreshLook Marketing Group, a provider of scanner sales information for

supermarket perishable departments, based in Hoffman Estates, Ill.

“Associates’ attitudes and helpful service is pivotal to a customer’s in-store deli experience. Equally important is an employee’s ability to handle foods so they are purveying the freshest, tastiest products, at a good value that leaves the customers wanting to return,” O’Connor stresses. “In a sliced-to-order deli meat program, if the associate has not been properly trained in product handling, meat quality may be compromised and product loss and department shrink can result.”

Increase Knowledge, Increase Sales

Many deli department employees think they know all they need to about slicing a pound or two of deli meat for customers. But the more staff members know, the better the

customer service they will provide and the more Ready-To-Eat (RTE) sliced turkey, ham and beef they will sell.

And customers aren't getting the kind of service they seek. According to *Eating IN*, a recent study from

A Deli Meat Primer

Knowing the characteristics of the meat in your deli case can help employees answer customers' questions and guide them to the appropriate products. It can also help them explain the price differences between a basic boiled ham and a more gourmet prosciutto.

As the IDDBA's Mary Kay O'Connor notes, how deli meat is made impacts its price. Factors that can determine cost include the cut of meat; whether the deli meat is made from whole muscle or restructured; the processing method (aging, smoking, brining, dry-curing with spices, added flavorings, added moisture or fillers, cooking method); certification (kosher, organic); and whether the product is imported. For example, prosciutto may come from pigs raised in a specific area of Italy, fed a special diet, processed and aged up to two years, before shipping to the U.S.

The following primer, courtesy of the IDDBA's newest e-Learning course, *Deli Meat: Product Knowledge for Retail Staff*, can help your associates understand the meat merchandised in your deli.

DELI HAM:

- **Honey-cured Ham.** A tender, sweet-tasting ham that has been cured in a brine containing honey, then cooked.
- **Boiled Ham.** A moist and mild-flavored ham that has been cooked with moist heat. May also be called "cooked ham."
- **Prosciutto.** Italian-style, dry-cured ham that is slightly spicy and very salty.
- **Black Forest Ham.** Traditionally, ham that has been dry-cured with salt, garlic, coriander, pepper, juniper berries and other spices, then smoked for several weeks over fir or pine. Many Black Forest hams in delis today are brine-cured and have similar flavor, but obtain their smoky profile from the addition of smoke flavor.
- **Virginia Ham.** Traditionally this ham is dry-cured and made from the meat of peanut-fed hogs. Today, most Virginia ham sold in the deli is brine-cured, water-added ham made from hogs fed other diets. It may be smoked over hickory or apple wood and is often boneless.

DELI BEEF:

- **Roast Beef.** Tender, flavorful deli beef prepared by cooking. Water and spices may have been added for flavor and texture.
- **Smoked Beef.** Tender, flavorful deli beef prepared by cooking and smoking or flavored with the addition of smoke flavor.
- **Pastrami.** Beef made from beef brisket or the bottom round. It is typically dry-cured with pepper and garlic, then smoked. It is salty, spicy and rather chewy. Turkey pastrami is also available.
- **Corned Beef.** Beef historically made from beef brisket, but today commonly produced from the top or bottom round. It is cured in a salt-and-sugar brine, and is salty and slightly sweet.
- **Pepper Beef.** A style of roast beef that has been coated with pepper and then cooked.

DELI TURKEY:

- **Oven-roasted Turkey Breast.** Mild-tasting turkey that has been cooked in an oven.
- **Smoked Turkey Breast.** Turkey that either has been cooked in an oven and had natural or artificial smoke flavor added, or cooked and smoked in a smokehouse. Available in mesquite and other hardwood flavors.
- **Specialty-flavored Turkey Breast.** Turkey that has been basted with a flavored sauce, then oven-roasted. Many flavors are available including lemon pepper, Cajun, sundried tomato, cranberry-sage, garlic and chipotle.
- **Glazed Turkey Breast.** Mild, sweet-tasting light or dark turkey meat that has been coated with a sweet glaze such as honey, maple syrup or brown sugar then cooked in an oven.
- **Turkey Ham.** Dark meat from turkey legs that has been smoked and cured.

The IDDBA offers several training programs that focus on deli meat product knowledge, selling practices and product care and handling.

For more information about, or to order the e-Learning program, visit www.iddba.learnsomething.com. For information about other IDDBA training programs including *Service U: Deli Meats 101*; *Deli Training & Certificate's Know What You're Selling: Deli Meats*; *Service U Cleanliness 101*; *Food Safety 101*; and *Deli Training and Certificate's Be Safe Not Sorry*, visit www.iddba.org.

the Coca-Cola Retailing Research Council, 20 percent of customers seek meal planning advice from deli associates, but only 35 percent of that group leave satisfied with the help they received, O'Connor notes.

"Now here's an opportunity for delis to improve customer satisfaction, expand product sales and generate more traffic," she stresses. "Employees who are motivated and empowered to talk about their products tend to have repeat customers, know how to properly handle products to ensure utmost freshness and are armed with helpful suggestions for their customers. And, frankly, they are happier and tend to stay longer on the job."

To mitigate mistakes and, ultimately, to increase sales, there are several aspects of the deli operation associates should understand. According to O'Connor, they include:

- **How to slice different kinds of meats.** "To give the customers the most ideal turkey slices they should be cut along the long edge with the grain," O'Connor explains, noting that associates should follow the manufacturer's slicing recommendations (which are often right on the package).

- **The procedures for handling end meat and extra slices left due to slicing trial and error.** "Are [the extra slices and ends] shrink or is there a plan in place for using the meat?" O'Connor asks. "Unchecked product loss or mishandling can lead to shrinking profits for the deli and unsatisfied customers."

- **Successful ways to up-sell.** An enthusiastic, skilled associate can ask customers about their meal plans and food preferences, then suggest types of cheese, condiments, bread, side dishes, salads and beverages that would complete a snack or full meal, O'Connor says. Examples of creative menu ideas that a knowledgeable employee might up-sell include suggesting Black Forest ham slices with Brie on a toasted baguette; pastrami and Havarti on a toasted onion-seed bun; and turkey slices spread with peanut butter, sprinkled with sunflower seeds and minced celery and rolled around pretzel rods for a kid-friendly, portable snack.

- **How to manage time and temperature.** For deli meats to maintain their integrity they must be properly received and held at the correct temperatures; rotated using first in, first out (FIFO) method; covered while on display to maintain premium quality; and held according to the manufacturers' 'use by' date.

- **How to avoid cross-contamination.** To prevent bacteria from one piece of food or equipment from contaminating another, RTE sliced deli meats should be cut on a dedicated slicer (slice cheese on separate slicer). Slicers, counters and utensils that are in

frequent contact with food should be cleaned and sanitized at least every four hours according to store policy to prevent the formation of biofilms.

- **Proper personal hygiene techniques.** They include washing hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and hot running water; washing hands after handling raw meats or poultry, using the restroom, removing trash, touching your hair or body, sneezing/coughing, taking breaks, eating or smoking and any activity that may contaminate your hands or gloves; and wearing gloves to prevent bare hand contact with RTE foods, according to the IDDBA's SuperSkills Food Safety Tips program.

By making sure employees understand the RTE sliced meats they're selling, deli owners and managers will ensure their patrons enjoy a satisfying shopping experience. As the IDDBA's training materials say, "Customers increasingly rely on deli associates for answers—it ensures repeat business when employees are armed with product knowledge that helps provide great customer service."

For information on specific types of deli meats, see sidebar on page 10. MD



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Post-Process LETHALITY

Emerging technologies helping to prove food safety is priceless

By Jim Watson

On May 17, 2010, Tyson Food Service publicly announced the release of new Tyson Deli Slices, a product line intended to satisfy the evolving needs of restaurants, institutions and catering operations. Available in three quality levels, the two-pound stacked packages of turkey, ham, roast beef and pastrami, “come with a cleaner label due to the use of ‘natural antimicrobials,’” states the company’s news release. With a purposeful nod toward other consumer concerns, the company further asserts that the new pre-sliced products are “lean and gluten free” and that “most varieties are lower in sodium.”

Tyson, of course, is just one of dozens of processors that already

have or will soon introduce Ready-To-Eat (RTE) meat and poultry products targeted to satisfy the growing interests in nutritional values, potential allergens, understandable labeling and, most importantly, prevention of foodborne illness. It is a matter of business survival. One recent study pegged consumer demand for RTE meats with “fresh prepared characteristics, without preservatives” as high as 92 percent.

Though studies often fail to place a value on those demands, it is inarguable that government regulators, as well as consumers, are increasingly focusing attention on food safety concerns. The RTE meat processing industry is responding with diligence and innovation. More than market

share is at stake. As illustrated over the past several years, the very existence of a processor can be threatened or extinguished by the direct costs and crisis of confidence that can be traced to either a product recall or public health tragedy.

Paths taken to avoid health-related problems vary widely, but it





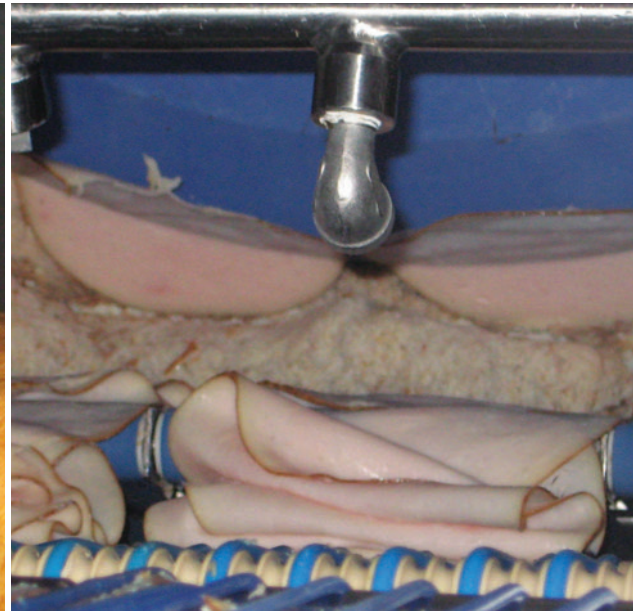
Photo courtesy of Dakota Provisions

At Dakota Provisions, product logs up to 60 inches long are positioned on the product bed of a Weber Slicer and delivered to the blade, where an antimicrobial spray is applied to the front and back of the slicing blade.

is safe to conclude that nearly all processors begin with one fundamental goal: how to assure the highest level of food safety while minimizing production costs.

To help accomplish these dual objectives, many processors have reached outside their internal resources to establish new supplier partnerships that help them employ and adapt the latest technologies and antimicrobial treatments to their specific

products and production methods. As Arun Ramabadran, director of market solutions for Spraying Systems of Wheaton, Ill., says, "Processors develop their HACCP plans based on inside knowledge of their specific processing lines, but they can often benefit from partnering with chemical and application professionals to improve advanced pathogen control and line efficiency."



Photos courtesy of Dakota Provisions

(LEFT) Step 1: Logs are delivered to the slicing room through a spray cabinet where the entire product surface is treated with antimicrobial spray at a specified dwell time. (RIGHT) Step 2: An antimicrobial solution is also applied at the blade during the slicing operation.

Food processors under pressure from consumers and regulators are increasingly deciding between two high-tech solutions that assure consistent product safety and longer shelf life for RTE deli meats—spray technology and high-pressure pasteurization.

What deli managers and foodservice operators must know

Sorting through the new post-process lethality technologies, the benefits claimed by processors, and scientific studies proving efficacy can be a daunting and time-consuming task. Most who work in the deli segment of the foodservice industry already know RTE meats and poultry are among the highest-risk products for contamination by pathogens, including often deadly *Listeria monocytogenes*. Hot-water pasteurization, irradiation, food-grade chemicals, biopreservatives and high-pressure processing have all proven to be effective interventions.

For years, the preferred treatments involved dipping, coating or injecting chemicals directly into already processed whole muscle meats. Over time, many processors struggled with the after-effects of these treatments, finding the compromises in product taste and texture to be unsatisfactory. As reported in the June 1, 2008 issue of *Meat & Poultry*, John Morell & Company was among those dissatisfied processors and among the first to adopt the Sprayed Lethality in Container (SLIC®) technology to preserve the flavor of its branded deli hams.

SLIC® technology was developed by the USDA/ARS in 1999 and quickly commercialized by companies like Spraying Systems. As conceived, the SLIC process involved the sprayed application of antimicrobial agents directly into the purge contained in a shrink-wrapped bag, prior to the insertion of the product. Vacuum sealing of the bag distributes the antimicrobial evenly around the product, significantly increasing the destruction of pathogens, including *L. monocytogenes* and extending shelf life by inhibiting the growth of spoilage organisms. Spraying Systems has further developed its AutoJet® Spray Systems, which can now be mounted directly onto high-speed industrial slicers.

Using this newest system, each slice is precisely sprayed at the instant it is cut. “The packaging of most deli style products can also be treated, prior to product insertion, providing complete coverage, regardless of packaging styles,” Ramabadran explains. “Processors can reduce their consumption of lactates, diacetates and other antimicrobials, reducing production costs while also producing the ‘clean label’ characteristics that will appeal to today’s consumers,” he continues.

Studies provided by Spraying Systems document cost reductions from the \$.02 -\$.03 per pound required for application of antimicrobials by bathing, dipping or spraying to as little as \$.002 - \$.009 per pound for SLIC applications. Within plants classified as “large” by the USDA, annual savings can approach \$2 million.

Dakota Provisions, based in Huron, S.D., employs an alternative spray technology supplied by Ecolab, based in St. Paul, Minn. According to Jordan Woodbury, director of QA/food safety, the processor began using the system more than three years ago with the primary objective of providing customers an extra measure of product safety. "As a co-packer tasked with providing the safest possible products under the brand names of our customers, we believe it's important to demonstrate our willingness to take food safety to another level," Woodbury states.

He further reports that, "More than 25 percent of our customers take advantage of this opportunity to add an extra measure of intervention." That's a significant percentage of participation, considering the advanced level of hygienic design incorporated into the construction of Dakota Provision's state-of-the-art, four-year-old facility.

Utilizing Ecolab's two-step process, Dakota Provision's 60-inch product logs are peeled and placed within a custom-developed cabinet where they are sprayed with antimicrobials. Free from further human contact, the logs are transported into the clean room for slicing. As the product moves through the slicer, antimicrobials are sprayed to treat both sides of the blade that, in turn, contacts the product.

According to Woodbury, Dakota Provisions and Ecolab worked together to test the procedure and adjust the dosage of antimicrobial agents for greatest effect. "We encourage our customers to take advantage of this extra measure of security, though many feel our normal procedures assure adequate measures of food safety," Woodbury says.

From a marketing standpoint, Woodbury believes that, "our spray technology definitely gives us a leg up. It demonstrates to customers that we are willing to take food safety to the next level and implement every precautionary intervention that will provide a solid sense of security," he says.

Woodbury does acknowledge an added cost that is borne by the customer. "The spray technology does not slow the process, so there is no loss of throughput," he says, "but the chemicals do increase costs minimally and our customers must take that into consideration."

Regulators, consumers up the pressure

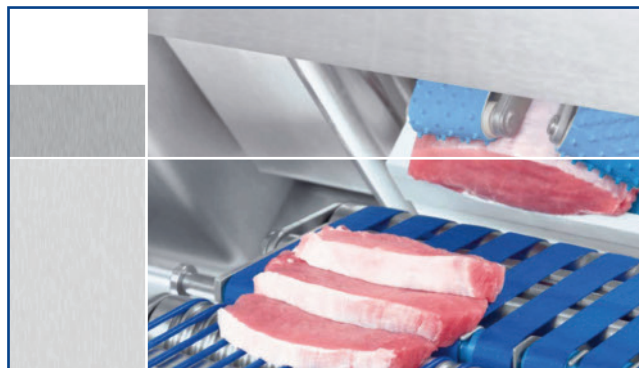
Under the watchful eyes of both government regulators and the consuming public, RTE meat processors are increasingly turning to yet another high-tech solution that assures consistent food safety and longer shelf life.

High-pressure pasteurization, commonly referred to as HPP, is another proven layer of post-process protection, destroying many foodborne pathogens including Listeria, E. Coli and Salmonella. Numerous studies also prove that HPP offers the benefit of significantly extended shelf life

"Processors can reduce their consumption of lactates, diacetates and other antimicrobials, reducing production costs while also producing the 'clean label' characteristics that will appeal to today's consumers."

—Arun Ramabadrán, director of market solutions, Spraying Systems

in RTE sliced meats and whole hams—without using preservatives—by slowing the growth of microorganisms responsible for spoilage. In a processor market hungry for new solutions, this technology is moving downstream and becoming



NEW SOLUTIONS IN FRESH MEAT SLICING: WEBER 701

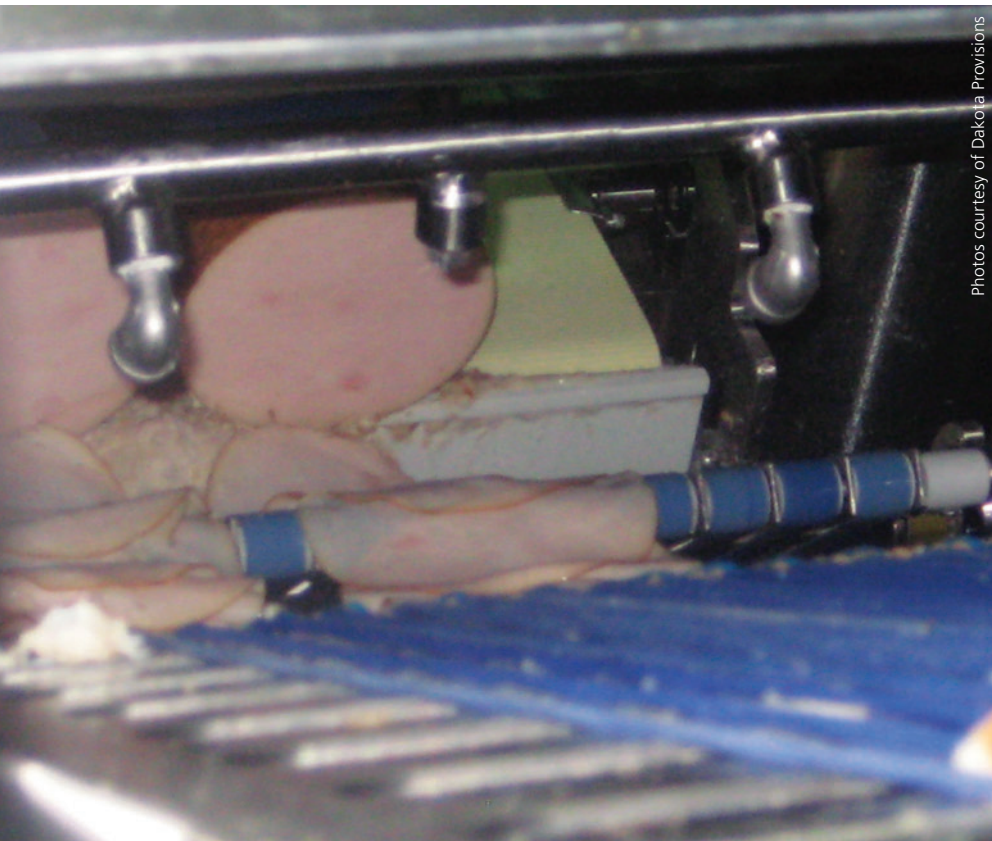
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Photos courtesy of Dakota Provisions

The spray bar is used to apply antimicrobial spray during the slicing process at the front of the blade.

At present, only 5 percent of all RTE meat products undergo HPP treatment. Cost of treatment is product dependent, but Avure reports the cost at just “pennies per pound.” As with the SLIC technology, additional HPP processing costs are partially offset by a corresponding reduction in the cost of additives. Avure also argues that because HPP-treated RTE meats retain their original sensory values throughout their shelf life, product spoilage and returns are reduced.

Because HPP-treated products are processed in their final consumer package, the potential for recontamination is virtually eliminated. Packaging flexibility is maintained, as both vacuum and gas-flushed packages can be HPP treated.

Maple Lodge Farms, a Canadian poultry processor, is among the 1700 worldwide users of the Avure’s system. Carol Gardin, marketing manager, reports that, “Consumer feedback has been extremely positive. We have had customers call and thank us for providing them with a solution to their dilemma of wanting to enjoy the convenience of ready-to-eat meats but at the same time being concerned that they were making a choice they felt might possibly harm their health. Today’s consumers want it all — they want nutritious, safe, tasty and convenient products without a lot of additives.”

Of course, no measure of intervention can substitute for rigorous sanitation. Still, it should be comforting to learn that new and competing technologies are improving food safety for all of us. **MD**

more affordable for midsized processors, though the minimum initial investment remains in the range of \$1 million.

HPP is more than a surface treatment and remains effective throughout packaged products, whatever their size and shape. This is especially important for sliced meat deli processors, where the risk of contamination continues, post-processing. Avure Technologies of Kent, Wash., is the HPP equipment market leader and claims more than 1,700 active installations worldwide, with products valued at more than \$2 billion annually subjected to their HPP procedure.

“As food recalls continue to grab headlines, high-pressure processing becomes more and more compelling as a food safety measure,” says Pat Adams, Avure’s president and CEO. “It also allows processors to plug into the mounting demand for convenient,

high-quality healthful foods that don’t contain additives and which have a much lower sodium content,” he continues.

Avure’s newest and smallest equipment can be imagined as a long horizontal 12-inch cylinder or tube, housed in a steel frame. Attached is a holding tank for the water and intensifier pumps. Fully sliced and packaged products, regardless of package shape, are loaded into a basket, which is then loaded and sealed inside the tube. The tube is surrounded by water and pressurized to extraordinary levels, exceeding 85,000 psi.

Energy transmitted via the water pressure to the food inactivates pathogens mainly by destroying their cell membranes. Because pressure is applied uniformly in all directions, the product is unaffected, suffering no changes in taste, nutrition, appearance and texture.



Catering

CONNECTION

Cater to your customers, boost your bottom line

By Jay Lyon

Today's tough economy means more and more consumers are entertaining at home. But while you might think that would spell trouble for some restaurants—especially the full-service variety—it presents opportunities for retail supermarkets and delis to grow their catering businesses.

With \$12 billion in catering sales, full-service restaurants represent the largest segment—a full 35 percent—of the social catering market. By contrast, supermarkets take in just \$3.5 billion, or 10 percent, of total catering sales. These statistics were revealed in *Parties Off-Premise: Opportunities for Growth Through Social Catering Occasions*, a 2009 report from Chicago-based research and consulting firm Technomic, Inc. In-store delis, it appears, are poised for great gains if they increase their emphasis on catering operations.

Technomic Principal Melissa Wilson expressed surprise at the results. “For one thing, the sheer size of today’s catering market was much larger than anticipated. When we last did a consumer catering study, the size of the market was about \$18.5 billion,”

Wilson says. “Our most recent study showed the market to be \$33.3 billion—a significant jump.”

Wilson also voiced surprise at the high percentage of the market controlled by full-service restaurants. “We did not have historical market share data to review, but 15 years ago the sourcing was significantly different,” she says. “Full-service restaurants were not set up for catering operations then.”

Opportunity Outlook

Although restaurants have watched the recession chip away at traffic, the economy has created a new segment of potential patrons. Retailers who don’t target this customer base may be missing out on significant catering dollars.

“Customers who once used restaurants as social venues are now entertaining at home,” Wilson explains. “And they’ve told us they plan to continue doing so because they’re enjoying socializing with friends at each other’s homes. In fact, 40 percent of consumers say they expect to entertain at home more often over the coming year.”



average \$40 at Winn Dixie; \$80 to \$150 at Whole Foods Market; and an impressive \$200 to \$300 at Hy-Vee.

Meeting Catering's Challenges

Although it is a growing segment of the food and beverage industry, providing food for off-site events isn't as simple as hanging "We Cater" signs.

Labor, time and ordering constraints are just a few upfront challenges faced by businesses that add catering to existing retail food operations.

Full-service restaurants, for instance, often have an edge because employees are familiar with online ordering systems; many even have personnel dedicated to processing orders placed via the web. Many supermarkets, however, turn catering orders

Capriotti's Sandwich Shop CEO Ashley Morris (left) hopes to more than double the company's catering business over the next three to five years. One weapon in his arsenal—Capriotti's best-selling "Bobbie" turkey sandwich with cranberry sauce, stuffing and mayo (below).



Savvy supermarkets and delis are responding. Some, like Whole Foods Market, "have upped their game and are actively promoting their catering operations," Wilson says.

The Whole Foods Market Culinary Center in Austin, Texas, for example, has taken supermarket catering to new heights. The facility, located behind Whole Foods Market's flagship store, offers full-service events of any size and scale. Business meetings, weddings, galas, open houses, holiday parties and other special occasions can be catered for clients within Austin, San Antonio and throughout the Hill Country.

"Others, like Giant Eagle's Market District and Publix's GreenWise Market, have a party planner on premises," Wilson adds.

No matter their company's size, most Technomic study respondents considered catering important, with the majority citing it as a great way to grow total store sales. That's not surprising, given that catering orders

over to any available deli employee, whatever their expertise. As a result, the customer's experience may lack the high-level service component many restaurants offer, Wilson says.

Companies with successful catering operations overcome those obstacles in various ways. Solutions can vary, even within the same company. According to Renée DeMan, a Chicago, Ill.-based prepared foods team leader at one Whole Foods Market, each store handles its catering business differently, depending on location and size. "Our Kingsbury Street store has a full-time catering desk, but at our Halsted and Waveland store we have a catering liaison," DeMan reports.

That could change if DeMan meets her ambitious goal: to make catering 25 percent of overall store sales. She hopes to grow catering revenues with the help of an in-store marketer who goes into the community to promote the service. Catering revenues at the Halsted and Waveland location currently average three to five percent of sales, with peaks of 15 percent around the holidays.

If the hoped-for growth happens, a full-time catering staff could be in the cards. For now, DeMan explains, her store must focus more closely on the labor aspect of its catering business. "You don't know when orders will come in, so our catering liaison may actually be scheduled to do other work that day, which means we have to reschedule resources to accommodate orders."

At peak times such as the holidays, DeMan staffs at least three full-time people dedicated to catering orders. She knows, however, that controlling delivery costs must also be part of the profit equation. "We have a subcontractor that delivers groceries, and they will also deliver our catering orders so that it's cost-effective," she says.

Other retailers report that focusing on catering is actually increasing their efficiency.

"What's great about catering is that many times we are preparing our catering orders in the morning—before the lunch rush. That allows us to use our resources effectively," says Ashley Morris, CEO of Capriotti's Sandwich Shop, a burgeoning Las Vegas-based chain with 60 franchises in 10 states and seven under construction.

The company hopes to more than double catering revenues over the next three to five years, building from the 10 to 12 percent of total sales today, up to the point it represents 25 to 30 percent of the shop's business.

Capriotti's serves a large sandwich—20 inches long. "Not a lot of places have a sandwich that big," Morris says. "We thought 'why not take it, cut it into six sections, and put it on a tray?' It made perfect sense as a way to get more business."

Catering allows Capriotti's to serve a high-quality product at a low price point—something today's cash-challenged consumers are seeking. "You can serve people a six-inch sandwich portion with some sides at \$4 per person," Morris says.

So how does Capriotti's communicate its catering message? The majority of the company's marketing and advertising is done within the four walls of its franchises. Catering boards are part of each franchisee's package, and cyclical posters promote events including the Super Bowl and the holidays.

But Capriotti's goes a step farther: it proves a free lunch really does exist!

"The 'free lunch' is a strategic initiative to increase sales. We consistently send out smaller trays to businesses in the community," Morris explains. "We'll call up the business and ask how many employees they have. Then, we tell them we're buying their team lunch one day during the next week. We drop off the

lunch and our catering menu, and once they have had the food we know there's a good chance they will call us in the future."

Morris sees geographic trends in his business. "On the East Coast, we do more personal parties. On the West Coast, we cater more to businesses. East Coast people are sub [sandwich] eaters, while West Coast people were raised on burgers."

No matter where you go, norms are changing—and they're elevating catering as they evolve.

"When I was growing up, my mom would never buy a party platter," Wilson recalls. "It used to be that people who did would re-plate the food themselves so that it looked like it was prepared at home. No one is doing that anymore. Serving food prepared by others is now the norm, and the packaging it comes in is perfectly acceptable."

As Technomic data stresses, "...limited- and full-service restaurants and food retailers can respond to this fundamental shift in consumer behavior and see meaningful improvements in unit-level performance."

Doing that, experts say, can make catering perfectly profitable, too. **MD**



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Going for the green

Packaging bans create obstacles and opportunities for stores and suppliers

By Jeffrey Steele

Executive Chef Scott B. Schulz is clear about priorities. He stresses quality and nutrition, avoids preservatives, encourages healthy eating and has an overall 'green' focus at his popular Cherry Deli & Catering in the East Hill neighborhood of Grand Rapids, Mich.

Thanks to extensive recycling efforts (the company recycles all its plastic, cardboard, metal and glass), Cherry Deli has reduced its waste

"We've never used [Styrofoam] and we never would. All our food containers are compostable except for plastic drink lids."

—Manager Gabriel Frazee, Nomad Café, Oakland, Calif.

output by 40 percent. Schulz says he would add 'green' cleaning solutions in a heartbeat if the city health department ever reverses its insistence on controlling bacteria with bleaches.

But 'green' packaging is on hold. "Our biggest problem with 'green' items is they are way too

expensive right now," Schulz says. "They are almost three or four times the cost of traditional products like Styrofoam cups and plastic forks. All it does is take money out of the bottom line, and we're already in a tough economy where people aren't eating out the way they did before."

Tough as times may be, 'green' packaging is gaining steam. Many businesses, in fact, must comply with laws that ban Styrofoam, as well as other take-out packaging materials. These laws create a Catch-22 for deli owners who want to be 'green' but must jump the hurdles price puts in their way.

West Coast Bans

Oakland and Palo Alto, Calif., along with Portland Ore., are among more than 100 cities nationwide dealing with packaging bans.

The Oakland measure that took effect in 2007 bans polystyrene (better known as Styrofoam) food packaging, forcing foodservice outlets to use disposable food containers that will biodegrade if added to food compost. Palo Alto's ban on polystyrene take-out containers, which went into effect April 22, includes containers, clamshells, bowls, plates, cartons and cups, but exempts straws, utensils and hot cup lids.

Though it comes during a recession, the ban is considered a positive step given the problematic characteristics of polystyrene, according to Amanda Wills, assistant editor of www.Earth911.com, a website dedicated to providing information about recycling and other environmental issues for businesses and consumers.

"Because it's so lightweight, polystyrene takes up 0.01 percent of the total municipal solid waste stream by weight but ... it takes up space in landfills and doesn't biodegrade," Wills notes.

Moreover, few California recyclers are equipped to handle Styrofoam.

From the Front Lines: Pros and Cons

The California Restaurant Association has battled packaging bans, arguing foodservice businesses need Styrofoam to keep food warm. However, some foodservice operators—often those that never used Styrofoam or stopped its use years ago—support the move toward 'green' packaging.

As Gabriel Frazee, manager of Oakland's Nomad Café, told the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "We've never used [Styrofoam] and we never would. All our food containers are compostable except for plastic drink lids."

Frazee reported he didn't mind paying a bit more for sustainable paper containers. Instead he has built that cost into his café's business plan.

At Tidal Creek Cooperative Market in Wilmington, Del., many of the deli containers are recycled, recyclable and biodegradable items. Napkins and plates are made of recycled material, while plates, cups and bowls are compostable. A few pieces of non-recyclable packaging are used in the deli, but only because Wilmington's recycling program accepts only plastics 1 and 2. Emphasizing its concern about maintaining functionality while embracing eco-friendly packaging, Tidal Creek says it will "continue to search for appropriate packaging that is more environmentally sound," and asks those who visit its website (www.tidalcreek.coop) to "please let us know if you are satisfied with the performance of packaging materials we have chosen."

Suppliers' Eco Solutions

The good news for packaging vendors is that American consumers are inclined to put their dollars behind sustainability.

According to results from a 'green' living survey Chicago-based research firm Mintel released in March, the environment remains a concern for the majority of Americans. More than one-third, or 35 percent, of survey respondents said they would pay more for environmentally friendly products.

"Given this increased interest in the environment over the past few years, nearly every segment of consumer products now offers a 'green' option for



Multivac's LipForm packages—designed to look and perform like prefabricated trays, but save on storage, processing, production and materials—are ideal options for deli salads like the German Spaetzle dish pictured above.

shoppers," Chris Haack, Mintel senior analyst, says. "Food and beverage and personal care products are the two most mature categories and account for the majority of 'green' products in the marketplace."

Consumers' embrace of environmentally friendly products has opened a new door for companies that offer food and beverage packaging.

Biopack Environmental Solutions, which designs and manufactures 100 percent biodegradable plastics, envisions the sustainable packaging industry growing 25 to 30 percent annually. That projection is based on studies that show 44 percent of consumers say the economy has no effect on their sustainability

Consumers Rank Sustainability Preferences

They might not be able to define the word. But consumers rank 'sustainability' as an important component in packaging options.

In its recent survey, *Sustainability Outlook: The Rise of Consumer Responsibility*, The Hartman Group of Bellevue, Wash., identified 88 percent of the population as members of the "world of sustainability." Only 50 percent, however, could define the term.

The study found the ability to have an afterlife is the packaging feature that matters most to consumers. Recyclability topped the list of packaging preferences, with three in four consumers (75 percent) ranking the ability to return a product's vessel to the consumer marketplace via curbside bins as "very important" or "important." Biodegradability ranked next at 71 percent.

Other packaging options consumers favored: containers composed of recycled content (67 percent); refillable containers (63 percent); minimal packaging (62 percent); containers that are reusable for other purposes (60 percent); and compostables (51 percent).

"Packaging is also a great way to communicate your sustainability message," Laurie Demeritt, Hartman Group president and COO, says. "Because consumers are in contact with packaging throughout its lifecycle, there are diverse ways to communicate, either through informed design, materials or narrative."

To download an executive summary of the study, visit www.hartman-group.com/downloads/Sustainability2009-ExecSummary.pdf. For information about The Hartman Group, including a description of the upcoming 2010 edition of *New Era in Marketing Sustainability* study, visit www.hartman-group.com.

purchasing, and 33 percent saying they are more likely to buy sustainable products today than they were previously.

'Green' packaging production begins with manufacturers like Kansas City, Mo.-based Multivac, a company that provides packaging machinery to food

processors who pack their products on-premise.

The company's LipFORM packages replace costlier prefabricated trays that, until recently, were the only ones designed with a rolled edge (or lip). LipFORM packages are designed to look and perform like prefabricated trays, but save on storage, processing, production and materials. The technology gives Multivac's processing customers "a good alternative to pre-formed trays," says Matt Malott, Multivac's director of key accounts. "The customer likes the look and feel of a [pre-formed] tray, but that's not the most environmentally friendly type of packaging. There's a big footprint to production of that tray. [LipFORM] offers a package with fewer materials. You've eliminated the polystyrene, and it's a thinner gauge, so it's less packaging overall."

Malott points to other benefits that LipFORM

Cryovac brand Grip & Tear® Post-Pasteurization and Portion-Pull bags, manufactured by Sealed Air, help increase sustainability through innovations that deliver extended shelf life.



provides, particularly those related to modified atmosphere packaging. “With modified atmosphere packaging, the product stays fresh much longer,” Malott says. “We’re going to extend the shelf life two to three times. Not having to discard inventory is a huge part of sustainability,” he reasons. “When you raise a turkey, everything that follows that turkey to the point where it’s sliced product—all the energy, transportation and packaging costs—is gone if you simply throw the product away.”

On the subject of cost, Malott argues that packages from LipFORM technology are “not necessarily” going to be more expensive when compared by deli suppliers using hundreds of millions of trays. “When you reach high volumes, it becomes sustainable and can even provide a cost savings,” Malott says.

Malott does agree that today’s biodegradable packaging materials based on corn or sugar (known as polylactic acids or PLA) are destined to add to product cost, in the short run, at least. Multivac can make PLA packages, but because PLA-based materials are comparatively new, they are not produced in quantities required for economies of scale, Malott says.

Deli operators, he adds, “are under cost pressures. It’s a bit of a tough issue. Until the economies of scale are achieved, it’s hard to take that first step.”

Like Multivac, the Cryovac brand manufactured by Sealed Air is intended to increase sustainability through innovations that deliver extended shelf life. The company’s new Portion-Pull Bag incorporates one-inch-wide horizontal side seal tabs that let consumers and foodservice operators use only what they need without removing the entire product from its packaging. The unused portion stored in the original packaging remains fresh until used, reducing food waste due to product spoilage and discoloration.

Going Forward with ‘Green’

As more and more cities ban non-recyclable packaging, deli operators and packaging manufacturers alike will have to decide how to solve the ‘sustainable’ versus ‘affordable’ dilemma.

Deli operators like Schulz are confident that can be done, and foresee a future filled with cost-effective ‘green’ packaging.



“I’m a small business. We have about 50 percent of our sales ending up on a to-go basis, and that’s a large percentage of [price] increase we would pay to be fully ‘green,’” Schulz says. “In five to 10 years, there will be more people producing these products, and things will be cheaper.”

And when those cost-effective ‘green’ packages are finally available?

“We will be the first ones to jump on them,” Schulz concludes. MD



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