

The versatility of specialty deli meats

 supermarketperimeter.com/articles/8145-the-versatility-of-specialty-deli-meats



Besides offering intriguing flavor profiles, one of the appealing things about the Italian specialty meats category is its versatility. Ready-made options accommodate upscale snacking, simple meals, brunches and entertaining with holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's and Fourth of July indexing the highest.

Although demand peaks during times when consumers want to create a memorable experience, Italian specialty meats are also well-suited for everyday indulgence. This includes sprucing up salads with chopped Prosciutto or swapping Peppered Salame for regular deli ham, according to Jean Stevens, director of sales, Volpi Foods, St. Louis.

Oliviero Colmignoli, founder and president, Olli Salumeria, Oceanside, Calif., echoed this, saying salami is adding new interest to pizza and as a component of pot pies. These meats are also in demand as a convenient snack or a quick protein pick-me-up throughout the day, Stevens continued.

“Through product labeling with protein callouts, we’re able to leverage the popularity of protein in packaging and sales pitches,” Colmignoli said. “Through R&D, we’re able to introduce new and innovative salami flavors that keep our product fresh in people’s minds.”

This includes a focus on education and inspiration in the category. Columbus Craft Meats, a division of Hormel, Austin, Minn., offers a number of entertaining items including the Columbus Charcuterie Tasting Board and Columbus Grand Charcuterie Sampler.

The Columbus Craft Meats' ready-to-serve Tasting Board includes Salume, cheese, crackers, olives and chocolate-covered cranberries in a convenient and premium packaging tray. Its Charcuterie Sampler includes six premium salami enclosed in a package that features thoughtful pairing selections.

“The charcuterie category continues to grow, and more consumers are searching for charcuterie online, consuming it at home and in restaurants and sharing their experiences on social media,” said Sean McNeil, senior brand manager at Columbus Craft Meats. “We continue to educate and inspire our consumers through our website, instore signage, product packaging and on social media.”

Where to find it

With such incredible growth in the category, one might also assume related expansion in the deli service counter. Instead, sales are down 3.7% versus a year ago and 4.2% versus two years ago. There are also similar declines in the service area for non-Italian specialty meats. Those still combating lingering pandemic-related fears are choosing to visit the grab-and-go areas of the deli and standalone floor displays instead.

Grab-and-go, a segment up 7.9% versus one year ago and up 58.9% versus two years ago, provides consumers both convenience and a way to streamline the process of choosing complementary specialty meats. With variety packs, consumers never need to second guess if they've chosen a tasty pairing. The ability to partake of a range of options also allows consumers an opportunity to learn how subtle differences in curing and grinding can create a distinct product.

“Consumers want a simple solution for the charcuterie board and variety packs help to easily determine what meats complement each other, rather than having to try and select 2-4 types of meat that pair well together,” said Amanda Evans, consultant, client insights, IRI.

Because of this growth, retailers are making space around entertainment sets, she continued. These are often areas adjacent to specialty cheeses and other items that are instrumental in creating the ever-popular charcuterie board. This is expected to continue to be a high growth area as consumers seek out a one-stop destination that includes complementary items such as specialty meats, cheeses, pickles, olives, honey, specialty crackers, dried fruits, chocolate, dips and wine.

“Consumers want to get it all in one place, she continued. “They are seeking an elevation from a basic meat and cheese board – an assortment of their own choosing – with a variety of items and pairings. Trying these products allows consumers to move up to fancier items and offers exposure to new segments.”

Value proposition

These newer segments are particularly attractive to a number of demographics. The 17th annual Power of Meat study from FMI – The Food Industry Association and the North American Meat Institute found consumers opting for in-home restaurant-like experiences over delivery and eating out with 80% of meals eaten at home. This includes a preference for food and beverages that offer unique flavors and one-of-a-kind eating experiences, according to The Hartman Group’s Shifting Food Habits and Routines – 2021 Eating Occasions.

With the cost of meat, particularly beef, close to 20% higher than in 2021, consumers will be looking for ways to enjoy these products in a more cost-effective way. The combination of inflation that’s risen to a 40-year high and higher input costs (grain, labor, fuel and transportation) will continue to impact consumers and their wallets for some time to come.

While these higher prices will curtail the purchasing frequency for some demographics, younger generations are bucking that trend, seeing their purchases as a way to support their values. As a result, Millennial and Gen Z consumers who possess increased spending power are changing the landscape regarding how producers, brands and retailers look at sustainability practices.

A willingness to pay more for sustainable products, coupled with belief in the individual consumer’s power to enact change, will continue to drive the spending of these younger generations, according to the Deloitte Global 2021 Millennial and Gen Z survey. This also includes seeking out specialty meats with animal welfare claims such as vegetarian fed, vegan, organic and no antibiotics/no hormones.

Olli Salumeria strives toward sustainability with initiatives of post-consumer-recycled (PCR) content in its packaging and safer and more humane animal husbandry.

“While convenience is trending, it’s also very exciting to see several of the high-end, artisanal salami companies drawn into every day, conventional market spaces,” Colmignoli said. “This means that consumers are paying more attention to quality ingredients, cleaner labels and sustainable animal welfare.”

Volpi Foods’ Raised Responsibly promise ensures its fresh meat is sourced from partners that place animal welfare and agricultural biodiversity at the forefront. In 2021, Volpi Foods worked directly with its partners to divert more than 45 tons of single-use plastic through its Eco-Pack Innovations.

“It’s important that retailers and manufacturers continue to offer the highest quality, best-tasting charcuterie meats that consumers are craving,” McNeil concluded. “That will lead to increased repeat and adoption, ultimately growing the category even further.”

Sign up for our free newsletters

Subscribe to *Supermarket Perimeter's* free newsletters to stay up to date with the latest grocery fresh perimeter news.

[Subscribe](#)