

# Natural, Any Way You Slice It

**Responding to foodservice consumers' demands for a wider selection of natural items, Hormel Foods implemented a new technology to present a natural line of sliced meats and, in the process, displayed the teamwork and innovativeness that were key to its 2006 Spirit of Innovation Award — Foodservice.**

*William A. Roberts, Jr., Business Editor*

Consumer demand for natural products continues to grow. Wal-Mart, for example, is investing \$500 million in sustainability projects, including purchasing wild-caught salmon direct from fishermen. The demand has trickled into the organic side of the business, with certain segments—notably dairy and meat—reporting shortfalls. According to the Natural Product Opportunity Report by SPINS, sales of natural and organic products increased 18% over 2004, surpassing the 2%-3% sales growth of conventional products. Furthermore, the report contends, with targeted distribution and new product development strategies, this segment has an untapped growth opportunity of at least \$3.6 billion. The Food Marketing Institute's 2004 study "Trends in the United States: Consumer Attitudes & the Supermarket" found four in 10 consumers indicated it is at least somewhat important for their primary grocery store to offer natural and organic products.

Sandwich meats are a staple for many Americans, yet all-natural, preservative-free options are somewhat rare, particularly in foodservice. Hormel's new line of sliced deli meats serves to alleviate that dilemma—in fast casual, QSR, healthcare and other locations. This year's Spirit of Innovation Award—Foodservice winner took the bull by the horns to craft a line of deli meats that is both natural and has



Hormel's Natural Choice line of sandwich meats (in smoked and roasted turkey, smoked ham and roast beef varieties) managed to lower the sodium while providing a natural presentation.

less sodium than its regular sliced meats. Hormel Natural Choice sliced deli meats also boast an extended shelf-life of 120 days, and the line was taste-tested against mainstream luncheon meats to ensure

the products would resonate with what consumers expect.

Hormel Foods' Natural Choice sliced deli meats are free of preservatives, additives and artificial ingredients and also promise up to 45% less sodium than the company's regular sliced meats. The latter point is of particular interest to some of Hormel's customers, as the lowered sodium levels meet the guidelines established by most healthcare facilities.

## Water the Odds?

Eschewing the use of anything artificial in the new line, Hormel Foods instead employed TrueTaste™ technology. The company describes this innovative pasteurization procedure as a powerful process which utilizes 87,000lbs of water pressure per square inch to protect against harmful bacteria and, in the end, to create what the company terms is an entirely natural product with "no artificial flavors or preservatives to disguise the sandwich meat's true flavor and texture." The company's process uses a compression tank filled with potable water to kill organisms such as E. coli, Listeria and Salmonella. Hormel's data indicate the shelflife resulting from the TrueTaste process is a significant

Hormel developers employed TrueTaste technology to create the Natural Choice line. This process utilizes potable water and manages another feat: shelflife extension beyond that of other processed meats.

improvement over thermally or chemically processed products. Because water is the processing agent, the technology generates no enzymatic activity or undesirable by-products in the meat. The company also claims its process kills more types of microorganisms than common industry processes.

Hormel Foods first used high-pressure pasteurization in 2001 on its line of prosciutto, which is available to both retail and foodservice clients. The foodservice group uses the technology on its Bread Ready line of pre-sliced luncheon meats, which was launched in the fall of 2004. The TrueTaste Technology is used on the foodservice Hormel Natural Choice sliced deli meats line, as well as the retail line of Hormel Natural Choice sliced deli meats, the first nationally distributed brand of 100% natural sliced deli luncheon meats. (The retail product launched nationally in March 2006.)

The procedure goes beyond inhibiting bacterial growth; it actually kills potentially harmful pathogens and spoilage microorganisms with its controlled water pressure, all without negatively affecting the meats' true taste, texture, appearance or nutritional value. The exertion of equal pressure from all sides interrupts the cellular activity of the pathogens, causing them to die. Because the package is sealed, new microorganisms cannot be re-introduced, while the meat flavor and other properties remain untouched.

This USDA-approved technology has been utilized in other items (including guacamole and fruit juices found in the grocery store), but Hormel says the Natural Choice line



is its first usage on widely available sandwich meat. The varieties in the range include:

- Smoked turkey and roasted turkey
- Smoked ham (promising a rich, country flavor)
- Roast beef

### True and Consequences

To guide its foodservice clients, Hormel also has offered a number of menu ideas for the Natural Choice sliced deli meats, including pairing the ham with Wisconsin Swiss and Havarti between sourdough bread with a sweet and smoky mustard.

Perhaps most importantly, those suggestions for the line are relatively low in caloric content. All of the ideas mentioned are part of Hormel's Flavor 500, a line of flavorful meals with 500 or fewer calories, a program that demonstrates to operators how to achieve bold tastes that patrons can enjoy without guilt. Utilizing a variety of Hormel Foods products in its recipes, the Flavor 500 program offers distinctive yet proven menu concepts on a CD format that operators can use to view and tweak recipes, make notes, order ingredients and print recipes. A breakdown of ingredients and calories, ingredient listings (complete with distributor order numbers for ease of ordering) and full-color photos are included for each recipe.

The all-natural aspect of the line is serving to attract flavor-driven consumers, as well as those seeking "good-for-you" options. Hormel notes that the combination of healthfulness and flavor serve to make Natural Choice sliced deli meats a good choice for healthcare and extended-care facilities, where patients and residents may have a need for lower-sodium, more healthful deli meats that still provide an appealing flavor and texture. Furthermore, the line is proving quite popular among the populations in colleges and universities, where both students and faculty have shown an enthusiasm for natural and healthy foodservice products.

In addition to those strong selling points for the consumer, the Natural Choice line also has an advantage for operators—120 days of refrigerated shelflife—a direct result of that TrueTaste Technology. Such a long shelflife means there is no need to freeze or thaw the product, though the option



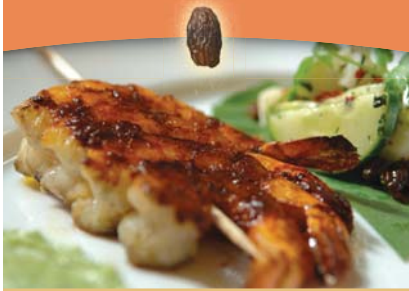
### Well Bread

Getting back-of-house quality from a product that is labor-friendly is certainly a challenge and one that has been integral to a number of Spirit of

Innovation Award — Foodservice winners. Such a philosophy proved a winning idea yet again this year, as Advance Food Company combined a quality product with a proven format to deliver a new take on what many regard as the ultimate in comfort foods.

Advance Food's Legend Country Fried Steak, described by the company as the new platinum standard for the category, is a hand-cut, premium sirloin. It has been battered, breaded and par-fried to lock in the breading highlights and flavor. As Drew Dozier, director of marketing with Advance Food, notes, "Mass production of a portion-controlled, battered, breaded and hand-cut, high-quality sirloin product has finally become a reality. Operator response and sales of this item have far exceeded projections to date, and we attribute this success to being able to deliver true back-of-the-house quality in a highly value-added format."

## California Raisins The Wise Choice.



### Chef Robert Del Grande's California Raisin-Achiote Glazed Shrimp with California Raisin, Jicama and Hoja Santa Salad

As the world's top chefs know, the depth of character and flavor that California Raisins lend to any dish is limited only by the imagination and creativity of the one using them. Del Grande often deploys California Raisins in novel combinations with salty, crunchy, spicy and smoky ingredients to achieve a spectrum of subtle and balanced flavors from the deep and earthy to the highly aromatic.

Howsoever they are used, raisins provide



a healthy, flavorful experience for your guests. Sun-sweetened, all natural California Raisins are always a wise choice in the kitchen.

Robert Del Grande,  
Executive Chef and Owner  
Café Annie Houston, Texas



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## PREPARED FOODS

# 2006 foodservice annual

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Hormel's Natural Choice line is the first usage of the TrueTaste technology on a widely available luncheon meat.

is there to do so. Still, as Hormel notes, it is best not to freeze the product.

Some may question just how much teamwork can be involved in sliced deli meat, but approximately 100 Hormel

Foods employees comprised the cross-discipline team behind the development of the Natural Choice line, including members of R&D, operations, sales and marketing, quality control, regulatory, packaging, product labeling and manufacturing. From the onset, the goal was a 100% natural deli meat low in sodium to appeal to foodservice clients needing more healthful, flavorful menu options.

A pair of requirements served as guidelines for the team: the sodium requirements set by healthcare facilities and the all-natural requirements set by the USDA (which Hormel defines as "all-natural foods, or 'whole' foods, containing no artificial ingredients, colors, flavors or preservatives"). "We were starting to see more and more consumers in the marketplace who were looking for healthier menu options," said Dennis Goetsch, vice president of marketing, Foodservice Division. "To respond to this demand, we wanted to create a product that was all-natural and lower in sodium."

Hormel Foods developed Natural Choice sliced deli meats under the following USDA Natural Policy, which was issued on November 22, 1982:

The term "natural" may be used on labeling for meat and poultry products, provided the applicant for such labeling demonstrates that:

1. The product does not contain any artificial flavor or flavoring, coloring ingredient, or chemical preservative (as defined in 21 CFR 101.22), or any other artificial or synthetic ingredient.

2. The product and its ingredients are not more than minimally processed.

The lower sodium content would prove a challenge for the group, as the deli meat would lose its cohesiveness when sodium was removed. Their goal was for the meat to bind, so operators would be able to remove the meat easily from its packaging without tearing. At the same time, the developers sought to formulate an appetizing product, yet one with 45% less sodium. To meet the challenges, the team

## Eyes on the Fries

Today's active, demanding consumers are looking for more healthful products in virtually all areas of their lives—their meals, their indulgences and even in meal staples that previously could not be considered healthful. In creating My Fries Gold, team members at ConAgra Foods Lamb Weston created an entirely new system, displaying the innovative effort and teamwork that would garner the company third place in the 2006 Spirit of Innovation Awards—Foodservice. Participants from R&D, marketing and operations worked on the product for three years, ultimately delivering a French fry that retains the taste and texture of regular fries, while reducing fat by 25%, dropping trans fat levels down to 0g and delivering a bottom-line oil cost savings of up to 25%.

At least part of the credit has to go to the team's development of the i3 advantage, a proprietary system that restricts oil absorption during cooking and thereby serves to provide a rich, natural potato flavor with a crispy texture and golden color.

As ConAgra Foods Lamb Weston notes, the i3 advantage system imparts flavor and texture, impedes the absorption of cooking fat and increases crispness and holding capabilities.






Almost 100 people were involved in the development of the Hormel Natural Choice line, which involved a cross-discipline team from R&D, operations, sales and marketing, quality control, regulatory, packaging, product labeling and manufacturing.

employed what they described as a “think in reverse” approach to determine how to keep the product natural, low in sodium and with a flavorful taste, but with no added artificial ingredients, colors, flavors or preservatives. Challenging the team to “think in reverse” was a new approach for Hormel Foods.

After testing a number of different formulations and a collaboration between the development team and a number of line-trials, the right formulation was found, delivering an all-natural deli meat low in sodium and in a relatively short time. Product development began in September of 2005, and the final product was available to Hormel’s foodservice customers beginning in May of 2006.

“We are incredibly proud of both the product and the team that developed this product,” Goettsch notes. “We see Hormel Natural Choice sliced deli meats as a breakthrough for both consumers with an appetite for healthier



menu options and operators who are looking for new ways to delight customers.” 

### Website Resources:

- [www.PreparedFoods.com](http://www.PreparedFoods.com) — Prepared Foods magazine
- [www.venturafoods.com](http://www.venturafoods.com) — Ventura Foods, co-sponsor of the SOI Awards
- [www.hormel.com](http://www.hormel.com) — Hormel Foods
- [www.hormelfoodservice.com/menuSolutions.asp](http://www.hormelfoodservice.com/menuSolutions.asp) — Additional information on Hormel’s Flavor 500 program
- [www.advancefoodcompany.com](http://www.advancefoodcompany.com) — Advance Food Company
- [www.conagra.com](http://www.conagra.com) — ConAgra Foods



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